Political parties in the Republic of Ireland

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Manchester University Press

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Published by Manchester University Press
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL
and 51 Washington Street, Dover
New Hampshire 03820, USA

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Gallagher, Michael, *1951–*
Political parties in the Republic of Ireland.
1. Political parties—Ireland
I. Title
324.2417 JN1571

Library of Congress cataloging in publication data

Gallagher, Michael, Ph. D.
Political parties in the Republic of Ireland.
Bibliography: p. 162
1. Political parties — Ireland. I. Title.
JN1571.G35 1985 324.2417 84-17161

ISBN 0-7190-1742-4

Printed in
Great Britain
by Bell and Bain Ltd., Glasgow

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1. The Irish party system

1.1 A deviant case?

Studies of the subject usually start by observing that politics in the Republic of Ireland seem somehow 'different'. Whether the aspect under scrutiny be the political parties, the party system, the behaviour of voters or of parliamentarians, or political attitudes in general, writers have been willing – some would say too willing – to take for granted the uniqueness of 'the Irish case'.

There can certainly be little dispute that the Irish parties and party system do not conform to patterns found in most countries. This emerges not only from works devoted primarily to Irish politics, but also from broad comparative studies whose authors evince unmistakeable signs of desperation as they grapple with the task of attempting to classify the Irish parties. The labels attached to the two major Irish parties in most cross-national studies are inclined to raise the eyebrows, if not the hackles, of Irish specialists (*cf.* pp. 140–1 below).

What are the features of the Irish party system which have caused Ireland to be referred to as 'so often a problem child in Western European schema' (Urwin and Eliassen, 1975, p. 97)? Three in particular stand out. One is the lack of any clear cleavage, rooted in Irish social structure, underpinning the party system. A second is the electoral weakness of the left. The third, discussed in chapter 7.1 below, is the apparent similarity between the main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and the apparent difference between these parties and parties to be found anywhere else in the world.

The first has led to Ireland being described as a case of 'politics without social bases' (Whyte, 1974). Introducing a study of electoral behaviour in a number of countries, Rose (1974, p. 18) writes that 'in Ireland people do not divide politically along class, religious, or regional lines'. In fact, it is hard to discern the lines they do divide upon. In a table in which fifteen democracies are ranked according to the percentage of variance in party allegiance explained by a number of social structural factors (such as occupational class, level of education, region, sex, and home ownership), Ireland ranks bottom (*ibid.*, p. 17). All factors

2. Fianna Fáil

In terms of winning elections, Fianna Fáil has one of the best records in the annals of liberal democracy. Over the fifty-year period from 1932 to 1982 inclusive, it contested eighteen general elections. After thirteen of them, it formed a single-party government, and it was in power for thirty-nine years during this period. Few parties can match this type of achievement. The Swedish Social Democratic Party was in power, alone or in coalitions which it dominated, continuously from 1932 until it lost office in 1976. The Christian Democrats have been the largest, and sometimes the only, component in every Italian government since 1946, as has the Liberal Democratic Party (or its Liberal and Democratic precursors) in Japanese governments since October 1948. In South Africa, with its restricted electorate, the Nationalist Party has been able to form a single-party government after every election since 1948. In Northern Ireland the Ulster Unionist Party comfortably won every election held between 1920 and 1972, but this was due to the nature of the state in which it operated rather than to its own prowess.

That Fianna Fáil should eventually dominate a polity it had at first rejected is both ironic and curious. The party itself emerged, by a rather complicated process of parturition, from the ashes of the anti-Treaty wing of Sinn Féin, which was divided from the start between the militarists, impatient with all 'politicians' and determined to reject everything except a thirty-two county republic, and the more politically-minded members, who as later events were to show were not dogmatically opposed to working within the framework of the Treaty. During the civil war, the former, headed first by Rory O'Connor and then by Liam Lynch, held the upper hand, but as the Free State government forces pressed home their superiority, so the balance of power shifted within the anti-Treaty camp. After Lynch was killed in April 1923, Eamon de Valera's constant suggestion that the anti-Treatyites should acknowledge that their military position was hopeless fell on more receptive ears. His authority re-established, it was he who issued the proclamation to the anti-Treaty guerrillas informing them that the military struggle was over.

The anti-Treatyites contested the August 1923 general election (under the name of Sinn Féin, though they were generally known as the 'Republicans'), and won over 288,000 votes. This represented an improvement on the 1922 anti-Treaty vote (see Appendix 1), and was probably partly due to a sympathetic reaction by the electorate against their harassment by the government; de Valera, for example, was arrested when he emerged from hiding to address a meeting in his Clare constituency. The forty-four Republican TDs continued the abstentionist policy, but their attempts to set up a parallel state system, involving an alternative parliament named Comhairle na dTeachtaí, came to nothing (Pyne, 1969–70, pp. 35–40). The party's popularity fluctuated greatly. At the nine by-elections held in 1923 and 1924 (excluding the National University contest), the Republican vote increased from an average of 23.5 per cent in those constituencies at the 1923 general election to 40.8 per cent. Its first victories came in November 1924, one of them in Dublin South, where its candidate, Seán Lemass, pushed the vote up to 51.4 per cent from 21.1 per cent in August 1923. However, the tide receded equally rapidly. The party had over a thousand branches in June 1924, but was down to half this number by July 1925 (Pyne, 1969–70, pp. 34, 41). By-elections now showed its support running no higher than the 1923 level.

By this time the party was on the verge of splitting over the question of whether to enter the Dáil. Even before the 1923 election, de Valera's opinion had been that this would be 'a matter purely of tactics and expediency' if the oath were removed (O'Neill, 1976, p. 157; for this period see also Farrell, 1983, pp. 98–123). This view gathered strength among the more pragmatic members after de Valera's release from internment in July 1924. It was reinforced in December 1925, when the Dáil debated the agreement between the British and Irish governments under which the border with Northern Ireland would remain unaltered. It was passed by fifty-five votes to fourteen, so that if the Republicans had taken their seats and voted against it, it would, other things being equal, have been defeated. This hammered home the point that the Republicans could achieve nothing while they remained outside the Dáil, and de Valera and his supporters now forced the issue. At the March 1926 Ard-Fheis (= annual conference) of Sinn Féin he proposed a motion that if the oath were removed, it would become 'a question not of principle but of policy whether or not Republican representatives should attend' the Dáil and the northern parliament. An amendment to the effect that, on the contrary, it was 'incompatible with the fundamental principles of Sinn Féin ... to send representatives into any usurping legislature set up by English law in Ireland' was passed narrowly, and de Valera accordingly resigned the leadership of the party. Over the next

The key elements which set all fascist parties apart from most other parties, such as their contempt for democracy and (in most cases) their racism and anti-semitism, were entirely absent from Fianna Fáil. It might well be argued that Fianna Fáil resembled the NSDAP only in respect of certain secondary characteristics and differed from it fundamentally in the essential ones. It could also be said that even such limited parallels as can be found apply to the Fianna Fáil of the 1930s rather than to today's party. To indicate these parallels is not to link the party with fascism or to question its democratic credentials. Rather, it is to suggest that even such an apparently unique party as Fianna Fáil cannot be fully understood if examined only in a purely Irish context, and that certain aspects of its image and policies which contributed greatly to its appeal in Ireland in the 1930s were also striking a chord with people in other European countries at that time.

3. Fine Gael

Fine Gael came into existence in 1933, as a result of a merger between three groups. The largest of them was Cumann na nGaedheal, whose ten-year history left abiding marks on Fine Gael, not always to the latter's advantage.

Cumann na nGaedheal represented a decision to give concrete organisational form to pro-Treaty sentiment. During 1922, the Dáil government led by Arthur Griffith had gradually (and willingly) ceded its power to the 'Provisional Government' led by Michael Collins, which was (theoretically) answerable to the 'Parliament of Southern Ireland' outlined in the 1920 British legislation. After both these men died in August 1922, leadership of the pro-Treatyites fell upon William T. Cosgrave. He had previously been minister for local government and, although personally unobtrusive, the party he led was by the late 1920s generally known as 'the Cosgrave Party'.

Initially, some had hoped that the Free State could be run without political parties, but reality dictated otherwise. On 7 December 1922, a private meeting attended by about a hundred Treaty supporters, including thirty-eight TDs, decided to form a nationwide political organisation with the name Cumann na nGaedheal, and appointed a 'provisional committee', with twenty-five members, to prepare the ground for a public launching.[1] Letters were sent out in mid February to potential supporters, asking them to establish branches in their own localities. On 8 April 1923, public meetings were held in Tuam, Kilkenny and Cavan under the auspices of the new party. It was formally launched on 27 April, at a day-long conference in the Mansion House in Dublin. In private sessions delegates agreed on the programme and constitution for the party, and in a public session in the evening the major names made warmly received speeches.

With the civil war over, another general election was called in August 1923. Cumann na nGaedheal's vote increased slightly overall, with a large increase in Dublin (see Appendix 1), where both Kevin O'Higgins and Richard Mulcahy exceeded twenty thousand first preferences

(Mulcahy's 22,005 is still the largest number of votes ever won by a general election candidate). This, however, was its highwater mark; it never won forty per cent of the national vote, and its apparent dominance of Irish politics at this time was owed first to Fianna Fáil's abstention and later to the support of Farmers' Party and Independent TDs. The government faced problems of lawlessness during its early years, and adopted characteristically heavy-handed measures. To add to the executions during the civil war, it employed detention without trial, capital punishment and flogging, none of which was calculated to mellow Cumann na nGaedheal's image. To its credit, though, it created an unarmed police force enjoying the general confidence of the population, and the very establishment of a liberal-democratic system of government was a major achievement in the context of the time.

The Army posed major problems, as to some extent it became the arena for a power struggle between different groups in the government party. Conflict between the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the 'Old IRA' broke out in the 'army mutiny' of March 1924 (for which see Fanning, 1983, pp. 43–52 and White, 1948, pp. 158–66). The former, which had supported the Treaty, had the backing of Mulcahy, the Minister for Defence, while the latter, with whom Industry and Commerce Minister Joseph McGrath was identified, was 'pro-Treaty Republican' in its views, believing that the Treaty should be used as a stepping-stone to an independent Irish republic, and that the government should be making much more rapid progress along these lines. Both groups claimed descent from Collins, with some justification since in 1922 he had been a model proponent of the Treaty in many respects while secretly co-operating with the anti-Treaty IRA in their military activities in the north. When the mutiny broke out, the two secret societies were dealt with summarily by the Home Affairs Minister Kevin O'Higgins, who dismissed their rivalry contemptuously as 'a faction fight between two letters of the alphabet'. Government control over the army was established once and for all, and both Mulcahy and McGrath went to the backbenches. The former still had a bright future in the party, but McGrath and eight other TDs left Cumann na nGaedheal and called themselves the 'National Group' for a while. In late October 1924 they all resigned their Dáil seats; only one contested the resulting by-elections, and not in the constituency he had resigned from.

Henceforth, the government party seemed little inspired by Collins's perception of the Treaty as a mere instrument to be used to win full independence. Although Irish ministers played an important part at Imperial conferences in reducing Britain's power over her dominions, the government acquired the image at home of being non-assertive towards Britain, especially when in December 1925 it signed a tripartite agreement with the Belfast and London governments under which the border with Northern Ireland would remain unaltered. With regard to social and economic policies the government bore out O'Higgins's comment that 'we were probably the most conservative-minded revolutionaries ever to put through a revolution' (White, 1948, p. 142). Its instincts lay with the men of property rather than the poor, the unemployed, the working class or the small farmer; on another occasion, O'Higgins declared that 'the ceasing of the bailiff to function is the first sign of a crumbling civilisation' (Lyons, 1971, p. 482).

Its innate conservatism was coupled with a lack of political feeling which caused it to appear in its worst light. In 1924 Ernest Blythe, the Finance Minister, cut the old age pension from ten to nine shillings a week (see Fanning, 1978, pp. 110–11), a millstone around the party's neck for decades thereafter. (A former Fine Gael minister interviewed in 1980 commented that it 'was just bad politics; no politician would have done that'.) Later in the same year Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce, was involved in the following extraordinary exchange with two Labour TDs (*Dáil Debates*, 9:561–2, 30 October 1924):

> *Mr McGilligan:* Today he [Deputy Johnson] says feed the people this year even though they may go hungry next year. I suggest that that is not what could be called statesmanship. You have to look over a a period of years, and you cannot take measures this year which may lead to more people going hungry next year.
>
> *Mr Johnson:* But if they die this year?
>
> *Mr McGilligan:* There are certain limited funds at our disposal. People may have to die in this country and may have to die through starvation.
>
> *Mr Colohan:* That would solve the problem.

McGilligan was not as doctrinaire as these remarks made him appear, as he played a significant part in the government's decision to establish the Shannon hydro-electric scheme in 1925 and the state-owned Electricity Supply Board in 1927. In general, though, the government believed in a minimum of state involvement in the economy; taxes and expenditure were low, and social welfare provisions were ungenerous.

This approach was not a vote-winner. In June 1927 the party's vote slumped by over 11 per cent, leaving it with only forty-five Dáil seats. The government survived a no confidence motion two months later, after Fianna Fáil had entered the Dáil, but only on the casting vote of the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker), and with its position clearly untenable it called another general election for the following month. At this it returned to a strength very similar to its 1923 level, and was able to form

4. The Irish Labour Party

The Labour Party was established by the Irish trade union movement in the early years of the century. Its traces its birth to the 1912 conference of the Irish Trades Union Congress (ITUC) held in Clonmel, which passed, by forty-nine votes to nineteen, a motion sometimes said to have founded the party. In fact, it was extremely vague, proposing only that 'the independent representation of Labour upon all public boards be and is hereby included among the objectives of this Congress', and no action followed in the way of setting up a party (for Labour's early years see Mitchell, 1974 and Clarkson, 1925). Nothing practical had been done by the time of the 1914 Congress, which discussed a constitution for the proposed party and indeed changed its own name to 'Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party'. The 1916 Congress made a few further half-hearted attempts to bring a party into being, by producing a programme for it and drawing up a plan for political organisation, but these met with an apathetic response since 'almost everyone in the labour movement was more concerned with building membership than creating a political party' (Mitchell, 1974, p. 80). Confusingly, in 1917 a Socialist Party of Ireland was established, and most of the congress leaders joined it, a clear indication that in their eyes there was no such body as an 'Irish Labour Party' in existence at that time. (Most of the congress leaders drifted away from the SPI over the following four years or were expelled after the SPI became a communist group in 1921.) Even by 1922, when Labour first contested a general election, the party still really existed only on paper, and its candidates were chosen, and their campaigns run, by local trade union branches and trades councils.

If the belief that the Labour Party was founded in 1912 is inaccurate, then an equally cherished myth is that it was 'created by Connolly and Larkin'. James Connolly, who proposed the Clonmel resolution, was a Marxist writer and activist who had spent seven years in the USA, working with De Leon's Socialist Labor Party and the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (the 'Wobblies'), before returning to Ireland in 1910 to work for the tiny Socialist Party of Ireland and the fledgeling Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU). He was shot by the British in 1916 after playing a leading part in the Easter Rising (for his fullest biography, see Greaves, 1961). James Larkin was an activist largely responsible for introducing the 'new unionism', with its emphasis on militant action and the sympathetic strike, to Ireland. He founded the ITGWU, and led the great Dublin strike of 1913, which was defeated by an employers' lockout. The following year he departed for the USA, where he spent the next nine years (see Larkin, 1965).

The contrast between the radical, militant outlook of these men and the cautious, reformist nature of the Labour Party from 1922 to the mid 1960s led some to accuse it of betraying its founders' ideals and to imply that it would have been a very different party had they remained at the helm. However, this is to miss the point that the party was not founded in 1912 and was not founded by Connolly and Larkin. Keogh (1982, pp. 3–4, 248) points out that Connolly and Larkin were decidedly atypical in their political beliefs, and that the militant trade unionism of the pre-1914 period should not be confused with radical socialism. Connolly never had to face the reality of contesting elections in an independent Irish state, and it is doubtful whether he would have met with much success in such a conservative environment. Larkin was never more than a peripheral figure in Irish politics after his return from America in 1923.

Labour's identification of 1912 as its foundation date owes more to an emotional (and political) desire to claim Connolly and the early Larkin than to historical accuracy. The case for 1918 is stronger, in that candidates were selected and some work was done on a manifesto, but most of this activity involved only a small group of people. At most, it was at that stage a 'head without a body' party; it did not go public until four years later. Most realistically, the party's birth should be dated to the 1922 general election; only then does its subsequent history become explicable. This election campaign was the first occasion when it actually sought support from the electorate; its manifesto was entirely reformist, and its candidates were in the mould of, and in several cases were, the hard-working, locally oriented, non-socialist men who were to dominate the party for the next forty years.

The 'national question' posed a major problem for the labour movement between 1914 and 1923. Some trade unionists supported Sinn Féin's demands for an independent republic; others inclined towards the Irish Parliamentary Party's aim of devolution; in the north, many were Unionists. The ITUC dealt with the problem by avoiding, as far as possible, committing itself on the issue. Its 1916 Congress, for example, passed no judgement on the Easter Rising, paying tribute to those who died in it and also to those killed fighting for Britain in the first world war. At the 1918 general election it stood aside and left the field clear successful, and that commentators have not been able to offer it much if any constructive advice.

The political culture also is hardly fertile breeding ground for a Labour party (for an elaboration of the argument in this paragraph see Gallagher, 1982, pp. 8–28). Apart from the already mentioned dominance of a generally unsympathetic church and the prevalence of constitutional issues, the party faces the problem of a rather complex set of political attitudes. Although comparative surveys suggest that the Irish are more right-wing than people in other EEC countries, the idea of an explicitly left–right ideological debate seems to have little legitimacy in most people's minds. Consequently, it is hard for a party of the left to get such a debate off the ground; the prevailing political culture, fostered to a large extent by the major parties' structuring of political debate, stresses consensus and allows all parties to claim to be 'a little bit left of centre' (see pp. 26–8 and 57–8 above). Another relevant feature of Irish political culture is individualism, a preference for individual as opposed to co-operative action, which militates against the growth of a party advocating fundamental societal change (and short-term sacrifices) rather than the alleviation of a succession of individual problems; working-class people, it seems, want to rise out of their class rather than to rise with it.

Nonetheless, the party has survived, albeit at the cost for many years of eschewing left-wing rhetoric and policies so thoroughly that it was accused of being 'the most opportunistically conservative Labour Party anywhere in the known world' (Larkin, 1964, p. 481). While it may not flow with the dominant currents in Irish life, it does have a role. In Mitchell's words (1974, p. 297), 'it has been the defender of the interests of the weakest members of industrial society and it has offered, in no matter how diluted a form, the untried alternative of socialism'; it offered 'a programme and philosophy of community and co-operative organisation of the social and economic life of the nation'. The fish could certainly wish for a more hospitable environment in which to operate, but the waters it lives in are not entirely alien territory.

Notes

1. One Labour member, Richard Corish in Wexford, had been elected to the Dáil in 1921. However, he was not a Labour deputy; he was nominated by Sinn Féin, which turned to him as a prominent local figure, and his acceptance of that party's nomination was criticised by the Labour national executive (see Mitchell, 1974, p. 130). He cast his Dáil vote in favour of the Treaty.

5. Minor parties

In addition to the three main parties, there have been others which have failed to sustain their existence, or to attract significant support, or both. Such groups (along with Independents) were strongest in the early years of the state, and again in the 1940s. At the June 1927 election they won 33.9 per cent of the votes cast, and forty out of the 153 seats. In 1948 they won 29.6 per cent of the votes and thirty-four seats. In contrast, in 1938 they won only 4.7 per cent of the votes, and were practically eliminated in 1969, when only one candidate outside the main parties was elected. At the November 1982 election, minor parties and Independents won only 6.2 per cent of the votes and five seats. Their strength in 1948 can be attributed to the stagnation of the political system, and a feeling that many grievances could not be expressed within it. Their subsequent decline reflects the greater efforts made by the major parties to broaden their appeal, the increased cost of fighting elections, and the powerful role of the media during elections, with the consequent focus on government formation and national issues. There is no evidence that the steady diminution of average constituency size has tended to squeeze out small parties and Independents.

Three minor parties – the Farmers' Party, the National Centre Party and Clann na Talmhan – can be categorised as agrarian. Republicanism has produced Sinn Féin, Clann Eireann and Aontacht Eireann; Clann na Poblachta too fits most comfortably under this heading. There have been many left-wing minor parties: the various communist groups, the National Progressive Democrats, the Workers' Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the Democratic Socialist Party and, more questionably, the National Labour Party. Other parties, such as the National League or Ailtirí na hAiséirghe, defy categorisation. This chapter deals with the most significant parties, in order of the date when they first appeared.

5.1 Sinn Féin

The name 'Sinn Féin', meaning 'Ourselves', was coined in 1904 by Máire Butler and adopted by Arthur Griffith as the encapsulation of his policy of national self-reliance (Coakley, 1980, p. 173). The party of that name was created in 1907. In April of that year a merger took place between Cumann na nGaedheal (founded by Griffith and others in 1900) and the northern-based Dungannon Clubs, and in August the resultant body (the Sinn Féin League) merged with a 'national council' (another Griffith-dominated organisation) to form Sinn Féin (Davis, 1974, pp. 22–35). A largely insignificant body before 1916, it was ascribed responsibility for the Easter Rising, which propelled it into the limelight and turned it into a battleground for the various strands of 'advanced' nationalist opinion (see Laffan, 1971). It was the dominant political force in nationalist Ireland between December 1918, when it crushed the Irish Parliamentary Party at the Westminster general election, and January 1922, when it split irrevocably over the Treaty. By 1923 it consisted only of anti-Treatyites. One historian of its early years (Pyne, 1969–70) has suggested that it went through four phases (or even that there were four different parties which happened to have the same name): monarchical (1907–17), nationalist (1917–22), republican (1922–6) and extremist/fundamentalist thereafter.

Although Sinn Féin is often regarded as simply a political front for the IRA, the two have not always been linked. In 1924 the IRA decided to support the party, but at its convention of November 1925 it severed the connection, which left Sinn Féin in something of a vacuum when de Valera and his followers left the following year (Coogan, 1980, p. 75). Sinn Féin entered the June 1927 election on roughly equal terms with Fianna Fáil (fourteen outgoing Sinn Féin TDs stood, compared with nineteen from Fianna Fáil), but it won only five seats as against de Valera's forty-four. Three of its seats were won in Munster; curiously, it did not contest any of the border constituencies. The most prominent members of the party at this time included Mary MacSwiney, Brian O'Higgins, Austin Stack and George Noble Count Plunkett.

In Sinn Féin's eyes, the only legitimate political institution in Ireland was the Second Dáil, which had been elected in 1921. This rump parliament had, in the eyes of all other political parties, ceased to exist by virtue of succeeding elections, but the handful of Sinn Féin TDs who had stayed with the party still styled themselves 'the Executive Council of Dáil Eireann, Government of the Republic', and cited a 'Dáil decree' of November 1922 to brand the Free State authorities as 'guilty of rebellion against the Republic'. On 17 December 1938, the *Wolfe Tone Weekly* carried an 'official announcement' from the 'Government', dated nine days earlier and signed by the seven remaining Sinn Féin 'TDs', stating that 'we hereby delegate the authority reposed in us to the Army Council' (the controlling body of the IRA).

The IRA itself had generally shunned the political arena, refraining from giving full support to any of the minor republican groups in which some of its members participated, such as Comhairle na Poblachta (1929), Cumann Poblachta na hEireann (1936), or the radical Republican Congress (1934–6). However, in 1949 it decided to 'infiltrate' Sinn Féin to provide itself with a political arm, a process Sinn Féin was glad to assist, so 'after 1950 Sinn Féin was the civilian wing of the IRA' (Bell, 1979, pp. 247–8). Sinn Féin's October 1951 Ard-Fheis saw a takeover by the IRA, which drew up a new constitution for the party. This was by no means radical, as the IRA leaders 'favoured the social teachings of the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*' (an anti-socialist document dating from 1891) and opposed the welfare state because they felt it 'destroyed the concept of the individual'. They had the contents of the constitution 'vetted by sympathetic clergy to ensure that they contained nothing contrary to Catholic teaching' (Coogan, 1980, p. 330)

Sinn Féin broke thirty years' absence from the polls by contesting nineteen constituencies at the 1957 general election, which was fought at a time of heightened nationalist feelings engendered by an IRA border campaign. Four candidates were elected, although of course they did not take their seats since Sinn Féin still did not recognise the Dáil's legitimacy. The party won most support near the border, but picked up votes in many parts of the country. It also contested the 1961 election, but won only about half of its 1957 vote and no seats.

The 1960s were a time of change for Sinn Féin, as it moved to the left and began to take an interest in issues like housing, ground rents and fishing rights. The inevitable split between the new left and the traditional republicans came at the end of the decade. In December 1969 the IRA's Army Council voted 39–12 to give *de facto* recognition to Westminster and the two Irish parliaments (the Dáil and Stormont), whereupon the minority withdrew and set up a 'Provisional' Army Council. The following month the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis voted 153–104 to end the abstentionist policy, and even though this fell short of the required two-thirds majority the minority again withdrew and set up a 'caretaker executive' of Sinn Féin (Coogan, 1980, pp. 428–9; Bell, 1979, pp. 366–8). On the whole, the older and rural members sided with the Provisionals and the younger and more radical ones with the 'Officials'. The former were referred to throughout the 1970s as 'Provisional Sinn Féin' or 'Sinn Féin (Kevin Street)' to distinguish them from the latter (who eventually became the Workers' Party), but by 1983 they were the only party in Ireland claiming the right to be called 'Sinn Féin'.

In 1971 Sinn Féin published a set of policies (Sinn Féin, 1971) for an 'Eire Nua' (New Ireland). In some ways they were relatively radical – they advocated a limit to the amount of land anyone could own, and said that 'Finance, insurance and all key industries must be brought under capitalism but 'Christian corporatism', as outlined in papal encyclicals. This would involve governmental control of the economy and the fostering of harmony between employer and employee. Unemployment would be ended by a massive public works scheme (involving, *inter alia*, the building of houses and roads), which would be financed by government control of credit and the breaking of the currency link with sterling. However, Aiséirghe 'frankly and fully respects the right to private property' (Aiséirghe, 1944, p. 16). For a foreign model it looked to Portugal and to 'the modernisation of the mediaeval guild system being so successfully reintroduced into Portuguese life by Salazar today' (Aiséirghe, 1943, p. 12).

Just as Salazar spoke contemptuously of 'politics ... all those noisy and incoherent promises ... opportunism that cares neither for truth nor justice ... the exploitation of the lowest instincts' (Crick, 1964, p. 15), so Aiséirghe had no patience with 'the cumbersome indirect methods of our imposed corrupt, unchristian, Godless, inefficient brand of parliamentary democracy' (O Cuinneagáin, 1943, p. 17). In 'Eire na hAiséirghe' there would be room for only one, 'national', party. The governmental system would be openly authoritarian (Aiséirghe, 1943, pp. 5–10). Vocational bodies would elect fifty deputies to a National Council, and the party would pick another thirty-five. These eighty-five would then elect a head of state, who would have unrestricted powers and a seven-year term in which to enjoy them; he would also appoint another fifteen members of the National Council. Its 'Ceannaire' (i.e. leader), Gearóid O Cuinneagáin (1943, pp. 12–13), gave the rationale for this scheme:

> It is essential that we establish strong central government in Ireland, that we give the country genuine decisive national leadership in place of talk and procrastination, political corruption, division and duplicity, ceaseless party strife. It is imperative for national progress that we modernise and make truly Christian and Gaelic our imposed alien parliamentary system of government. A single individual at the head of state affairs, strong enough to be independent of and dictate to all vested interests. That is the Gaelic tradition. The inefficient and corrupt party political system to be abolished.

Its messianism sometimes spilled over into sheer eccentricity. The 'Christian perfection of its social and economic system' would make the new Ireland a model for the whole world, and superior civilisation would enable Ireland to control not only the Atlantic but also the Pacific. If it played its cards 'carefully and cleverly' it could 'dictate to the dictators' and, 'in co-operation with Divine Providence, ... settle the affairs of the universe for another 2,000 years' (O Cuinneagáin, 1943, pp. 7–8). There was also more than a touch of unreality about the party's vision of its path to power: a thousand young men and a hundred thousand 'associate Aiséirghe patriots', all of whom had severed every worldly connection, would incessantly organise and preach acceptance of the movement's goals, until eventually the politicians' dictum of 'the will of the people' had given way to Aiséirghe's slogans of 'the true welfare of the people' and 'the will of God'. One propaganda technique it did employ was large posters pushed around the streets on wheels.

For a party so certain of its destiny, the fate it met at the hands of the indifferent Irish public must have been shattering. On the hustings its idealism was prone to give way to less lofty sentiments; in Cork O Cuinneagáin complained that the gaols in Ireland north and south were full 'and Irishmen were rotting in the prisons of England, but the Mason went free and the Jew went free' (*Cork Examiner*, 19 June 1943). At the 1943 general election, its four candidates won just over 3,000 votes between them. In the 1944 election it nominated seven candidates; this time they won nearly 6,000 votes (0.5 per cent of the total) but again they all lost their deposits. At the 1948 election there was just one candidate with the Aiséirghe label, and he attracted only 323 votes; thereafter it did not appear again. This electoral failure must have been particularly disappointing since the movement's pamphlets had sold in tens of thousands. Ailtirí na hAiséirghe resembled a sect rather than a political party, and its often mystical visions were far removed from the everyday concerns of the Irish people.

5.9 The National Labour Party

This party was a breakaway from the Irish Labour Party which eventually returned to the fold. Its origins lay in a number of mutually reinforcing disputes within the trade union movement. There was a division between Irish-based and British-based unions; there were traces of a clash between a nationalist and reformist outlook and an internationalist and socialist approach; and, probably most important, there was a personality clash between William O'Brien, the cautious, bureaucratic general secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) and James Larkin, the flamboyant ex-communist who had been expelled from the ITGWU in 1924 and had then founded his own union, the Workers' Union of Ireland. Larkin was re-admitted to the Labour Party in 1941, and his election to the Dáil at the 1943 election brought matters to a head. The ITGWU attempted to have Larkin expelled from the party; when this move failed, the union disaffiliated from Labour, and five of the eight Labour TDs who belonged to the ITGWU left the parliamentary Labour Party in January 1944 and were expelled from the party itself on 2 February (see Nevin, 1969).

The union and the TDs claimed that they had left because Labour

Clare from 1937 to 1951, who gave his occupation as 'bone setter and farmer' and retained support not by constituency service in the conventional sense but, as he reminded voters in election-time advertisements, by giving his services free to all his constituents and restoring them to fitness after they had been 'only a mere bundle of shattered bones'.

Notes

1. The word 'Clann' is usually translated as 'family', 'children' or 'clan', but Coakley (1980, p. 177) points out that 'it has a much more general meaning denoting adherents or followers', and argues that 'it could, perhaps, best be rendered in a political context as "party" '.
2. The sources for the occupations of minor party candidates in this chapter are contemporary national and local newspapers.
3. This number is sometimes given incorrectly as fourteen; the 'fourteenth', Philip Mahony of Kilkenny, emphasised during his campaign that he was the nominee of the Kilkenny Farmers' Association and had no connection with Clann na Talmhan. See *Kilkenny People*, 5 June 1943 and, for an authoritative list of the thirteen TDs, *Irish Independent*, 30 June 1943.

6. Party organisation

6.1 Organisation

Parties are often reluctant to reveal fully details of their internal organisation, which, moreover, are usually of little interest to most outsiders. However, a study of the party's structures can help answer questions about the location of power within the party and the purpose for which it exists. Is it democratic or oligarchic? Does it exist to promote a specific ideology or simply to win elections? Almost every party claims to be democratic, but an early student of parties argued that the claim is always false. Michels, propounding his Iron Law of Oligarchy in the first decade of the century, maintained that 'who says organisation, says oligarchy', for in any large organisation power inevitably ends up with a small number of leaders effectively outside the control of the rank and file; 'the oligarchical and bureaucratic tendency of party organisation ... is the inevitable product of the very principle of organisation' (Michels, 1959, pp. 401, 35).

The structure of each of the three main parties is fairly similar. All members belong to a branch (called a cumann in Fianna Fáil), the basic unit of the organisation. (For other accounts of party organisation, see Moss, 1933, pp. 54–108; McCracken, 1958, pp. 110–14; Murphy, 1967–8; Sacks, 1976, pp. 101–36; Chubb, 1982, pp. 111–16.) In each party membership is open to anyone who agrees to abide by the rules of the party.[1] In the past, information about a branch's members went no higher, so the party head offices knew how many branches they had but not how many members, and certainly had no complete list of members. However, as a result of the recent professionalisation of the parties both Fine Gael and Labour branches are required to submit a full list of their members' names and addresses to head office, which is thereby able to compile membership registers. As of mid 1983, Fine Gael had about 30,000 members and Labour about 6,500. Fianna Fáil is just beginning to introduce this element of head office supervision, and in mid 1983 estimated its membership at 65,000.

In each party membership fees are set at very low levels, although there is fierce resistance from members whenever an increase is proposed. Labour members must pay £4 a year, a sum which goes to head office via each member's branch. The other parties do not have a fixed fee, this being up to the discretion of each branch. In Fine Gael most branches have a fee of £2.50; whatever they charge, they must forward £2 per member to head office every year. Fianna Fáil again is least centralised: some branches may charge members £1 or so, while others have no fees and instead run an annual fund-raising event like a dance or a raffle. The money is used to cover the cumann's limited running expenses, and none of it is sent to headquarters.

The Labour party has provision for corporate members, i.e. trade unions, to join the party. In 1983 sixteen unions were affiliated, including the two largest (the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland). Their total membership amounted in 1983 to 61.1 per cent of the members of the sixty-seven unions in the Republic which were affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Party branches have the functions of raising funds, recruiting members, maintaining a local presence for the party, selecting candidates and running election campaigns. Minimum branch membership is ten in Fianna Fáil and nine in Fine Gael; in Labour the minimum is ten for urban branches and five for rural ones. In each party the tendency is to have fewer but larger branches in Dublin (see table 6.1). Fianna Fáil's Dublin branches have an average membership of about twenty, while for rural branches the figure could range from ten to over a hundred. Fine Gael's branches average about thirty members in Dublin and ten to fifteen in the rest of Ireland. Most Labour branches would be near the constitutionally prescribed minimum. In all parties, branches contain people of highly varying degrees of activity and commitment. Nationally, each party wins about three hundred votes for each branch it has, and has about thirty branches for each seat it has.

Table 6.1 Party branches in 1983–4

	Fianna Fáil		Fine Gael		Labour	
	Total	Average per constituency	Total	Average per constituency	Total	Average per constituency
Dublin	256	23	159	14	113	10
Rest of Leinster	676	84	477	60	166	21
Munster	957	74	690	53	207	16
Connacht-Ulster	921	102	658	73	15	2
Ireland	2,810	69	1,984	48	501	12

Note: The Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael figures refer to 1983, the Labour figures to 1984.

Source: For Fianna Fáil, *Clár for Ard-Fheis 1984*, pp. 15–16. For the other parties, figures supplied by the respective head offices.

The frequency with which branches meet also varies between city and country. In the city, meetings are normally held monthly, but in rural areas they are less frequent. Rural members may have less interest in discussing policy matters than their city counterparts, and in addition they probably come into constant contact with each other in the normal course of their lives, at the creamery or at mass, for example, whereas city members need formal branch meetings to keep in touch with each other. The members of rural branches are invariably from the local community, but in Dublin population movement has created some anomalies. There is a tendency for former inner-city residents to keep up membership of their inner-city branch, with which they have social links, even after they have moved out to the suburbs. Whereas Fine Gael strongly discourages, and almost prohibits, members from belonging to a branch other than the one in whose 'functional area' they reside, Fianna Fáil has done little about the problem in the past, with the result that its suburban organisation has been undermanned and some of its inner-city branches have been run by 'outsiders' not in touch with local problems. Only when head office began to request membership lists from branches in the early 1980s did the extent of the problem become apparent.

A perennial feature of all party organisations is the 'paper branch', consisting of paid-up but inactive members, whose sole purpose is to strengthen the position of aspiring election candidates. Dáil candidates are selected at conventions attended by a certain number of delegate from each branch, so it can be worthwhile for a would-be candidate to boost his support artificially by setting up such branches. Also perennial is headquarters' determination to identify and weed out paper branches. Fianna Fáil and Labour head offices are aware of the problem but believe they are on top of it. Fine Gael has gone one better, by devising in the late 1970s a 'model system' for candidate selection, under which the number of votes a branch receives at a selection conference is not uniform (as in the other parties) but depends on the size of the electorate in its 'functional area' (i.e. the area for which it has been allocated responsibility by the constituency executive). This system (which looks complicated on paper but worked smoothly at the 1981–2 elections) makes the creation of paper branches a pointless exercise. Even if an area of the constituency is riddled with such organs created especially by an aspiring candidate, they will not have a greater collective voice at the

7. Conclusion

7.1 Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael

The differences between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and the reasons for their continued separate existences, constitute perhaps the greatest puzzle of contemporary Irish politics to outsiders, and indeed to some insiders too. This manifests itself in the difficulties experienced by writers attempting to classify the Irish parties under one of the conventional headings. For example, Henig and Pinder (1969, p. 516) describe Fianna Fáil as 'Agrarian?' and Fine Gael as 'Conservative'. Smith (1980, pp. 98–9, 319–20) confusingly describes Fine Gael as both 'Liberal-Radical' and 'Conservative', and Fianna Fáil as both 'Conservative' and 'Left Centre'. Blondel (1969, p. 162) describes one as 'Liberal/Radical' and the other as 'Conservative', but prudently does not specify which is which. A USA State Department survey of parties classified Fianna Fáil as 'Centre' and Fine Gael as 'Conservative'. A Soviet assessment, however, rated both as right-wing, saying Fianna Fáil 'represents the interests of the nationalistically oriented bourgeoisie and major farmers', while Fine Gael 'defends the interests of major financial and industrial capital' (Janda, 1980, pp. 273–9).

Perhaps the most idiosyncratic categorisation comes from Budge and Farlie, who place the two parties on opposite sides of the left–right spectrum. Fine Gael is classified as 'Conservative' and 'Bourgeois', while Fianna Fáil is described as 'Left-Reformist' and even 'Socialist-Reformist', although the French Gaullists, its European allies, are placed under the 'Bourgeois' heading (Budge and Farlie, 1983, pp. 82, 169). Fianna Fáil, they say (p. 55), possesses 'the general reformist ability to rally support with socioeconomic redistribution' (*cf.* its attitude to wealth taxation in the 1970s, p. 22 above), and is also, 'in a nation of farmers ... the champion of the country'. The party stands to gain, apparently, when 'constitutional', 'moral-religious', 'urban-rural' or 'socioeconomic redistribution' issues come to the fore, whereas Fine Gael has a more popular stance on (unspecified) 'ethnic' issues.

The Irish left has often alleged that the division between the two parties is an artificial one, based only on accidents of history and personal

animosities, their constant arguments mere 'play-acting'. Is this the case, or do they represent distinctive social groups or at least viewpoints?

It will be obvious from the foregoing chapters that, on the whole, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael do not differ profoundly in substance in most respects. This is particularly true in the area of economic policy, where both parties combine a basically private enterprise outlook with a pragmatic (and voter-oriented) willingness to tolerate high levels of state involvement in the economy, including nationalisation and subsidisation of loss-making concerns. The fundamental similarity of the two parties' economic philosophies became especially apparent during the convergence of their views in 1982, when both prescribed policies of austerity and expenditure cuts. This led to occasional suggestions from Fine Gael members that their party consider coalescing not with Labour, which favoured greater public expenditure, but with Fianna Fáil, which one senior party figure (John Kelly, in *Irish Times*, 28 May 1982) once described as 'the other half of the old Siamese twin'.

On other matters, differences of some sort are detectable. On the organisation of society, Fine Gael has, since 1977, taken up a relatively liberal and pluralist position, Fianna Fáil a more conservative and majoritarian one. On the Irish language, whereas Fine Gael from 1961 onwards advocated less compulsion in the approach to teaching and promoting it, Fianna Fáil has tended to favour linguistic revival through the education system, perhaps the only area where this otherwise voter-directed party adheres to a clearly unpopular line (Garvin, 1981 a, pp. 176–8). The party's constitution (p. 15) says that Dáil candidate selection conferences are 'expected to give preference to Irish-speaking nominees provided they are otherwise properly qualified'. On Northern Ireland, too, there are obvious differences, as noted earlier, though the low salience of this issue in the politics of the Republic suggests that it could hardly form the basis for an adversary political system.

One can also attempt to compare two parties by comparing the attitudes of groups at corresponding levels in each. For Ireland, unfortunately, there are very few data to facilitate such an endeavour. Party supporters' attitudes are regularly measured by Eurobarometre surveys, in which respondents are asked to place themselves on a scale running from 1 (the furthest left) to 10 (the furthest right). The 1973 survey (reported in Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976, p. 254) found a practical identity between the two sets of voters; Fianna Fáil supporters rated themselves on average at 6.6, and Fine Gael supporters at 6.7. Identical figures emerged from the October–November 1974 Eurobarometre, and three years later, in July 1977, little had changed, with Fianna Fáil supporters at 6.5 and Fine Gael's still at 6.7. After another three years, in October and November 1980, Eurobarometre 14 found that the positions were similar, although Fianna Fáil supporters (averaging 6.6) were by now slightly to the right of Fine Gael supporters (6.3).

The fullest examination of party supporters' attitudes was conducted in a September 1976 survey conducted by Irish Marketing Surveys; the findings are shown in Table 7.1. Once again, Fianna Fáil supporters and Fine Gael supporters had an almost identical self-rating, at around 6.6. An interesting fact emerged when respondents were asked to rate the parties (not done in the Eurobarometre surveys). Whereas members and parliamentarians of the two major parties maintain that their own party is to the left of the other, supporters saw their own party as to the right of the other. Fianna Fáil supporters regarded Fianna Fáil as the most right-wing party; Fine Gael supporters regarded Fine Gael as the most right-wing party. Labour supporters, and respondents as a whole, saw Fianna Fáil as slightly to the right of Fine Gael. This poll was conducted while Liam Cosgrave was still Fine Gael leader, and it could be speculated that in 1984 the party would appear less right-wing in the electorate's eyes than it did in 1976.

Table 7.1 The Irish public's ratings of themselves and the political parties on a left–right spectrum, 1976

	Rating of			
	Self	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour
Fianna Fáil supporters	6.6	7.1	5.8	3.8
Fine Gael supporters	6.7	5.8	7.2	4.1
Labour supporters	4.9	6.8	6.6	4.7
All respondents	6.2	6.6	6.4	4.1

Source: Politics Survey conducted for Radio Telefís Eireann by Irish Marketing Surveys, September 1976. No. of respondents: 1,004.

Note: Respondents were given five options when placing themselves and the parties on the spectrum: very right-wing, slightly to the right of centre, centre, slightly to the left of centre, very left-wing. To permit comparisons with the findings from the Eurobarometre surveys, and from the survey reported in Table 7.2, which employ an evenly-spaced scale running from 10 (most right-wing) to 1 (most left-wing), the figures in this Table are calculated by scoring very right-wing as 10, slightly to the right of centre as 7.75, centre as 5.5, slightly to the left of centre as 3.25, and very left-wing as 1. Obviously, it is impossible to be certain that respondents saw the centre-right and centre-left options as being exactly halfway between the centre and the respective extremes. About a third of the respondents were unable to answer the questions.

The only information on party members' attitudes comes from a survey carried out in a Dublin constituency in 1972–3 (see Garvin, 1977). This concluded that Fianna Fáil members rated themselves as more nationalistic and more liberal on socio-economic issues than Fine Gael members did, but the latter rated themselves slightly more left of centre. Both sets of members placed their own party in the centre of the political spectrum and the other party on the right. Overall, Garvin summarised the Fianna Fáil subculture as 'populist' and Fine Gael's as 'moralist'. The tendency of parties to claim to be on the 'left', it may be noted, is not confined to Ireland. Sartori (1976, pp. 334–5) argues that 'left' possesses an 'ever-growing evaluative positiveness' and has become 'the most coveted and crucial word in the war of words with which political battles are fought'. Laponce (1981, p. 13), too, observes that 'left' has 'a positive valence', and 'in politics ... is perceptually the dominant term'. He also, incidentally, on the basis of an exhaustive survey of perceptions of 'left' and 'right' in many different societies, concludes (p. 13) that 'the ordinary elector', at least in the European Community countries, understands the terms at least as well as he/she understands 'the meanings of the political parties he[/she] supports, Ireland being, possibly, an exception'.

Because TDs almost invariably vote according to the party Whip in the Dáil, roll-call analysis as a means of measuring elite attitudes would be pointless. A more promising approach, involving interviewing deputies, was conducted by Sinnott in 1975. He concluded (1983, p. 31) that 'Irish political parties in the 1970s can be distinguished programmatically and that the differences between them are not reducible to a unidimensional simplification'. Specifically (p. 29), Fianna Fáil TDs were furthest to the right and also most nationalistic; Fine Gael TDs were in the centre and least nationalistic; Labour TDs were furthest to the left and slightly more nationalistic than Fine Gael TDs.

A mail survey of TDs in June 1983 showed a perhaps predictable tendency for deputies of each party to place their own party to the left of the other (see table 7.2).[1] When it came to self-placement, Fianna Fáil deputies rated themselves slightly right of centre while Fine Gael deputies placed themselves slightly to the left of centre. Interestingly, Labour TDs placed their coalition allies Fine Gael to the right of Fianna Fáil, though when asked to compare the two *parliamentary* parties the positions were reversed (they rated the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party at 8.2 and the Fine Gael group at 8.0). The Fine Gael TDs placed their own parliamentary party well to the left of their party as a whole (5.6 compared with 6.2), but, apart from the Labour deputies, no group saw any significant difference between the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party and the Fianna Fáil party as a whole. Two deputies wrote letters explaining why they could not answer the questionnaire. One said, 'I fail at all times to understand Right, Left and Centre'. The other said he

Table 7.2 Deputies' ratings of themselves and political parties on a left–right spectrum, 1983

		Rating of					No. of	% of
		Self	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour	Workers' Party	deputies responding	deputies responding
TD's party	Fianna Fáil	5.8	5.4	7.2	4.2	2.0	29	38.7
	Fine Gael	5.1	7.4	6.3	3.7	1.8	33	47.1
	Labour	2.8	7.1	8.4	3.2	3.6	7	43.7
	Other/none	2.0	8.3	7.3	4.0	3.0	3	60.0
	All	5.0	6.6	6.9	3.9	2.1	72	43.4

Note: The figures are the averages of the ratings of each group on a scale ranging from 1 (the furthest left) to 10 (the furthest right). The mid point of the spectrum is 5.5. For a fuller explanation, see note 1 at the end of the chapter.

found it 'meaningless', as 'to try and apply left/right labels to *Irish* political parties is, to my mind, as pointless as trying to apply conservative/liberal, authoritarian/democrat, white/black, etc., labels'. Both deputies had cabinet experience.

In a western European context, both parties could be described as centre-right. In the European Parliament both belong to right of centre groupings: Fianna Fáil belongs to the European Democrat Alliance along with the Gaullists (RPR) and a Scottish Nationalist, while Fine Gael is part of the Christian Democrat (European People's Party) group. Cross-national attitude surveys confirm the two parties' positions on the right-hand side of the spectrum. The 1973 European Community survey mentioned above found that the self-placement of supporters of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael placed both parties among the fourteen most right-wing of the forty-five parties covered (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976, pp. 252–4; Gallagher, 1982, p. 10; *cf.* Laponce, 1981, pp. 216–17). The weight of evidence makes it hard to see why any comparative study should categorise either party as left of centre. The most sensible way out of the dilemma faced by those undertaking comparative research across western European nations is probably to group each with its European Parliament allies.

However, all the evidence that in a European context the similarities between the two parties far outweigh the differences does not prove that they should or will merge. In 1969, 53 per cent of Fianna Fáil supporters and 61 per cent of Fine Gael supporters felt that all the parties were 'much of a muchness', with only 35 per cent and 28 per cent respectively discerning 'important differences' between them (Carty, 1981, p. 80). But by 1982, 53 per cent of Fianna Fáil supporters and 53 per cent of Fine Gael supporters *disagreed* with the suggestion that there was little or no difference between the two parties (*Sunday Press*, 14 November 1982). Although voters see the parties as being very similar as far as the left–right dimension is concerned, it must be remembered that this is a fairly unimportant dimension in Irish politics. With regard to other issues, such as Northern Ireland, the parties can have significantly different images, especially in the eyes of their own supporters, even if observable substantive differences are not great.

The relationship between the parties depends on how each sees the other rather than on how an outside observer perceives them. In 1975, François Mitterand, visiting Ireland, asked 'an aged politician' why the country had 'two apparently identical Conservative parties'. The reply was: 'What keeps them apart? The contempt they have for each other' (Mitterand, 1982, p. 165). While this may not be the whole story, it does emphasise the point that each party has its own traditions, and that these include ceaselessly opposing the other party. In the highly unlikely event of the Irish left ever advancing to within striking distance of an overall majority, the two parties might, like the Gaullists and Giscardiens in France, overcome their mutual distaste to form an anti-left alliance. But without such a development, there is little prospect of their agreeing to work together in government, let alone of their merging.

7.2 The Irish party system: past, present and future

At this point it is time to return to some of the questions raised in chapter 1, about the supposed uniqueness of the Irish party system and the reasons why it developed as it did, and to speculate as to the way in which it may develop in the future.

In seeking an explanation for the distinctive nature of the Irish party system, many writers (see Whyte, 1974, pp. 647–8; Carty, 1981, pp. 4–5, 85–6; Garvin, 1981 a, pp. 208–15) have referred to the framework devised by Lipset and Rokkan. Their argument is complex, but the aspect found most useful in cross-national comparisons is the suggestion (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, pp. 14, 33–50) that four main conflicts have been liable to arise within western European states as a result of the historical evolution they have undergone. These conflicts, which have created corresponding societal and political cleavages, have been between a dominant and a subject culture (or between 'centre' and 'periphery'), between church and state, between landowning agricultural interests and industrial interests, and between the bourgeoisie and the working class. The party systems of western Europe today, it is argued, can be largely explained by asking when and in what form each of these conflicts arose in each state, and how, if at all, it was resolved.

Those attempting to apply this rather deterministic framework to

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