

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



GREEN ENTITLEMENT

GREEN SENATOR Pippa Hackett and her co-conspirators – senators Pauline O’Reilly (party chair) and Róisín Garvey – will likely be seen off by rival leadership contender Roderic O’Gorman, but the three senators’ ambition is in reverse proportion to their own record in sundry elections.

Hackett’s first effort was at the 2019 local elections in Edenderry, Co Offaly, where she took the last seat with 594 first preferences (quota 1,172). God loves a trier, but it was all downhill after that.

She took a seat in the Seanad in a by-election in 2019 – but only because she was unopposed. In the 2020 general election she came eighth out of 15 candidates in the Laois-Offaly five seater, failing to take a seat despite plentiful Green transfers. However, the fealty that Hackett showed leader Eamon Ryan during this period was such that Ryan ensured she was one of the party’s Seanad candidates – along with another loyal supporter, O’Reilly.

Ryan also made sure that these two were favoured in the real battle for votes and seats at Seanad elections – the horse trading and deals done by parties back stage – and the two made it into the Seanad, unlike radical Green candidate Saoirse McHugh.

Hackett seems to have devolved her poor electoral touch to her family and, in anticipation of the five-seat Laois-Offaly constituency (Hackett lived conveniently near the county line) being turned into two three-seaters in the latest boundary revision, the family moved smartly to test the new electoral ground. Thus, hubby Mark Hackett stood in the recent local elections in an effort to retain the seat he had inherited from Pippa in 2019.

He stood in Edenderry (Offaly), while their son, Charlie, ran in Graiguecullen-Portarlinton (Laois).

Dad polled poorly with 270 first



Pippa Hackett

preferences (quota 1,251) coming eighth out of 10 candidates. Charlie came 11th out of 11 with 214 first preferences.

Thankfully, Ryan and the party leadership do not base their political decisions on mere electoral arithmetic and, having organised support for Pippa’s Seanad bid in 2020, Ryan then made her a junior minister with a seat in Cabinet as a super junior minister.

Also elevated to the Seanad was Garvey – who expressed elation at Catherine Martin’s narrow leadership election loss in 2020 with the rather un-Green soundbite, “Fuck her” – but who made it into the upper house as one of the Taoiseach’s non-elected 11, having failed to win a seat in the general election.

Regardless of her stellar non-electoral record, Róisín now believes she should be deputy leader of the party.

O’Reilly is seen by many as the orchestrator of Hackett’s leadership campaign. She failed to win a Dáil seat in Galway West in 2020, but stood in the recent Midlands North-West EU constituency, coming 15th of 27 with 13,710 first preferences. More telling was that she was bested by former Green radical McHugh, who finished 12th with 18,976 votes. Is this the new well-

oiled leadership machine that Pippa, Pauline and Róisín are presenting to members?

While many radical “just transition” members have left the party in disillusionment since 2020, it will be interesting to see what level of support TD Neasa Hourigan secures in the deputy leadership vote.

BLUE-BLOUSE BATTLES

GOLDHAWK REPORTED in the last edition on the two Dublin Bay South (DBS) Fine Gael personalities, ex-TD Kate O’Connell and newly elected councillor Emma Blain, who hoped to stand here at the next general election. The options appeared to be that one of them would accompany barrister James Geoghegan on the DBS ticket, while the other would be drafted into Dublin Rathdown to fill the void left by retired minister Josepha Madigan and join another junior minister, Neale Richmond, on the election ticket there.

If Blain went to Rathdown, it would be more of a return than a transfer as the

councillor used to be a member of Glencullen-Sandyford area on Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council before moving to DBS and taking a seat on the Pembroke area of Dublin City Council. However, there are issues that may yet result in Blain being denied a place on an election ticket in either constituency.

There has been much media comment on the horrid behaviour of some DBS party members towards the sensitive Kate, which could act as a barrier to her rehabilitation in the party organisation. To an extent, this is still true. But if DBS members don’t like Kate, the new Taoiseach, Simon Harris, certainly does as she has been a supporter of his for some time. This could prove rather more significant than the hostility of the Sandymount matrons who look down their noses at parvenu Kate.

With James topping the poll in Pembroke and going on to be elected Dublin lord mayor for the period in which the general election must be held, he is on course for a Dáil seat. And with Kate being a magnet for media coverage and FG undergoing a minor revival, the possibility of winning two seats is a real one.

This would mean that Blain must wend her way back to Dublin Rathdown if she wants to run at the general election. But there are local obstacles to this move also. These come in the form of councillors Barry Saul and Maeve O’Connell, who came first and second in Stillorgan at the locals with 2,605 and 1,907 first-preference votes respectively.

For Emma to flit back and forth from Rathdown to DBS and expect to be welcomed back with open arms might be a touch optimistic and might even result in her getting the sod-of-turf response Kate received from her enemies in DBS some time back.

Blain’s misfortune was to make the decision to parachute into DBS from Rathdown when Leo Varadkar was taoiseach and party leader and it looked as though he would be *in situ* for the medium term at least. Harris has since arrived and it appears that he will do O’Connell’s bidding and add her to the ticket alongside Geoghegan.

The Tory boy barrister warned recently that putting O’Connell on the ticket risked splitting the vote, indicating that we can expect a few spats in DBS, with Simon and Kate facing resistance from James and a block of DBS members.

Meanwhile, the selfless O’Connell has been busy reinventing herself and has presented as the model party member in the months since Harris became leader. She cut a party patriotic image at the FG ard fheis, telling journalists that her re-entry to FG politics was “not about me. I want to do whatever I can for Fine Gael to keep Fine Gael in government.”



Kate O’Connell



IT’S REFRESHING in these times of political hand-to-hand fighting and abuse of – and between – politicians to note Clare Fianna Fáil senator Timmy Dooley’s fraternal expression of great joy at his “neighbour and friend” Michael

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION

McNamara's victory in South at the recent EU elections.

Within minutes of the Independent TD's triumph, Timmy tweeted: "Congratulations to my neighbour and friend Michael McNamara who has tonight been elected to the European Parliament. Delighted for his wife Sarah Jane and his extended family, friends & campaign workers".

A senior front-bench spokesperson for FF in the past, Timmy has been in and out of the Dáil and Seanad since 2002 and was a TD from 2007 to 2020. At the 2020 general election count in Clare, Dooley found himself neck and neck with McNamara – not for the first time – before he was pipped by his 'neighbour and friend' on the 10th and last count, meaning Timmy had to accept a nomination to the Seanad from another great friend, Micheál Martin.

McNamara, formerly of the Labour Party, is now on the verge of joining the Renew group in the EU parliament, of which FF is also a member.

Timmy must be even more delighted – as long as his neighbour does not return from Europe any time soon.

DUBLIN DANGER FOR FIANNA Fáil

MICHEÁL MARTIN'S appointment of Jack Chambers as finance minister and also as deputy leader of Fianna Fáil, a post that had been vacant for four years, was doubtless a recognition of the party's need to project a Dublin image in these divisive times. It was also a reward for the party's unexpected success in the local elections, in which Chambers was FF's director of elections. But the awarding of these posts was hardly a form of approval for Jack's electoral leadership role in Dublin, where the party performed very poorly compared to the rest of the state.

Fine Gael had a good election in Dublin, taking 43 seats out of the 183 in Dublin City Council (DCC), Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR), South Dublin County Council (SDCC) and Fingal County Council, or 23.5% of the total number. This compares very well to FF's 24 seats in the same Dublin councils, or 13.1%. And while FF ministers expressed joy at their party's national vote percentage of 23% in the local results, the Dublin results should have raised many red flags.

Going through the different Dublin regions, the overwhelming picture is of FG mopping up seats in the four areas well ahead of their rivals in FF in the unspoken competition for top dog between the two governing centre parties. In DCC it was FG 11-FF 8; DLR, FG 16-FF 5; SDCC, FG 9-FF 5; and Fingal, FG 7-FF 6.

In the 2019 local elections, FF took 18.2% of the first-preference vote in Dublin and 26.9% nationally. Eight months later in the general election of 2020, it produced a



Jack Chambers



"Oh no! He's gone full Mescal!"

national share of 22.2%.

With dozens of Dublin Dáil seats in contention, it will be interesting to see the ratio of seats that will result from FF's local election share in Dublin of 13.1%.

Based on these local election figures, it is hard to see any Dublin constituency producing a gain for the party at the general election, (while FG can expect gains, especially in south Dublin). There could even be FF losses in constituencies such as Dublin South-West, where TD John Lahart could suffer from a weak vote in the locals (12.5% in SDCC). And another backbencher, Dún Laoghaire TD Cormac Devlin – where FG took 16 local seats to FF's five in DLR this month – faces a tough general election.

Much will depend on whether Sinn Féin manages to revive itself for the second time in five years and if so, by how much. Any revival, however, will damage FF more than FG, especially in Dublin.

Martin last week said that Chambers had received a great reaction to his role as director of elections from "around the country", an interesting qualification on the compliment. But Jack will need to improve the party's standing and vote share in the capital city at the general election if he is to proceed along the designated route of finance minister and party leader, as described by excited party 'sources' last week.

GARDA BUGGERS

TD RICHARD Boyd Barrett hauled justice minister Helen McEntee over the coals in the Dáil last week regarding Garda surveillance of the survivors and families of those butchered during the Dublin-Monaghan (D-M) bombings (see *The Phoenix* 13/6/24).

Boyd Barrett asked the minister about the presence of undercover special branch officers at Garden of Remembrance ceremonies for the D-M victims in the 1990s.

In an earlier response to a written question, McEntee had informed Boyd Barrett that the issue was an operational matter for An Garda Síochána, not her department.

In the Dáil, she refused to engage any further with the scandal. Crucially, she did not deny that it had happened.

The D-M survivors were not the only victims of shadowing by the force. John Hume – a key architect of the peace process, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and former leader of the SDLP – was also a target.

During the all-party discussions of Dáil

parties at the New Ireland Forum in Dublin in the 1980s, members of a Garda unit availed of their access to the phone exchange in the basement of the Burlington Hotel. They frequently placed recording devices on the phone lines leading to rooms occupied by guests.

The handpieces in the hotel acted as microphones, which picked up what was being discussed inside. A connection to a room Hume was using was tapped. Details of Hume's discussions somehow wound their way to the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

Hume realised what was afoot after an encounter with a spooky civil servant at the NIO, who tried to coerce him into conforming with NIO policy. The NIO man threatened to publicise information derived from the hotel as leverage.

Sir Garret FitzGerald, then taoiseach, intervened, approaching one of Thatcher's ministers in protest. The politician realised that if the sensitive information made its way to the press, he would be implicated in a political blackmail plot. The bloodhounds on Hume's tail were called off.

The Burlington scandal was kept under wraps but an indication of the uproar that might have erupted became apparent after the same Garda unit bugged a house in which Seamus Mallon was staying in Kilbarrack, Co Dublin, at this time. Mallon was the then deputy leader of the SDLP. The snoopers secreted a bugging device in the kitchen at the residence. After it was discovered, a media furore exploded.

Garda commissioner Larry Wren covered up the role played by his officers and sat back – as did FitzGerald – as the State prosecuted two innocent republicans for the intrusion, Patrick Stagg and John Doherty.

It is inconceivable that FitzGerald did not realise what was afoot at Kilbarrack, especially in light of what he knew about the activity at the Burlington. Yet he left Wren and his subordinates in place.

In a parallel development, solicitor Kevin Winters has resorted to warning the Government he will sue An Garda Síochána to ensure that it hands over all the relevant D-M files to the Police Ombudsman in NI.



Helen McEntee