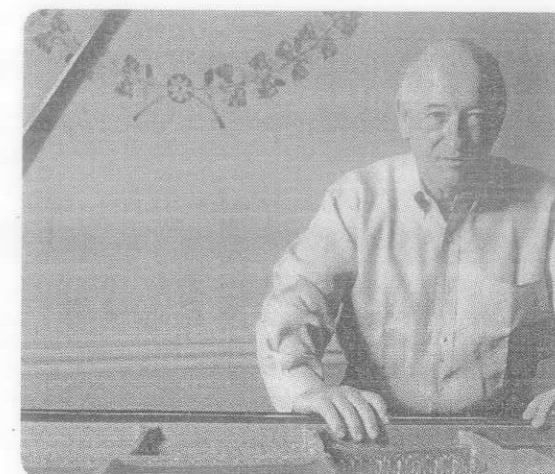


Leader2

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Giving power to the people

Former Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, now 92, returns to Ardnacrusha 83 years after his father opened it, writes **Donal O'Regan**

A MAGICAL place where electricity was generated from the waters of the Shannon was how Taoiseach Enda Kenny remembers Ardnacrusha Power Station when he was a young boy.

Former Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, was a young boy - nine years of age - in 1929 when the power station was opened by his father, WT Cosgrave.

The president of the Executive Council in the first Free State government was the man who made the "brave decision to harness the power of the Shannon to produce electricity for the Irish people", said the taoiseach.

He was speaking at a ceremony in Ardnacrusha Power Station last week to mark 85 years of the ESB, the Shannon Scheme and the contribution of the Cosgraves.

"What a legacy they



Taoiseach Enda Kenny and former taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, with Patrick "Brud" Skehan, Bridgetown, who as a child played with Mr Cosgrave at the 1929 opening

have left us, one that makes us justifiably proud as a nation and as a people.

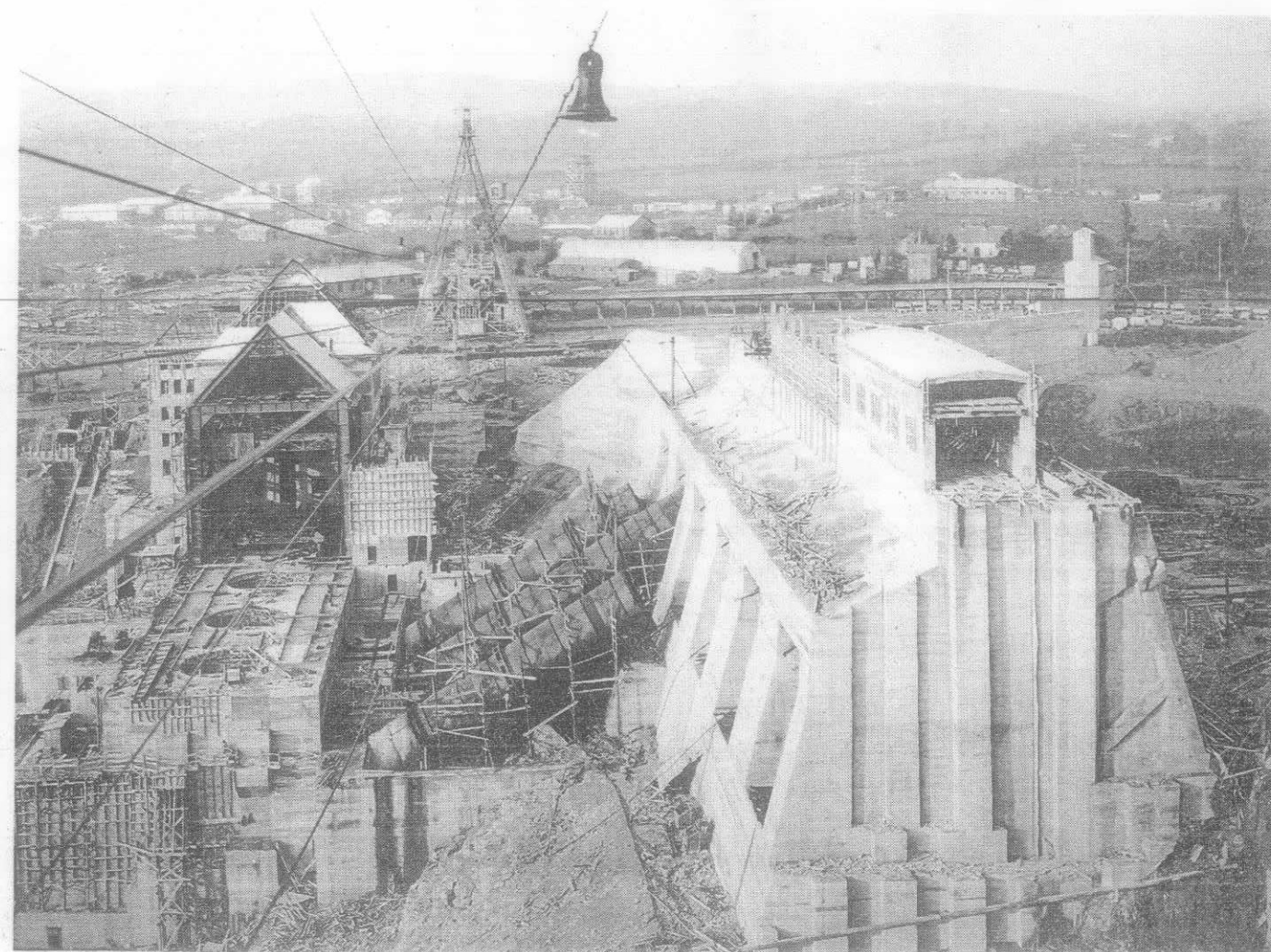
"It is important that we remember those persons of honour, bravery, courage and vision who set about doing this project

as part of the building of the Irish state," said Mr Kenny.

Four thousand Irishmen - many from Limerick city and county - worked on the project which was the largest hydroelectric station in

the world at the time. It took four years to build at a cost of 5.2m old Irish pounds by the German company Siemens - almost one-fifth of the entire annual budget.

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Scaling new heights: This photograph shows the construction of Ardnacrusha Power Station in the 1920s

Ardnacrusha: powering on 83 years later

Continued from page 1

➔ Mr Kenny welcomed Liam Cosgrave back to Ardnacrusha.

"It was a big day for a small boy and that boy would go on to be taoiseach," said Mr Kenny.

Eighty three years later, Mr Cosgrave's memory is as sharp as if it was yesterday.

"There was a lot of mud, it was a very wet day and I had a new pair of shoes and I didn't want to get them dirty," said Mr Cosgrave.

On this occasion there wasn't a cloud in the sky and the only water was in the river.

"There were planks to walk on and we were able to avoid getting into the mud. The other thing was there was some query when the switch was turned on whether the water would flow. Of course that meant nothing to me as a young fella, but it came on immediately.

"We can look back with great pride and a deep sense of thanks and gratitude that in the very early days of the state, this country had men of capacity, determination,



Pat O'Doherty, ESB chief executive; Tom Hayes, ESB; Catherine Halpin, plant manager; Lochlann Quinn, ESB chairman; former taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave; Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan and Taoiseach Enda Kenny

ingenuity, foresight and enthusiasm in initiating this scheme," said Mr Cosgrave, who was reunited with a man he met on July 22, 1929.

Patrick "Brud" Skehan, Bridgetown, then 14, recalls playing with the young Liam.

"I remember playing with the two Cosgrave brothers when their father was making his speech as the opening was taking place," smiled the 97 year-old.

Mr Skehan, who travelled eight miles on a bike from the family farm in 1922, said the crowd was very small.

"It was a very quiet opening for such a powerful thing I thought. There was a little platform set up and a few steps up to it.

"There was a bit of hostility towards the Cumann na nGaedheal government and only the real Blues turned up!" said Mr Skehan.

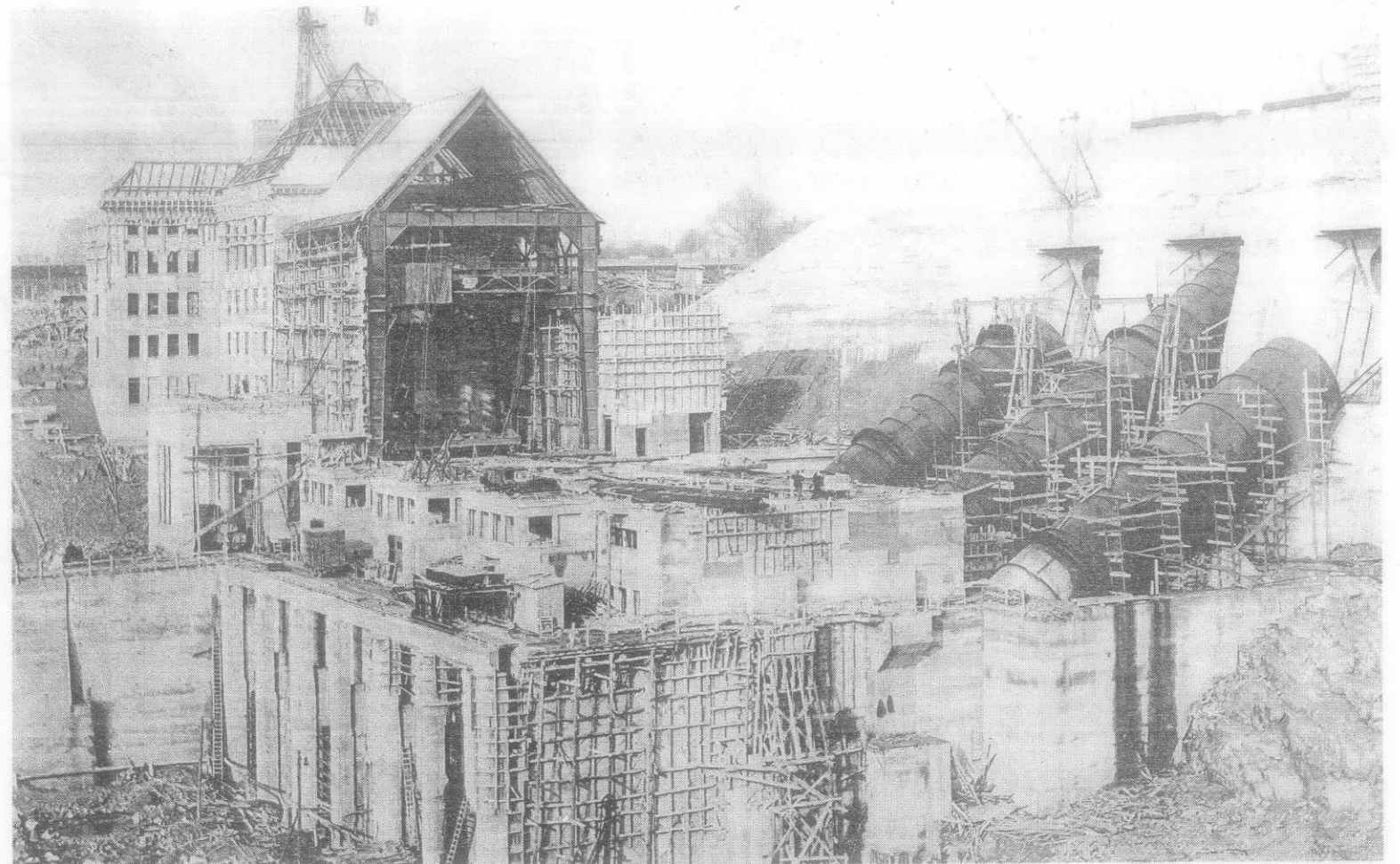
The young Liam along with father WT, mother Louisa and younger brother, Michael travelled in a state car under a heavily armed escort due to the danger of the times.

Mr Kenny said then, like now, are "uncertain times".

"We are witness to their conviction, success and their endeavours. Eighty five years on from this day there will be other people remembering this generation's challenges and difficulties," said Mr Kenny.

Mr Skehan recall there was "great money" paid on the Shannon Scheme at the time.

"It was ha'pence ha'penny an hour for labour; 10 pence for an engine driver and a shilling an hour for the driver. That was great money at the time. I wouldn't be much



Five thousand men - 4,000 Irish and 1,000 German - moved seven and a half million cubic metres of earth during the four year construction process

good today," said Mr Skehan, who met Mr Kenny and Mr Cosgrave.

The former taoiseach said the workforce of 4,000 Irish and 1,000 Germans certainly earned their money.

"Remember they hadn't machinery such as JCBs or diggers - it was a pick and shovel job," said Mr Cosgrave.

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Pat Rabbitte said it is important to not just salute the memory of the visionaries who caused it to happen, but also to remember the men who worked on the project.

Seven and a half million cubic metres of earth had to be moved.

"A great many of them were seriously injured and some of them died. It is appropriate we remember them as well," said Mr Rabbitte.

Their labour provided all of the electricity needs of Ireland at the time. To show how the country has changed - today Ardnacrusha supplies 2 per cent.



Taoiseach Enda Kenny presents Liam Cosgrave with a copy of a portrait of his father, WT Cosgrave, by Sean Keating



WT Cosgrave, his wife Louisa and sons Liam and Michael at the official opening of Ardnacrusha Power Station



Tom Hayes, Bernardine Moloney and ESB chief executive, Pat O'Doherty



Pat Downey, John Redmond, Carmel Fields, Pat Naughton and Joseph Fitzgerald at the ceremony



Then taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave at the 50th anniversary of Ardnacrusha Power Station

Pictures: Press 22