

A Man of many talents

- a profile of Mayor Dick Sadlier

By Rose Rushe

FOR those whose memory has dimmed with time, Dessie O'Malley and company were not cast out, like demons, from the Fianna Fáil party. Rather, like Mayor Dick Sadlier, they were obliged to re-apply for membership, if sought, when the status quo of local cumanna was dissolved and new cumanna established. As a stroke of Fianna Fáil organisational genius, it was typical of the party under Charlie Haughey. The dissenters, including Dick Sadlier, regrouped under new leadership rather than submit to the indignity of beginning again in a party they had served for years.

"Any criticism of party politics from within was, to put it mildly, extremely unwelcome," remembers Mr Sadlier wryly. "It's the function of a major party to work in an open, frank and constructive way." And so, the Progressive Democrats came into being.

Origins

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael came down the bloodline into this Wickam Street man's veins, where his parents ran a pub. Indeed, generally, Sadlier clan ran several pubs in town, so it is no wonder that politics was taken seriously in his household. There must have been plenty of rhetoric aired in the smoky bar zone.

"I would recommend anyone to work in a bar, or spend some time running one," he says of his upbringing. "It is an education in people and hardwork itself." Certainly, in times of yore, the state of Ireland was put right around a publican's table. Fianna Fáil was the party he grew into, inspired by Sean Lemass, Devalera and Jack Lynch. "These were leaders and patriots in a practical sense, outstanding in their time." But their time was up when Dick Sadlier joined and Charlie Haughey had taken up the

reins. For some, Fianna Fáil became a bumpy ride with the new charioteer.

"There was the emergence of new personalities who had not the same commitment to the party," is Mr Sadlier's 'insider' opinion. "Charlie Haughey was professional to his fingertips and highly competent. I would maintain that he did not understand the difference between self-interest and the national interest." This belief is only partly what propelled him into the heart of the Munster-born PD's.

"Des O'Malley is an outstanding politician, and an independent thinker," he says of the founding father. "When a party cannot accommodate persons who have diverse points of view, its function as a democratic party becomes limited. I always speak plainly and say what I believe needs to be said."

Contemporary

Mary Harney has succeeded the inaugural leadership after some rows between contenders. Is she the best person?

"Mary Harney is the leader now and that's that. Whether she is male or female is not an issue. People want someone who will deliver the goods," he responds, when pressed about aspirations of his own to the thorny crown of kingpin.

On or off the record he is not to be budged on current party leadership and is happy to serve at councillor level. He would certainly run for the Dáil if a city seat became available, cheerfully admitting to the certainty of being "slaughtered" if he ran in West Limerick. No, the vacancy will have to appear on his home turf, and no, there is no dissatisfaction with party leadership at the moment.

Defections

On the evening of this interview, Mary Harney was in

Limerick for a private Progressive Democrat meeting as part of the 'building campaign'. This is something badly needed in the light of the highly public and embarrassing defections from the party.

How does Dick Sadlier feel about people who campaigned on one party ticket, used all the material and goodwill sources and votes, and landed on the bum seat of another party or went independent?

"I was extremely disappointed with how the European elections turned out. Pat Cox is a highly able politician and makes his own decisions. But Des O'Malley gave up a thriving private solicitor's practice for a lifetime service to politics.

"It is significant he got his highest vote ever in Munster in those elections and that was a tribute to recognised service. It

party platform was for his national political career - twice made senator and mayor and a Dáil seat. "I feel very let down. But the way forward is to look forward, not back. Let the people be the judge, next election. Mary Harney has 100 per cent backing in the party now," he comments. His own contribution to the PD's is to shift the focus on to public policy. He recommends core-building throughout the country and the consolidation of party membership with strong, identifiable policies. He is pro-privatisation and has a liberal social agenda. Environmental issues are close to his heart, especially Limerick's legendary Long Pavement.

Council

He has a strong vision of how local government should

implemented. The consequent cost cutting and condensed effectiveness which would ensue are nothing compared to the loss of power to individuals. Turkeys don't vote for Christmas!

Implementable features he does see as being achievable include a governing council composed of bridging members from the city and county councils.

A new, single site dump, controlled by an outside body, perhaps the Environmental Protection Agency (site unmentioned). "People can't be expected to police themselves", is the Mayor's opinion on councils looking after their own waste controls. Air pollution minimised by making smokeless fuel mandatory in Limerick immediately.

"Our air smut levels have

doubled in recent years and what is good enough for Cork is good enough for here," he remarks.

A public schools forum with members elected from each voteless second level school, where workable suggestions are taken on board seriously by the city council. And on a personal note, the 'granting of a year's leave to public servants (such as himself) when elected to Mayoral office'. As well as a dizzy political and social schedule, Mr Sadlier continues in full time employment as an economics lecturer in SOPS.

"Hard work never killed anyone", he comments ruefully, "but one year at this pace is enough". It is an extraordinary diary of private and public duties, manageable only by one with sure feet on the ground and a keen eye for relevance.



Mayor Dick Sadlier

was appreciation shown in the most tangible way possible." This is the diplomatic analysis of the run up where in-party dissent grabbed many more column inches than the agenda for which the PD's stood.

Defections

Mr Sadlier is philosophical about Martin Cullen's recent defection, given how good the

operate - "the city and county council should be amalgamated into one".

"It is ludicrous having two separate controlling bodies in the county. Just as it is having 144 TD's in a country the size of Ireland." Mr Sadlier is aware that these proposals will never be