

# Michael Noonan, teacher, intends to be a full time Dail Deputy

THIRD IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON 'FIRST TIME' CANDIDATES IN THE GENERAL ELECTION

MICHAEL NOONAN, another first-time Dail contender ready to do battle for a Fine Gael seat in the East Limerick constituency, combines a sturdy athletic background in Irish education, culminating in his present teaching position at Limerick's Crescent Comprehensive School. He is a member of Fine Gael's National Executive Council and has been seven years a Limerick County Councillor.

The academic prowess inherited from his father, a deeply committed national school teacher evolved through to the adoption of teaching as his profession. His emergence as a political animal was a corollary of his family's traditional support of Fine Gael as a Party, the ancillary influence of Dinny Naughton (second cousin of Michael Noonan's mother), a long-serving chairman of Limerick County Council, and Michael's own propensities towards the political arena, and was later cemented by incursions, during his formative and impressionable years, into various Fine Gael political groups.

## Urban-based

Though now urban-based, the aspiring Dail candidate, a member of a family of seven, was born and brought up in County Limerick's Mount Trenchard, an area adjoining Foyne. As well as being Principal of the Loughlin National School nearby, Michael Noonan's father was also a small farmer and, today, most of Michael's relatives continue in the latter tradition.

Of his own immediate family, however, one brother, Fr. Jim, a Kiltegan priest is currently serving in Northern Nigeria, his eldest sister, Mrs. Nuala Linnane is married and living in Middleton, Co. Cork; another sister, Mary, who previously held a ward sisters post at Limerick's Regional Maternity Hospital, is now employed as an industrial nurse with Aughinish Alumina, yet another Noonan male is serving the community through his work with Allied Irish Banks in Galway, while the remaining twin sisters are both married: Madeleine (Mrs. O'Dwyer), in Cork and Joan (Mrs. Fitzgerald), based in Dublin where, in between looking after her family, she occasionally gets an opportunity to practice her metier — pharmacy.

Michael himself is married to Florence, from Castlemaize, Co. Kerry, and the couple have four children, twelve-year-old Deirdre, eleven-year-old Orla, ten-year-old Tim and seven-year-old John. All the children attend St. Paul's National School, Dooradoyle, where their mother teaches, though next year Deirdre will be entering her father's school, The Crescent Comprehensive.

Michael Noonan's own formal education began at Loughlin National School and continued at St. Patrick's Secondary School, Glin. From there he graduated to St. Patrick's College of Education, Droicheada, Dublin, where he trained as a national teacher and went on to U.C.D. from which he emerged with a B.A. degree in Irish, English and Economics.

It was during this period at university, in 1966 that he first encountered Garret FitzGerald. "He was one of my economics lecturers, and he made a tremendous impression on me; he is still a 'whiz man' but he was a 'whiz kid' then." Concurrent with academic progress, the political embryo began to develop in the young student and he joined the Dublin city branch of Fine Gael, "The Young People's Branch," to which he was attracted by the idealism of Decca Costello's "Just Society," and where his knowledge of Garret FitzGerald was consolidated on an even more personal basis.

## Rostrum

Meanwhile, emerging from the portals of university, Michael Noonan gleaned his first practical experience as a teacher on the rostrum of Dublin's Harold's Cross National School, where he spent four years before joining the staff of St. Mary's secondary school, Bishop St., Limerick, where he made local history by becoming "the first man ever to be employed in a national school in Limerick city." After three years here, he joined the teaching staff of the then Crescent College, continuing to work in its "successor" institution The Crescent Comprehensive, and has now chalked up over ten years service with the Jesuits and ensuring impressive promotion.

Allied to his pursuits in instruction, however, Michael's political interests continued to blossom and soon after his arrival in Limerick, while domiciled in the Ennis

Road area, he joined the Arthur Griffith Branch of Fine Gael, Ted Russell's dominion, and was "immediately involved in the bye-election which followed the death of Donogh O'Malley."

Later, when he moved from that area of the city to the Mungret/Dooradoyle region, he joined the Regional Branch of Fine Gael, going on to be elected to the County Council in 1974, and being successful in his bid for yet another term of office in the '79 elections.

Michael Noonan's decision to seek a candidate's ticket for the forthcoming Dail elections, then, was one formulated on the basis of an established Fine Gael orientated family background, intermingled with a

says: "I will represent all the constituents equally if elected. For after all... in my area as Councillor, there is a cross-section of the people, half urban and half rural." He is not entirely devoid of practical experience.

Again on a topic on which he is specifically equipped to speak, education, his means of livelihood, as well as his shared preoccupation with the cause he is espousing. Michael is voluble on the question of reform: "Firstly, I would like to see greater funds allocated. Classes are too big... And the pupil/teacher ratio needs to be improved to benefit the weak student who is tending to get lost. This applies particularly to primary schools...

were of the utmost importance... and yet, "at N.I.H.E. at the moment they haven't enough money to clean the place properly."

There are thirty vacancies for lecturers there just now and they cannot afford to employ them until November. They are deferring them until then so they won't have to pay them. And the lecturers who are then in the situation where they have no syllabus or syllabus preparations made...

N.I.H.E. are thinking of cutting down 25 p.c. on their intake to make ends meet... else they have to get more funds. Their big hope was counting on the State... but they are in the same situation as the universities who are having to put their fees up."

On the question of how Fine Gael's outlook tallies with his own personal attitude to these issues, the candidate says: "The are both substantially the same. Naturally, being a teacher, I am particularly interested in educational matters, but curriculum development, a greater pupil/teacher ratio, and an independent examination board are all Fine Gael policy."

If elected, I would press for the rest myself. I would feel in a good position to do so, to get the ear of the party and have the influence it would afford. On a national scale, as far as own personal attitude to these issues, the candidate says: "they are both substantially the same. Naturally, being a teacher, I am particularly interested in educational matters, but curriculum development, a greater pupil/teacher ratio, and an independent examination board are all Fine Gael policy."

## Priorities

And the candidate's priorities in the achievement of this end would be "the re-introduction of food subsidies, undertaken following the time of this interview by Fianna Fail, and the implementation of tax rebates." By these methods, "it would be possible to get a lower wage agreement and reduce inflation. Over a space of three or four years, it would be possible to balance the current budget... you will always have a deficit in the capital budget."

The current extent of public borrowing for day to day expenditure is appalling, but foreign borrowing for capital purposes is excellent. As to where Fine Gael, in government, could succeed where Fianna Fail has allegedly failed, and how the former could realistically get the country running smoothly again... our Dail aspirant had no reservations: "To restore confidence is the first big problem in a country whose society is disintegrating into competing pressure groups. And Fine Gael can do this by providing a national leadership in which the people at large will have confidence. With the effort made by Fine Gael to plan economically, so that all would benefit and everyone would get a fair slice of the cake, everybody would become less demanding and would see a future for their children."

To get this kind of confidence, people have to see some attempt to put the finances of the country right and Fine Gael can do this over a period of four, or the longest, five years... \$'s

This cannot be done any faster... What Margaret Thatcher, for example, has been doing is disastrous. Not only is she destroying the basis of industry in England, she is also destroying the confidence of the people. A sudden dire deflationary monetarist approach is disastrous and only creates more problems. The immediate task of Fine Gael "to get this country back," however, "can," stressed Michael Noonan, "be achieved by this one point: inflation control, but the priority is, and must be a planned and realistic reduction of inflation. Unemployment then follows inflation down, and there will be more jobs for more people. At the moment inflation is closing factories... and I don't think it is realistic to advocate spending policies while financial and economic

On third-level education: "The big problems are access and supply. There are not enough places available for people to benefit from third-level education. Were the right people getting in to third level institutions? A lot of the right people are getting in, but a lot of the right people are being left out. The grant situation is very bad and inadequate. There should be greater physical access provided by more places and grants. Due to economics, many people who qualify for admission to third-level education cannot afford it without a grant. This should not be our academic bias. I would like to see education available for anybody who got a place at third-level. Our participation in third-level education is only about half the European rate. And apart from the obvious right of the availability of education up to third-level, there is also the economic aspect — there are no jobs any longer for people without a skill."

And this, said Michael Noonan, was where the regional technical colleges and institutions such as N.I.H.E.



Michael Noonan, with his wife, Florence, and children, John, Tim, Orla and Deirdre.

policies are out of control. The first job of a new government is the introduction of an economic policy to create wealth then all the other spending policies advocated will be associated, and improvements will ensue."

## Inflation

The year after they left office, following their last period in government: "Fine Gael, before Fianna Fail's economic policy had made any impression, had got inflation

down," continued the present candidate. In 1977, before the election, inflation was running at 12 p.c., the following year it was down to 9 p.c. or 8 p.c. and then it went up, up, up. One of the present distressing results of this could be clearly detected in the abysmal state of Irish farmers: "the farming situation is disastrous, again due to the direct result of inflation. The recent farming package negotiated in Brussels would have been good if inflation had been running at 8 p.c.

or 9 p.c., but with inflation at 21 p.c. it is very bad. And this is not only affecting the farmers, it is affecting everybody. Limerick City is a classic example of an urban area depending, to a great extent, on a rural area for survival. I think the people here have a very great interest in the prosperity of the farming community and they are very worried about the economic effect on the city's business due to farmers' lack of finance."

Expanding on the solitary financial theme, in a positive sense, the East Limerick candidate said that one of the concrete steps Fine Gael would take to help the Irish people was enshrined in: "the greater availability of mortgage finance" included in the Party's policy. "Fine Gael would give a much bigger grant than the £1,000 grant at present available. Fianna Fail have promised another £3,000, to be paid, not at the start, but over a term of three years. This means that the young couple buying their

house have the difficulty of first raising the money themselves... Then it will only be paid back to them on a scaled basis... which, in actual fact, could be the money they are paying in interest. Fine Gael, on the other hand would "give a very big grant at the beginning" which would reduce the initial sum borrowed and then allow the normal tax relief rebate on the originally smaller outlay. But, perhaps, the grantees single boon Fine Gael has to offer Ireland is its leader Garret FitzGerald, since endemic to this one man are the two essential elements deemed necessary to liberate

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## MICHAEL NOONAN, TEACHER

(from page 36)

"save the country," namely: breadth of mental capacity and humanitarianism. Michael Noonan has no doubt about this: "I have great confidence in Gafret FitzGerald as leader. His 'Economic' background ensures that we have a realistic and qualified financial politi- cian and his interest in the welfare of the people has always been obvious."

"If anybody can get the country out of its present trou- bles he can. He is the one hope the country has at this minute. He would inspire confidence, leadership and the hope and team work needed at present. His well-known social com- mitment would ensure that his economic policies would be carried out in a humane way and that the disadvantaged sections of the community would be protected."

"He is very much com- mitted to the *Just Society* idea that everybody in the country has a right to a living and that the country should be orga- nised for the benefit of all the citizens, not any particular group or section."

"Furthermore he has the confidence of both com- munities, (Unionists and Nationalists), in the North. And with his policy for *A United Federal Ireland*, I feel that if anyone can win the con- fidence of the Unionists and make them feel that they have a place in a modern united Ire- land, he can."

Within the sphere of his own personal/political philosophy Michael Noonan regards him- self as "a Republican in the best sense of the word... it follows from that, that every- body in the country should be treated equally and that the Government wouldn't cater for any particular class, creed or sect, but would cater for the entire community."

Was not impartiality in operation in the Republic at least - towards those enveloped in the term 'sect'?"

"Yes, and I espouse the *Wolf Tone* ideal that Catholic, Protestant, Dissenter are all Irish... I don't think violence has any place in politics... or any place at all in life."

From idealism and national turbulence, the Limerick candidate turned to the sheer concrete level of local prob- lems, many of which indeed he felt, could be dealt with, even without the otherwise essen- tial element: Money... "there are local problems in Limerick which could be solved, regard- less of inflation. For example, we need another bridge in Limerick and all that's stop- ping it at the moment is the Minister for the Envi- ronment."

### Amenable?

Would a Fine Gael Minister be any more amenable on the point?

Emphatically: "If I am in the Dail, I will be outside his office every day until he sanc- tions it."

Wandering horses were another "non monetary" Limerick difficulty, while "the new legislation" introduced to "deal" with the matter was "a laughing stock"... though the next issue, that of traffic, was totally and singularly devoid of comical content.

"... Central city business is being badly hurt at the moment due to the develop- ment of traffic, ensuing con-

gestion and a lack of parking facilities in the city centre. A lot of that could be solved by skirting the locality. Take Arthur's Quay car park - it is very badly organised, to get out of it you have to go on to Sarsfield House and out onto Patrick St. The solution would be a second exit onto the quays in front of Dunne's Stores."

"Then there is the car park on the Dublin Road, which is hardly used at all, if this had direct access to the city through Ellen St. people would use it."

And, in a further dimension, continued Michael Noonan, "there are a lot of derelict sites around the city centre area which could be used for multi-storey car parks... even every little town in England has one of these now." Spaight's park- ing facility, which is a some- what comparable example of this was the candidate agreed, a good operation. But, just as with "the awful need for a lot of extra open spaces in the city for youth recreational facilities, the County Council and Corporation should purchase areas of land for both recreational and parking needs."

Another local dilemma was that of housing maintenance which currently "is in a very serious situation... doors and windows are rotting in houses and there is no money to do anything about it. Thirty men who were only on main- tenance work have been put into road work because there is still money there to spend on primary roads and we are trying to maintain employment by moving them there. But there is no housing main- tenance money available."

"... Reconstruction grants for housing should be restored. Even for privately- owned houses, there were always grants which were used for extensions, maintenance, putting in of solid fuel and upkeep... it is a big mistake."

Limerick housing situation itself: "more money is badly needed for local authority housing, we have a serious housing problem in Limerick. There are about eight hundred on the waiting list at present."

### Health

Health facilities in the-region were another salient poser: "A full-time resident der- matologist for Dooradoyle's Regional Hospital is urgently needed. The *Psoriasis Association* is demanding that one be there. The situation at the moment is that a der- matologist comes once a month or something like that."

"Also both Regional Hospi- tals, General and Maternity, need more bed-space and extensions."

Finally, in his own realm of education, a local installation which the candidate would like to see under way is "a com- prehensive school in Castletroy. There will be eighty coming out of Monaleen School this July, and one hundred and twenty coming out in '82, and these children are already looking for places in post-primary schools. Most are getting places and are putting pressure on other areas which means that other children can't get places in their local school." Referring collectively to all the afore-mentioned, Michael



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Noonan ended: "Nearly all of these are national problems with local manifestation and Fianna Fail has failed totally in handling them. I think Fine Gael could do something about all of these."

"On the practical plain of election prospects, Michael Noonan considers that 'there is a very good chance of Fine Gael winning two seats in East Limerick - a swing of 4 p.c. would get a second Fine Gael seat...'. Meanwhile, Tom O'Donnell, Richard Hourigan and myself work as part of a team."

"As far as his wife's Florence, reaction to his candidacy is concerned, he muses... 'we were married in '67 and I was interested in politics then. She has also become very interested in politics... and remember that my decision to go forward was not anything sudden. I have been very active in politics for the past ten years... Florence fully supports me and canvasses with me...'"

Fully immersed, however, as the wife of a full-time T.D. how did she view her role?

"... Well... I haven't asked her that, I think she sees her- self in the same role as any wife, supporting her husband in any position he is in"... and following the interjection of a playful smile... "she teaches as well and I support her... when the children were smaller, she didn't work but now that they are at school there are no problems'."

Ahem... ?  
 And whereto the fair ladies at large under the Utopian F.G. regime?

"Fine Gael believes, as I do, that women and men should be equal under the law, have equal opportunities to lead full lives and develop their personalities to the fullest... 'I went to the co-educational school myself and I am teach- ing girls and boys at the moment and believe me the similarity between them is far greater than the differences.'"

In moments of total leisure (of necessity in abeyance just now), Michael Noonan, the man, enjoys summer camping and likes to swim quite a lot... I used to coach the children at St. Paul's Swimming Club until I got so involved in politics, now I swim to keep fit... As a sport, ten minutes swimming is as good as anything else. It is also a sport that suits politics - the time involvement is small in comparison to the amount of benefit derived"... no political analogy suggested here... merely a sporting fact!

And while swimming keeps his body in trim, reading fulfills the complementary mental function for Michael Noonan, though his passion in this direction is again some- what restricted due to the pernubral time factor: "I read a lot when I get a chance, especially during the school holidays. I read thrillers for enjoyment, John le Carre, particularly, and I read quite a bit of history; I am very interested in modern Irish history." Of recent vintage in the latter category, those books he has perused include Professor Lyons (T.C.D.), volume on Parnell, which he liked, and Ruth Dudley Edwards work on *Pearse Triumph of Failure* which he declared to be "excellent."

Theatre is another of the candidate's loves and, for some years now, he has taken groups of pupils to Stratford-on-Avon during the annual November term break...

Perhaps next November will be, spend in a rather less rarified cultural atmosphere...

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