

MICHAEL NOONAN CLAIMS VICTORY

By **RON KIRWAN**
in Leinster House

LIMERICK'S Michael Noonan has claimed for the first time that he has "enough votes" to win this Friday's Fine Gael leadership battle.

The hottest of hot favourites since the campaign began last week, he also expects to win on the first count.

"I think I have enough votes to win. I have now completed my canvass and I have secured sufficient pledges to bring me a clear majority in the Limerick East constituency.

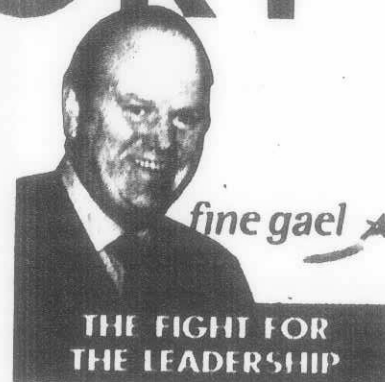
He also believes he has enough support to become leader no matter how many of the declared candidates stay in the race.

"Even in a four way contest I think I'll have enough to win on the first count," he confidently predicted.

"I think he's okay," said Senator Mary Jackman. "That's the general feeling among the parliamentary party members.

"I have no doubts that he will do it and that's the very strong consensus here in Leinster House as the election gets closer.

"No-one seems to be pulling out but it



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doesn't matter. I have no doubts and feel very confident he will win," said the Castlebar senator.

An unbackable 2/5 on favourite when the election was announced last Friday, these remarkable odds were even further reduced this week as leading Fine Gael deputies indicated he was their first choice for leader.

"It seems to me given the fact that all the leading figures in Fine Gael have declared for Deputy Noonan a momentum has begun which should ensure he is elected," said MEP John Cusnahan.

"These are leading and respected figures like former leader Alan Dukes, Alan Shatter and Charles Flanagan who were also considered possible contenders to lead the party.

"It was particularly significant that

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EDITORIAL

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Our pride

THE Limerick Leader, an independent newspaper, makes no apology for supporting Michael Noonan for the leadership of Fine Gael. He is the man for the job. His election this Friday would obviously be good for Limerick but it would be even better for Ireland.

Michael Noonan has got what it takes both to be leader of the Opposition and to be Taoiseach. This is generally recognised even by his adversaries, or at least by those of them who really know him.

Those who don't really know him understandably tend to misjudge the man. Some of them have reduced themselves to damning him for his Limerick accent, as if he were some kind of semi-literate red-neck. In fact he is arguably the most articulate and cultured member of the Oireachtas.

But cynics have levelled a more serious charge, insinuating that he is bent on changing Fine Gael's pluralist Northern policy to one of nationalist bigotry. This is a distortion of what he said on Morning Ireland last week. He told David Hanly that he agreed with John Bruton's policy but that it had been misunderstood. Some SDLP members had seen Fine Gael under Garret FitzGerald's leadership as their party of choice.

Still worse, the distortion of his remarks was also a distortion of his whole life in politics. Michael Noonan has long since stood for an Ireland in which, in his own words, everyone would feel comfortable. And his words have been matched by his deeds: his tenure as Minister for Justice was characterised by physical bravery as well as moral courage in the face of terrorism.

Michael Noonan is no political saint. He can be impatient, gruff even. He is not a natural gladiator.

His early election campaigns in Limerick East were a struggle, even when he was in Cabinet. The more the electorate began to know him, however, the more they voted for him.

Michael Noonan, too, has learned along the way, honing his considerable political skills. His daring is tempered with fine judgement; his toughness with flexibility.

But most of all he always has been is and always will be a man of honour; a source of inspiration; a born leader.

We are sure we speak for all Limerick people of goodwill of all parties and of none when we wish him, his wife Florence and family every success and happiness.

Limerick is proud of them.

steps of Limerick District Court this Thursday after he was invited by Judge Tom about the "peace deal" between feuding families in Southill. Mr Kelly, his brother, and members of the McNamara and Casey families attended the court. Mr Kelly is signed "peace deal" between the families

Picture: OWEN SOUTH (LL)