Gang of 6 ready if Collins gets Euro job

By MARTIN BYRNE

THERE are plenty of contenders for the Dáil seat of Gerard Collins if he gets the EC commissionership.

Whenever Fianna Fáil picks to contest the by-election is almost certain to win the seat if it falls vacant. The constituency has not seen a new Fianna Fáil TD for 25 years — way back in 1969. As both Deputies Collins (54) and Noonan (57) are still comparatively young, many hard-working Fianna Fáil activists have despaired of ever seeing the inside of Leinster House.

Some of those who are perceived as being likely to run are members of the "gang of six", the nearly half of the party-in-council who felt left out of things and defied the whip last year to thus cost the party several committee places for the full life of the council.

Prominent among these, and likely to consider contesting, are two party poll-toppers or near-poll-toppers — John Griffin of Rathkeale and Michael Brennan of Adare. Another party poll-topper and member of the "gang of six", Michael Barry of Killaloe, might be perceived as being too old to offer himself at this stage.

However, Cllr Michael Collins, brother of the present deputy, might offer, perhaps some younger member of the Collins family would be considered.

At first sight, the problem with Michael Brennan’s 1,576 votes at last year's local election is that not all of them came from Limerick West. Part of his electoral area is in Limerick East, and includes suburban Raheeno, Doordealy, etc. as well as the town of Bruff, for example. Back in living in Adare, the probability is that the overwhelming bulk of the support came from within Limerick West, and this would make a good base on which to construct a credible as a Dáil candidate. He is increasingly independent in council, and has spoken openly of not allowing himself to be dictated to by the local party hierarchy.

John Griffin has been a long-serving member of council, and was seen as a plausible successor to Mr Collins four years ago when the latter was being considered for the Irish EC commissionership at that time. He was also mentioned in party circles two years ago as a suitable replacement, had Mr Collins sought nomination for, and been elected to the presidency. Mr Griffin has a work-rate of extraordinary dimensions for a man councilor. Ostensibly, he is the postmaster at Rathkeale, in reality, he delegates a good deal of his post work to his staff, and devotes himself to representative work and to the business of Foynes Harbour, of which he is the energetic chairman.

Michael Collins was chairman of the County Council two years ago, a matter of great pride for him, as his late father had held the chair for a record number of years. He represents the same electoral area as Mr Brennan, drawing support more from the city suburbs and from the suburb of Foynes Harbour at Parnell Street/Davis Street, but lives in a new home half-way between the city and Patrickswell.

And then there are the dark horses. Last year, John Cogan from Drogheda succeeded his father, Tom, who had stepped down after a long and distinguished career in council and on the health board. If there is to be a member from the western half of the constituency to maintain the existing balance, along with a jump-

back to Europe? Gerard Collins points the way for a string of West Limerick hopefuls. With him during his presidency of the Council of Ministers are Italian foreign minister, Venice's Gianni de Michiello.

down of a generation, John Cogan would be among the few available options.

Michael Healy from Newmarketwest might be considered, which would result in the amazing phenomenon of two TDs living immediately next door to each other. His next-door neighbour, Michael Finucane (FG), is already a deputy. Abbeyfeale’s Michael O’Kelly, a cousin of Deputy Collins, has held the Abbeyfeale council seat since Mr Collins vacated it on reappointment to Cabinet in 1977.

Maxine Barrett from Glin has the seat where her family have held for decades — first the late Jim Barrett, founding chairman of the health board, then Tommy.

Probably also ruled out because of geography is Willie O'Connor from Ballylanders,

There has been a TD in Askeaton before. The late Denis Jones lived there, and found it a convenient enough base from which to work for Fine Gael.

Kevin Sheehan is the Askeaton town member (FG). David Naughton is also from the parish, at Ballyheigue.

Mr Sheehan is a popular man, being a polar- topper in the Rathkeale electoral area and setting the quota. Twice vice-chairman of council, he is not one of the "gang of six", and had earned the respect of the party organisation.

Romance: Des and Roisin.