

# Gerard Collins: From Justice to Foreign Affairs

**GERALD COLLINS TD, Ireland's new Minister for Foreign Affairs, and a veteran of the Ministry of Justice, this week talked to the Limerick Leader.**

Asked about reports of manning shortages within the Gardai, the former Justice Minister replied:

"There is a difficulty in recent times with regard to the overall strength of the force. And this is due to the Public Service embargo which has caught up the Gardai in its sweep over the past couple of years.

You must remember the Gardai were free of this public service embargo but it was extended right across the board to all sectors in 1987 because of the economic mess which had to be cleared up. The government, recognising the important role of the Gardai and the fact that they must have sufficient manpower, decided to authorise me to recruit 1,000 new Gardai, and this recruitment is underway at the present time.

As it stands right now it is true to say that we have less Gardai than heretofore because of resignations and retirements and the fact that there was a period when recruitment was suspended. And until such time as the new recruits come on stream the full strength of the force won't be realised. But having said that, it is the prerogative of the Commissioner to use his manpower as he thinks fit." In most parts of the country, the crime figures are down considerably. There was an increase in Dublin in 1988, but it is important to note that in the first six months of this year there was a marked decrease already as a result of new Garda tactics employed by the Garda Commissioner in conjunction with his chief superintendents. But in this country, in comparison to other countries, we are relatively crime free.

There are areas where there are difficulties, certainly. There are areas which require constant attention and this is being given to them."

**His view on the threat from subversives:** "There is undoubtedly a serious subversive threat within the country, and proof of that can be seen in recent times. We do believe that large amounts of guns and explosives were brought into the country between 1985 and 1987. A certain percentage have been recovered by the Gardai, but the view is genuinely held that there is still a very large amount of guns and explosives in the hands of the subversives."

Mr Collins said that any double-think on public attitudes towards subversives had weakened considerably.

I asked Mr Collins, in view of the decision of the Northern authorities to indicate that certain long term prisoners would shortly be released, if there were any similar type cases which could be looked at here.

"I have no doubt, but that cases can be considered on an individual basis. This is a matter for the new Minister for Justice and then the government."

Having worked on the Northern Ireland Ministerial conference opposite Mr. Geoffrey Howe, the British Foreign Secretary, I asked Mr Collins, now that he would have more dealings with Mr Howe, how he viewed his opposite number.

"I have a pleasant, friendly, working relationship with Geoffrey Howe. I think we understand each other and each other's point of view, and this is extremely important. There are occasions when we agree to differ. But we can do so in a reasonable, mature and gentlemanly fashion."

**How do you see the relationship between the two governments at present.**

"There was a very good communique issued in Madrid as a result of the meeting which took place between both prime ministers. It stated that they had a very friendly courteous and worthwhile meeting, and this is something we all welcome."

**The concept of a coalition has received a mixed reaction on the ground from some Fianna Fail supporters. Do you think this will persist or will party supporters come to accept the situation as it stands now.**

"I accept there was concern and political unease within a certain section of the traditional Fianna Fail supporter after the election. Firstly, because we did not have an overall majority and secondly because we found ourselves in the political predicament that we did find ourselves in."

But having had the matter fully explained publicly, I think there is general acceptance that the end result was inevitable. And that the interests of the country which demand stability of government have been met, and that we can continue the programme of recovery which we started out two and a half years ago."

**Given that he has not attained an overall**

**position of Charles J. Haughey within Fianna Fail now.**

"He is the undisputed leader of Fianna Fail. And we must remember in this regard that no other party has attained an overall majority either in the past five elections. It is practically impossible under the present electoral system for a party to achieve an overall majority."

**But is Mr Haughey's position as strong as it has been?**

"There is no question whatsoever of any challenge to his leadership."

**What is the mood now within the Parliamentary Party as you see it?**

"The Parliamentary Party stood very loyally with Charlie Haughey at all times and indeed gave him every support and encouragement in the negotiations which had to be undertaken to provide a government with the Progressive Democrats."

The Parliamentary Party gave him that support practically unanimously as did the National Executive. Of course the preference would have been for a single party Fianna Fail government, but that wasn't on.

And it is understood now, that without the help of the Progressive Democrats, we would not have been able to form a government."

**Your wife, Hilary is an independent-minded person. Do you listen to her viewpoint on different issues? Does she play a significant role in the formation of your ideas?**

"My wife is a very keen student of life as it is, and very aware of the difficulties which have to be faced by many families. My wife is a very strong supporter of me, as wife/husband relationship,

comment on it. I would certainly hope that Willie O'Dea will play a major role in Irish political life. I believe he has a lot to offer and I believe that he should be very successful at any level he has to play. It is not for me to comment on his position except to say that I would have great hopes for Willie O'Dea, as would all those who support him in his constituency have as well."

**The Justice Ministry is one looked on with trepidation by politicians given that portfolio down the years. You, as one of the longest occupants in Justice, have come out unscathed, what do you attribute that to?**

"God-given common-sense. I worked with a very good team, and I was very much involved. It is a ministry that requires a personal involvement on a 24-hour basis every day of the week. We had a wonderful team in the Department and a wonderful team in the Gardai at all levels."

I was in my seventh year as Minister for Justice. A number of previous Ministers for Justice lost their seats, because of the particular type of work that has to be undertaken. I am happy to have served successfully in that Department and I am equally pleased that I have a new challenge in a totally different area and a challenge I am very much looking forward to."

**As a TD, you pay a lot of time consuming attention to constituency matters. Does this cut across your more important responsibilities as Minister.**

"I can never, ever afford to forget that I am a public representative for the people of West Limerick. That is the Number One priority. And then, as a result of giving me that position, I am

agreement on a framework for Community assistance to Ireland. Our discussions have been on the basis of the programmes set out in the plan. These are comprehensive and designed to meet Ireland's needs in the most important sectors of the economy and to prepare the country to meet the challenges and avail of the opportunities which will be presented by the opening up of the Single European Market. We have made very clear in Brussels to meet the reasonable financial requirements set out in the plan in order to reduce the considerable regional disparities in social and economic developments between Ireland and the central areas of the Community. Discussions with the Commission will be completed in the near future, and we would expect to begin implementing the various programmes well before the end of this year."

"The plan contains a description of proposed expenditure in each of seven sub-regions. The Mid-West is one of these, and the expenditure of approximately 1 billion is foreseen for this area over the next five years. The strategy for the development of the Mid-West has four key elements:

- Knowledge-based enterprise emphasising in particular new technology industry.
- Resource-based enterprise relying on our indigenous assets in the agricultural and food sectors, tourism, aquaculture and timber products.
- Infrastructure, investment in roads, transport links, marine and port facilities and the environment in general.
- Human resources, encompassing education and training facilities, employment and training programmes and technological support by the third-level education sector to industry for research and development.

We are committed to ensuring that local representatives and interests co-operate effectively in implementing the development programmes in each sub-region. As set out in the Programme for Government, the Advisory Groups at sub-regional level will be kept fully informed of developments and will meet at least twice a year to review progress in that sub-region. The sub-regional working groups which involve representatives of local authorities, state agencies and Government departments will meet regularly to co-ordinate programmes, projects and expenditure."

**What is your view of our present voting system of Proportional Representation?**

"As you know Fianna Fail Governments made two attempts in the past, in 1959 and again in 1968, to alter our present system. The purpose of those two attempts was to ensure stable government, to reduce the possibility of vulnerable minority governments, and in some cases, of coalitions of disparate groups of different ideological backgrounds. When Fianna Fail proposed these changes in the past we did so in the sincere belief that we were acting, as we always have in the best interests of the country's future. We saw the day fast approaching when our present system would bring into Leinster House a proliferation of small parties that would make the process of forming Governments difficult and divisive. Such a situation could indeed introduce the risk of a form of political inertia that can result from weak and fragmented opposition."

"I believe that the primary purpose of a general election must be to give the people a Government that broadly corresponds with their overall choice. Under our present system there is the risk that the choice for government will largely be transferred from the people to the party leaders after the election. I am not convinced that this is the preferred system our people prefer to elect a Government themselves, and that right should always be safeguarded. In the light of our own recent experience all of us in the Dail may have to reflect on how we can continue to do this."

## A special interview by JIMMY WOULFE, News Editor

and but for that support it would have been impossible for me, a long time ago, to play such a full and active role in public life as I have been playing.

She is totally unselfish in this regard, and indeed often to her own disadvantage, but is happy that I can play the role that I am playing. My wife is a very strong, independent person and often has a viewpoint which I find most helpful and illuminating.

She has a great ability to see the wood from the trees."

**Would you have many fundamental political differences?**

"I believe my wife votes for me as her public representative (laugh). While we may disagree on approaches to problems, nevertheless I think she has every confidence in me to redress these problems as best they can be redressed."

**Getting back to the Northern Ireland situation, has the Anglo Irish agreement brought any real difference to the situation in the North.**

"I believe that it has very much indeed. There is an awareness of it and there will be more so as time goes on. And in recent times we had the House of Commons finalising their parliamentary efforts on the fair employment legislation, which is very important with regard to employment opportunities in Northern Ireland which will go a long way towards ending the blatant discrimination which existed there. That is just one example."

**Will you find it strange sitting at the cabinet table with Des O'Malley and Bobby Molloy, given the acrimonious past.**

"A very genuine effort has been made to forget any personality differences that were there, and that we have an agreed policy for government. There is a steely determination there within government to ensure that nothing will come between us and the successful implementation of that plan in government over the next four years."

**There has been some talk about Shannon Development's role. Are you happy with the way they have handled their new role?**

"I think we are all pleased in the region and proud of the efforts of Shannon Development. Proof of their success in the region has been the constant call, in recent times, by the people of Kerry to have their remit extended into North Kerry, which was done recently."

We are very happy that Shannon Development has been given that additional responsibility, and we know from our own contacts that they are making a great success of it. And it has done one great thing in that it has brought the people who have the responsibility for doing what Shannon Development are doing much closer to the people on the ground."

**There has been some protest in Limerick East at Willie O'Dea being ignored in the appointment of Junior Ministers.**

"These are matters for the Taoiseach and it would be very unwise and wrong of me to

nominated to higher positions by the Taoiseach. I can never forget, nor have, nor will I, that my basic responsibility is to the people of County Limerick. It's difficult at times — the demands are very great, the workload is extremely heavy, but I recognise that and I am prepared to do that and will continue to do it as long as I am able to do it."

**You have been spoken of as a possible future leader of Fianna Fail. If a vacancy occurred would you offer yourself for that position?**

"These are matters that I never comment on, for obvious reasons of good sense and political maturity. One may entertain ideas today that may not be possible tomorrow. The fact is the situation does not arise."

**Any one particular problem you would like to tackle in your new ministry?**

"One comes to mind immediately: the large number of Irish men and women in the US and are having difficulties with regard to work permits. They are described as out-of-status persons."

I propose to try and help their situation. I hope to lobby the Friends of Ireland in the house of Representatives to the best of my ability, on the passage of the Kennedy/Simpson Bill, which has already passed through the Senate. I believe this Bill will greatly benefit those people. We must never forget these people. We all know some of them. I also hope to play an active role in ensuring that the image of Ireland is properly presented with a hope to attracting new investment, so that the large unemployment figures can be brought down considerably and as quickly as possible."

**What sort of working relationship do you have with the Taoiseach?**

"It is very obvious that the Minister for Justice, who has full responsibility for law and order and security, must have a very strong working relationship and very personal working relationship with the Taoiseach."

That I had, because he must be kept aware of the situation, at all times, as it develops. As Minister for Foreign Affairs, I know I must play a similar role with him. He has a very great personal interest in Foreign Affairs himself."

He too would be involved in Europe with me. We would have to have a good close working relationship. This is important and that we have mutual trust and confidence in each other to do what we have to do."

**You have already published a National Plan which envisages the expenditure of £9bn. pounds on structural measures in Ireland over the next five years. What will you do to ensure that we receive the necessary level of funding from the European Community to implement the plan? What are your priorities for the Mid-West? Will local representatives have a say in implementing the plan?**

"We sent the National Plan to Brussels in March this year. Since then we have had an intensive series of discussions with the Commission at political and official level in order to reach

## 6 months ban for having no insurance

TOM Behan, Tervoe, Clarina, was disqualified from driving for six months and fined £100, with endorsement, when convicted at Tarbert court of driving while uninsured.

Justice Aidan O'Donnell also fined him £200 for non display of road tax, £20 for not having had stoplights on his trailer, £20 for not having had indicators, £20 for not having had a numberplate and £30 for not having had a current driving licence.

Recognizances in the event of an appeal to the Circuit Court were fixed.