With thirty years in public life behind him, of which sixteen years were spent in the Dáil, Steve Coughlan today tells his story to John Lilly and The Limerick People.

He talks about his first days as outgoing T.D. in the Labour Party, when, having secured the nomination, he was subsequently denied the seat under dubious and controversial circumstances. He discusses his life outside politics and offers opinions about the present political situation and possible return to public life.

In the next few issues, The Limerick People will publish extracts from Steve Coughlan's story which also deals with the time when he was first elected to Dáil Éireann. His life as a bookseller during the second world war and his decision to leave the Dáil.

It is a story that is both deeply personal and humorous. Important in the wider historical sense and occasionally warmed by friendships with men who paved active roles in the shaping of this country.

Today, The Limerick People publishes the first of six extracts from Steve Coughlan's story. It concerns his childhood and how political ideals and national aspirations were formed, his membership of the I.R.A. in Tafas, the attempted rebellion of 1916, and Gen. Eoin O'Duffy and an infamous Blue Shirt march in Limerick.

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Sketches and Personal Reminiscences; and Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism by John O'Leary.

'Ireland, at this time, was still preoccupied with Parnell's downfall and Healy's interesting success. The Irish had fought in 1922-1923 between those who supported the treaty and those who opposed it. Meanwhile, De Valera and Congreve, who had been in the I.R.A. for thirty years, had reconciled the issues in a political rather than in a military fashion. But the group of I.R.A. men, including the arch-rival of Eoin O'Duffy, failed in their attempts to reconcile the Irish by peaceful means.'
LIMERICK PEOPLE, DECEMBER 7, 1980

Exclusive

CONT'D FROM PAGE 1  
"Against this backdrop of political upheaval, Steve Coughlan's own political loyalties were new being shaped. Parental influence was obvious. He was young, immature and believed that the only standable attitude shown towards Parnell was not to keep with the Fenian tradition or the Wolfe Tone tradition, a tradition which was deeply concerned with the unification of Ireland and its people, whether they be Catholic or Protestant. For O'Duffy, there was little of this.

"Parnell wanted to unite the country as did Tone. I made up my mind that their answer was the right one in dealing with Irish intelligence and - the British government at all times."

Steve Coughlan on his first communion day.

As an Insurance Clerk with Life Assurance Company, an English firm with branches in Ireland, he was twenty, old Steve Coughlan, was posted to Limerick in 1931. In trade, he became a man of outstanding honour who were associated with the Republican movement and he associated himself with them.

Among those men were John Joe Sheehy, who died recently in Tralee and the late Johnny Connor, better known as Niall MacAntriagh. T.D. for Kerry who later died in a car accident.

Other members of the I.R.A. whom Steve Coughlan met were Moss O'Keeffe, Sean Russell and Sean McBride. I knew them well and travelled with them, in a united Irish two country republic.

An intelligence officer in the I.R.A. he had to gather intelligence from the circle of Cumann na Gael and he associated himself with them.

BALLYMULLEN, Tralee, Kerry Rugby league have been going for years before a public meeting in Tralee in support of their candidates. The leader of the Government, W. T. Cosgrave, was to address the meeting. Throughout the night, the I.R.A. were united in their wish to prevent the meeting of office, at any cost. In the end, they decided that the meeting would not take place and it was agreed that W. T. Cosgrave would be shot.

"I was detailed to shoot W. T. Cosgrave and I was thankful. But at the last minute I was a member of the I.R.A. and did not Cosgrave. We succeeded in disrupting the meeting and a f.r. Meany of St. John's Church appealed the I.R.A. to go home. But nobody listened until the gun went, under. Kelleher, broke loose and bellowed everybody in.

O'Duffy and the Blue Shirt Movement as they felt that he was impeding the national aspirations towards unity. O'Duffy, at that time, was seen as a traitor and his lack of help to fuel that belief. The Government felt that he was using his office for personal motives which lay outside Government policy.

The meeting was held privately, as Cumann na Gael, of which O'Duffy was a member, was very weak after the election. Nevertheless, the meeting did take place in the Foresters Hall in Tralee.

Professor Marcus O'Connor of Killarney won a seat for the defeated I.R.A. Government. The I.R.A. faced the election of Stephen Fuller, survivor of the Ballylarry bomb attack. He was one of nine men taken from Ballymullen barracks by Free State troops who brought the men to Ballylarry and tied them to the bodies and blew them up. Fuller crawled on his hands and knees to the nearest house, a half mile away and was taken to hospital.

After the "32 election many members of the I.R.A. gave up their arms and joined Flanna Fial. It was a fine for change at De Valera had made his point in favour of pursuing military goals by peaceful and democratic means. Still, there were groups of I.R.A. men in Tralee and elsewhere clinging to the gun and refusing to come in with De Valera. Arms continued to be bought back from America by visiting All Ireland Teams and that was the question of the Blue Shirt Movement to be tackled.

Shortly after General Ern O'Duffy was sacked from his position as Commissioner of the Garda, De Valera he formed the Blue Shirt Movement. O'Duffy offered an alternative job, declining instead to succeed to the boast that the Blue Shirts would be victorious in England, as the Brown Shirts were victorious in Germany.

When he announced his intention of addressing a meeting in Tralee the I.R.A. planned to shoot him. They were kept in line by O'Duffy's men and O'Duffy was not shot.

O'Duffy made his escape out of Tralee. Although there were former Cumann na Gael government ministers one hundred percent behind the Blue Shirt Movement, O'Duffy and his dream tailed from the Irish political scene, around 1933-35.

Around 1933-4 Steve Coughlan returned to Limerick and attended a dance organised by the Blue Shirt Movement in the Lyrical Hall. He went with friends to protest against the organizers of the dance. They were advised at the door, by the late Mossy Reddy, not to go in as they were in danger. But Coughlan and friends persisted and during the playing of the National Anthem, everybody in the hall, except Steve and some parity gave the Fascist salute. "On our way home after the dance, a couple of Blue Shirts attacked us with iron bars and I received sixteen stitches as a result. But it is interesting to note that at that dance there were people who are now closely associated with a Fascist Father Dunne."

(To Be Continued)

STEVE Coughlan's parents.

ATTENDING a funeral at Ballina, C. Mayo: Steve Coughlan; Sean McBride (Minister for External Affairs between 1951-55), and Martin McGrath, Mayo County Councillor.

MAUDE Gonne, Sean McBride.