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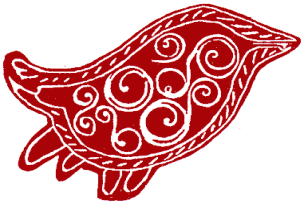

Title: Review: "Freedom to choose: Cork and party politics in Ireland 1913-1932", by Micheál Martin (Cork: Collins Press, 2002)

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Micheál Martin *Freedom to Choose - Cork and Party Politics in Ireland 1918-1932*. Cork: Collins Press, 2002. Pp xiv+288. €22.95 ISBN 978-1-84889-001-5.

This work traces the development of the main political parties in the Irish State describing the emergence of the larger players, the present Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour parties and the decline of previous important groupings in the Irish Republic, the Unionist Party, the Farmers Party and the Businessman's Party. Written from the point of view of politics in Cork, a city where political sensitivities were heightened following the deaths of Lord Mayors MacCurtain and MacSwiney and the burning of the city centre in December 1920, it traces the rise and fall of the parties and their adaptation to outside events and influences.

The differing core beliefs between the Fianna Fáil party set up in 1926 from those who followed Éamon de Valera from the fragmented Sinn Féin party and Cumann na nGaedhael are that the one determined to pursue a policy of complete separation from Great Britain and considering the acceptance of dominion status necessitating the swearing of an oath of allegiance to the Crown as an impossibility and the other prepared to accept dominion status viewing the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 as a stepping stone to independence. These divergent views and the legacy of bitterness left by the Civil War have cast a long shadow over Irish politics. It may be that too rigid an adherence to these beliefs deprived the emerging State of the co-operation of many principled and hardworking patriots.

Support for the larger parties fluctuated, very often in response to extraneous events. The deaths of MacCurtain and MacSwiney followed by the burning of Cork in December 1920 rallied public opinion behind Sinn Féin, only to be followed by overwhelming victory for the pro Treaty candidates in the 1922 and 1923 elections from an electorate weary of death and destruction.

The author describes the cataclysmic upheaval in voting patterns following the Representation of the People Act 1918 which extended the franchise to men over 21 years and to women over 30 years, enlarging at one stroke the numbers entitled to vote from 701,475 to 1,936,673. In Cork, those entitled to vote more than quadrupled, introducing a body of voters with less ideology and more mundane than aspirational, for whom the constitutional relationship between Britain and Ireland was less pressing than the practicalities of jobs and housing. The Labour Party with its commitment to social issues, among them better housing and an egalitarian educational system emerged as a serious political force in Cork when it topped the poll in the 1922 election. However, it failed to capitalise on this success by running too many candidates in the next election and thus splitting their vote.

The author is particularly interesting in his discussion of the ability of the Fianna Fáil party to avoid this pitfall, to grasp the necessity for vote management and to use circumstances as they presented themselves to the party advantage. He draws on the advantage to Fianna Fáil in building up their organisation in the comparatively calm climate of 1926, as against the Cumann nGaedhael situation of 'establishing a party while governing a war torn state'. The organisational achievement of setting up the *Irish Press* in 1930 also helped with the development of Fianna Fáil. Further helping to widen the electoral base, protectionism emerged as a central tenet of Fianna Fáil in the late 1920s, effectively bridging the urban/rural divide.

The author pays tribute to the achievements of the Cumann na nGaedhael period in office notably the 1927 Shannon hydroelectric scheme. On a lighter note, readers may be surprised to learn that Mr Cosgrave used an aeroplane for electioneering in 1923 enabling him to address meetings in Ennis and Carlow on the same day!

This reader would have welcomed fuller treatment of the background against which proportional representation was introduced in 1919.

The extent to which the Catholic Church involved itself in politics is surprising to the 21st century reader. The period covered by this book was, of course a period of particularly deeply held feelings. Cork's Bishop Cohalan appears to have been unusually forthright in expressing his views.

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Speaking from the pulpit following the burning of Cork, he said that the city had suffered as much damage at the hands of the servants of the government as Dublin had suffered in 1916.

Based as it is on a master's thesis, this book's main strength is as a work of reference and it is of enduring value to those interested in the development of the Irish State. Its value is further enhanced by its excellent bibliography and notes. The author's present position as Minister for Foreign Affairs affords him a unique opportunity to assess Ireland's adaptation to the wider political arena of European politics and we may look forward to a further publication.

Mary Lantry

Books Received

Deevy, Mary B. and Donald Murphy (eds). *Places along the way: first findings on the M3* (NRA Scheme Monographs 5). Dublin: National Roads Authority, 2009. xv+197pp. ISBN 978-0-9564-1800-5.

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Manning, Conleth. *The history and archaeology of Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork: excavations 1982-4* (Archaeological Monograph Series 4). Dublin: Stationery Office, 2009. xiv+156pp. €15. ISBN 978-1-4064-2440-9.

Nilis, Jeroen. *Irish students at Leuven University, 1548-1797: a prosopography* (Fasti Academici 4). Leuven/ The Hague: Acco, 2010. lvi+303pp. ISBN 978-9-0334-7985-4.

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