

## IRELAND

Date of Elections: June 16, 1977

### Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Representatives, which was prematurely dissolved on May 25, 1977. Normal expiry of the House's term was not due until February 1978. (General elections for the Senate, which must take place no later than 90 days after a dissolution of the House of Representatives, were scheduled to be held in August, 1977.)

### Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Ireland, the *Oireachtas*, is composed of the House of Representatives (*Dail Eireann*) and the Senate (*Seanad Eireanri*).

The House of Representatives has 148 members\* elected for a maximum of 5 years.

The Senate is composed of 60 members, of whom:

- (a) 11 are nominated by the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister);
- (b) 3 are elected by the National University of Ireland;
- (c) 3 are elected by the University of Dublin;
- (d) 43 are elected from five panels of candidates, consisting of persons having knowledge and practical experience in, respectively, culture and education, agriculture, labour, industry and commerce, public administration and social services.

Not more than 11 and not less than 5 members of the Senate are elected from any one panel.

### Electoral System

Every citizen who is not disqualified by law and who has reached the age of 18 has the right to vote in elections to the *Dail* in the constituency in which he ordinarily resides.

Registers of electors are revised annually at the county or county borough level. Voting is not compulsory. Members of the armed and police forces are authorized to vote by post.

\* See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections VIII* (1973-1974), p. 13.

As regards elections for the Senate, the following persons may vote:

- (a) For the 3 representatives of the National University of Ireland, every citizen over 18 years of age who has received a degree from the University;
- (b) For the 3 representatives of the University of Dublin, every citizen over 18 years of age who has received either a degree or a foundation scholarship from the University or, if a woman, has obtained a non-foundation scholarship;
- (c) For the 43 other Senators, members of the new *Ddil*, the outgoing Senate and every council of a county or county borough.

Electoral rolls for Senate elections are revised before each election.

Citizens who fulfil the conditions required to be electors to the *Ddil* are entitled to stand for election to this House, with the exception of the insane, undischarged bankrupts, persons undergoing imprisonment with hard labour for at least six months or penal servitude for any term imposed by a court of competent jurisdiction, and persons convicted of corrupt electoral practices. Members of the armed and police forces, civil servants (unless excepted), the President of the Republic, the Comptroller and Auditor General and all judges are excluded from membership while holding these posts.

For election to the *Ddil*, a person may nominate himself or may, with his consent, be nominated by another person (who is registered as a *Ddil* elector in the same constituency), as proposer. Nominations must be made within nine days after the issue of the writ for election, and be accompanied by a deposit of £100, which is reimbursable if the candidate is elected or gains at least one-third of the electoral quota.

Candidates to the Senate must be eligible to become members of the *Ddil* and, in addition:

- (a) Be nominated by 10 registered electors of the University concerned, if they are standing for a University seat;
- (b) Be nominated by either 4 members of Parliament or a registered nominating body, if they are standing as panel members.

Members of the *Ddil* are elected in a ratio of 3, 4 or 5 to each of the 42 electoral constituencies, by proportional representation under the single transferable vote system.

According to this system, each voter receives a ballot-paper containing the names of all the candidates in his constituency. He votes for one of these by writing the figure 1 opposite the name of his choice; he is then at liberty to indicate an order of preference for the other candidates by adding the figures 2, 3, 4, etc. against their names.

At the opening of the count, the ballot papers are sorted according to the

first preferences recorded. The total number of valid papers is then computed, and from that figure the electoral quota is calculated through division by the number of seats to be filled, plus one. Candidates who obtain a number of first preferences equal to, or greater than, this quota in the first count are immediately declared elected. If, however, no candidate has reached the quota, the candidate who received the lowest number of votes is eliminated and his votes are transferred to the candidate for whom a second preference is recorded. If a candidate receives more than the quota required for election, his remaining votes are transferred to the remaining candidates in accordance with the subsequent preferences expressed by the electors. When the number of remaining candidates neither elected nor eliminated equals the number of vacancies to be filled, those candidates are declared elected, although they may not have reached the quota.

Voting for the Senate, which is by secret postal ballot, is also conducted according to the single transferable vote system.

The Speaker is automatically deemed to have been re-elected to the *Ddil* without having to go through the electoral process.

Vacancies which occur between general elections are filled through by-elections, except that the Prime Minister nominates a person to fill a vacant seat formerly held by a nominated Senator.

### **General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections**

Parliament was prematurely dissolved by the President of the Republic, on the advice of Prime Minister Liam Cosgrave.

The three-week election campaign was fought on personality as well as on those issues which had proved of great concern to the ruling *Fine Gael* (United Ireland Party) — Labour coalition Government: the economy (high rates of unemployment and inflation) and the question of how to deal with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) involved in the continuing hostilities in Northern Ireland. Mr. Cosgrave blamed the economic woes on the increasing prices of oil imports and the general world economic slowdown, and was known as a partisan of tough policies vis-a-vis the outlawed IRA's militants, who sought the reunification of Northern Ireland with the Republic. Opposition (*Fianna Fail*, or Republican Party) leader Jack Lynch countered by stressing that the economic problems could have been minimized and favoured reunification.

On polling day, the country's electorate — bolstered by some 400,000 18-year-olds voting for the first time in *Dail* elections — returned the *Fianna Fail* to power with a record number of seats. Mr. Lynch, who had been Prime Minister from 1966 to 1973, once again took up this post and had his new Cabinet approved on July 6.

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Fianna Fáil . . . . .  
Fine Gael . . . . .  
Labour Party . . . . .  
Sinn Féin . . . . .  
Communist Party of Ireland . . . . .  
Irish Republican Socialist Party . . . . .  
Independents . . . . .

2. Distribviion of Members of the Dail according to Sex

|                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| Men . . . . .   | .142       |
| Women . . . . . | .6         |
|                 | <b>T18</b> |