



CNI

PRESS WATCH -

If you think Stormont is bad, take a look at the Dáil

You think Stormont is a shambles with a proconsul failing to provide any leadership, flailing around, out of his depth? Have a look across the border at a hamstrung Dáil where not a week goes past that another scandal, another inquiry produces furious exchanges across the chamber leading to, well, nothing, but more of the same; anything but a decision, Brian Feeney write in The Irish News.

You probably don't know anything about the shenanigans in Dublin. There's no reason why you could, since you learn more about deaths in Stockholm from local TV and radio than about the carry on in Dublin though events in Dublin have a direct bearing on politics here.

A thumbnail sketch of the endless squabbling in the south follows.

This week it's water charges, a saga that has been returning like a boomerang since Fianna Fáil introduced them in 2010. The EU insists Ireland make people pay for using water to comply with an EU directive otherwise Ireland will be fined. Most of the parties now think imposing water charges is political suicide. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are at daggers drawn on how to fudge the issue. So much so that last weekend Fianna Fáil threatened to refuse to support any newly elected Fine Gael leader for Taoiseach.

That's only this week's burning topic. Alongside water charges are the ongoing inquiries into An Garda Síochána and its beleaguered Commissioner Noirín O'Sullivan about, first, accusations that senior gardaí conspired to discredit a whistleblower Sergeant Maurice McCabe, a Supreme Court judge's inquiry into the inquiry about Maurice McCabe, the Fennelly report into illegal taping of all phone calls to garda stations for years, and an inquiry into the latest revelations that gardaí invented a million, yes a million, breath tests and that over 14,000 people were wrongly convicted for motoring

offences as a result. It certainly puts RHI, the DUP and Arlene Foster into perspective.

Fianna Fáil don't know whether to call for Commissioner O'Sullivan's resignation or not to call for her resignation or how to do either. They think either might play into Sinn Féin's hands because Sinn Féin have tabled a straightforward motion of no confidence in her. Anything to avoid supporting a Shinner motion good, bad or indifferent.

That's not the half of it but it gives you an idea of the depth of the mess, the hypocrisy, the indecision and corruption in the south. Partly it's the fault of Enda Kenny who insists on clinging to office even though his own party is terrified of an election with him leading it. Partly it's the fault of Micheál Martin the Fianna Fáil leader, a noted ditherer. If you laid him and his front bench end to end they'd never reach a conclusion. So he holds the hapless Kenny's head above water, anxious to drown him but afraid to strike.

Few people think the government will last to autumn 2018 when the confidence and supply deal with Fianna Fáil runs out. Some think there'll be an election this autumn but the government could collapse after Easter. Do Sinn Féin want to return to a northern assembly

having achieved nothing on legacy, Irish language or stopping the DUP eviscerating the Good Friday Agreement? Do Sinn Féin want to continue administering Conservative dismantling of the NHS and their cruel two child policy? No of course not, not when they could find themselves fighting an election in the south which could bring them into government. They wouldn't want to be accused in a campaign of implementing cuts in the north but opposing them in the south.

All the indications are that neither Fianna Fáil nor Fine Gael will be able to form a government without support from Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin won't touch Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil won't touch Gerry Adams but there are ways round that. You'd have to be blind not to notice Fianna Fáil sidling closer to Sinn Féin on special status for Ireland in Brexit negotiations, on Irish unity, a twelve point plan to be produced after Easter, on water charges, which brings us back to where we started.

When the odds are going nowhere in the north or going all the way in the south there's only one answer.

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