



CNI



Taoiseach Enda Kenny is engulfed in a political crisis over policing scandal

PRESS WATCH - Clock is ticking for Taoiseach as controversy surrounding whistleblowing garda deepens

His days at the helm of the Irish Government are numbered for Enda Kenny, writes Ruth Dudley Edwards in the Belfast Telegraph

Like many commentators, I've been humbled by recent failures as a political forecaster. I'd bragged about accurately predicting the result of the 2015 UK general election, but was brought down to size by getting both the Brexit referendum and the US Presidential election results wrong.

Still — despite my new-found caution — I'd hazard a guess that Enda Kenny won't be Taoiseach for much longer.

He was lucky to have been able to hang on after his poor performance in the 2016 general election, when his Fine Gael party lost 27 seats.

With only 49 out of the total of 158, he came back to power only because Micheal Martin, the leader of Fianna Fail, which had 44, agreed to back his minority administration after agreement had been reached on certain key policies.

To placate some restive back-benchers Mr Kenny had said he wouldn't fight the next general election, but he confidently expected after the Brexit result in June that he would be left unchallenged over the next few years to negotiate the best possible deal with the European Union.

Having been in his job since 2011, which is longer than most EU leaders, he's well-known in Brussels, and is liked for being co-operative and constructive (in fact, he has often been criticised for being too subservient to the European Commission).

He's in trouble now, and — as with the RHI scandal and Arlene Foster — what's put him in jeopardy began with a whistleblower and reached crisis point over an alleged cover-up.

Irish nationalists are ambivalent about whistleblowing, which is often seen as disloyal and close to informing.

And, as we know all too well, the IRA regarded informing as a capital offence.

Garda Sergeant Maurice McCabe has had several years of persecution ever since he made allegations about various incidents of police malpractice.

No one tried to kill him, but he has been ostracised and smeared and was, he believes, the object of an organised campaign by senior members of the Garda to discredit him.

Horribly, this appears to have included spreading false allegations of sexually assaulting

a child, in which Tusla, the Republic's child protection agency, appears to have behaved with either startling incompetence or actual malevolence.

It's a very complicated story that involves other brave gardai who have backed up Sergeant McCabe, and have in turn been victimised.

It was one of the ironies of the peace process that Irish politicians called incessantly for root-and-branch reform of the RUC — a fine police force demonised by terrorists — while being at best half-hearted about applying the same standards to the Garda.

The Garda has traditionally been so popular in the Republic that people chose to ignore any allegations of brutality and corruption.

People who didn't get much worked up about the murders of hundreds of police and soldiers in Northern Ireland were furious about the IRA killing of their equivalents in the south.

In a Dail debate last week Gerry Adams enraged several TDs by seeking the high moral ground on the whole controversy.

Memorably, Patrick O'Donovan from Limerick made an eloquent and furious speech that

included a demand that the forthcoming tribunal on the whole affair should require Sinn Fein TDs to “come clean on what happened to the six dead members of An Garda Síochána, the dead members of the defence forces and the dead members of the Irish prison service, who were put into early graves by an organisation the sole motive of which was to subvert the State”.

As Deputy O'Donovan pointed out, Sinn Fein's interest in the wellbeing of the police force is very new, but then Mr Adams is responding to a dramatic change of mood.

The public can no longer ignore painful truths and foot-dragging, and now they want justice. In 2014 Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan had to resign after telling the public accounts committee that the leaking of information had been “disgusting”.

There have been other scalps along the way, and there will be more to come from among police, politicians and civil servants.

The clamour to replace Mr Kenny — who has handled recent developments very badly — has become deafening.

It would be a foolhardy commentator that would predict him lasting much longer.

Ruth Dudley Edwards writing in The Belfast Telegraph, February 20, 2017

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