

# Was Sinn Féin Dying? A Quantitative Post-Mortem of the Party's Decline and the Emergence of Fianna Fáil<sup>i</sup>

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*ABSTRACT: This article calls for a reappraisal of the consensus surrounding the split within Sinn Féin in 1926 that led to the foundation of Fianna Fáil. It demonstrates that quantitative factors cited to demonstrate Sinn Féin's "terminal" decline – finances, cumann numbers, and election results – and to explain de Valera's decision to leave Sinn Féin and establish a rival republican organisation, Fianna Fáil, do not provide sufficient objective grounds to explain the republican leader's actions. This article demonstrates that Sinn Féin's election results during the period in question (1923-1926) were encouraging and the decline in finances and cumann numbers can be explained by the fact that the base year used to compare progress was 1923, an election year. Moreover, this article compares the performance of Sinn Féin to the first five years of Fianna Fáil (1926-1931) to show that what has been interpreted as terminal decline can also be attributed to normal inter-election lulls in party activity. Correspondingly, subjective factors – e.g. personal rivalries, differences in ideology, organisational style and levels of patience in terms of achieving political power – were most likely the determining factors rather than organisational decline.*

## Introduction

A consensus has emerged in recent years regarding the series of events, and the underlying circumstances, which led to the Sinn Féin split and the resultant establishment of Fianna Fáil. Though never the subject of much academic study, the verdict commonly expressed is that the Republican Party was dying, and that de Valera jumped from the Sinn Féin Titanic before it hit the iceberg of another electoral test. So common is this belief - bolstered sometimes by reference to articles and letters composed by those who were to become the Fianna Fáil political elite - that few have attempted to produce any quantitative data to substantiate it. An isolated though influential attempt to do just that has been provided by two lengthy articles written by Peter Pyne published forty years ago in the *Economic and Social Review* (Pyne 1969: 29-50, Pyne 1970: 229-257). Pyne's analysis, which remains a seminal and ground-breaking study, has provided the basis for many subsequent assumptions regarding the vicissitudes of the Sinn Féin Party from the end of the Civil War to the founding of Fianna Fáil. R.K. Carty, for example, writes that Sinn Féin's 'early successes in establishing an organisation proved to be ephemeral, and by 1924 their party was disintegrating' but his sole source for this definitive judgement is Pyne's study. (Carty, 1981: 101). In his major work on Fianna Fáil Richard Dunphy cites Pyne as his source to relate the familiar story of falling cumainn numbers, a worsening financial position combined with 'extremely disappointing' election results including the by-election 'defeat' of March 1925. This leads Dunphy to state unequivocally that 'Sinn Féin had gone into a state of steady decline by 1924'. (Dunphy, 1995: 65) Similarly, in his book "Explaining Irish Democracy", Bill Kissane cites Pyne to argue that Sinn Féin's 'poor showing in a by-election in 1925

apparently convinced de Valera finally of the need to abandon the abstentionist policy. Given that a decline in the party's fortunes was apparent from almost every indicator, it was not surprising that "various elements within the republican movement began to question the party's performance and the efficacy of its policies". Mounting pressure for a reassessment of Sinn Féin's political strategy led to a division within the republican movement'. (Kissane, 2002: 171, see also Kissane: 2001: 3)

The parameters of Pyne's investigation are the years 1923-1926, and an attempt is made to document what is perceived to be the inexorable decline of the "Third Sinn Féin Party". Taking that as his starting point, Pyne attempts to elucidate the 'factors contributing to [the party's] collapse'. (Pyne, 1970: 229). Three criteria are employed as barometers to gauge the organisational health of Sinn Féin - the financial position of the party; the number of party branches; and the support received in the various elections contested by the organisation. In this brief review, I hope to demonstrate that while Pyne's facts are accurate, they are insufficiently contextualised. More particularly, a glance at the performance of Fianna Fáil in these three crucial areas during its formative years suggests that Pyne's main conclusion – that the Sinn Féin party experienced terminal decline between 1923 and 1926 – is worthy of interrogation.

### **Party finances**

Pyne notes that Sinn Féin's income for the year 1923-1924 was £26,000, which included a contribution of £20,000 from American supporters to contribute towards the cost of contesting the 1923 election. During the following year (1924-1925),

income dropped by a third to £17,000, the bulk of which consisted of American donations.<sup>ii</sup> Between 1925 and 1926, Pyne notes, party finances 'plunged' to £3,800, and two thirds of this was subscribed in the United States. In assessing these statistics Pyne points that out that by 1926 Sinn Féin's income was but 15% of what it had been two years previously. In addition, it is suggested that the reliance on American financial support is indicative of poor organisation and dwindling domestic support. Taking cognisance of these statistics, Pyne (not unnaturally) concludes that 'the financial position of the party was, therefore, one of rapid decline from 1924 onwards'. (Pyne, 1969: 41)

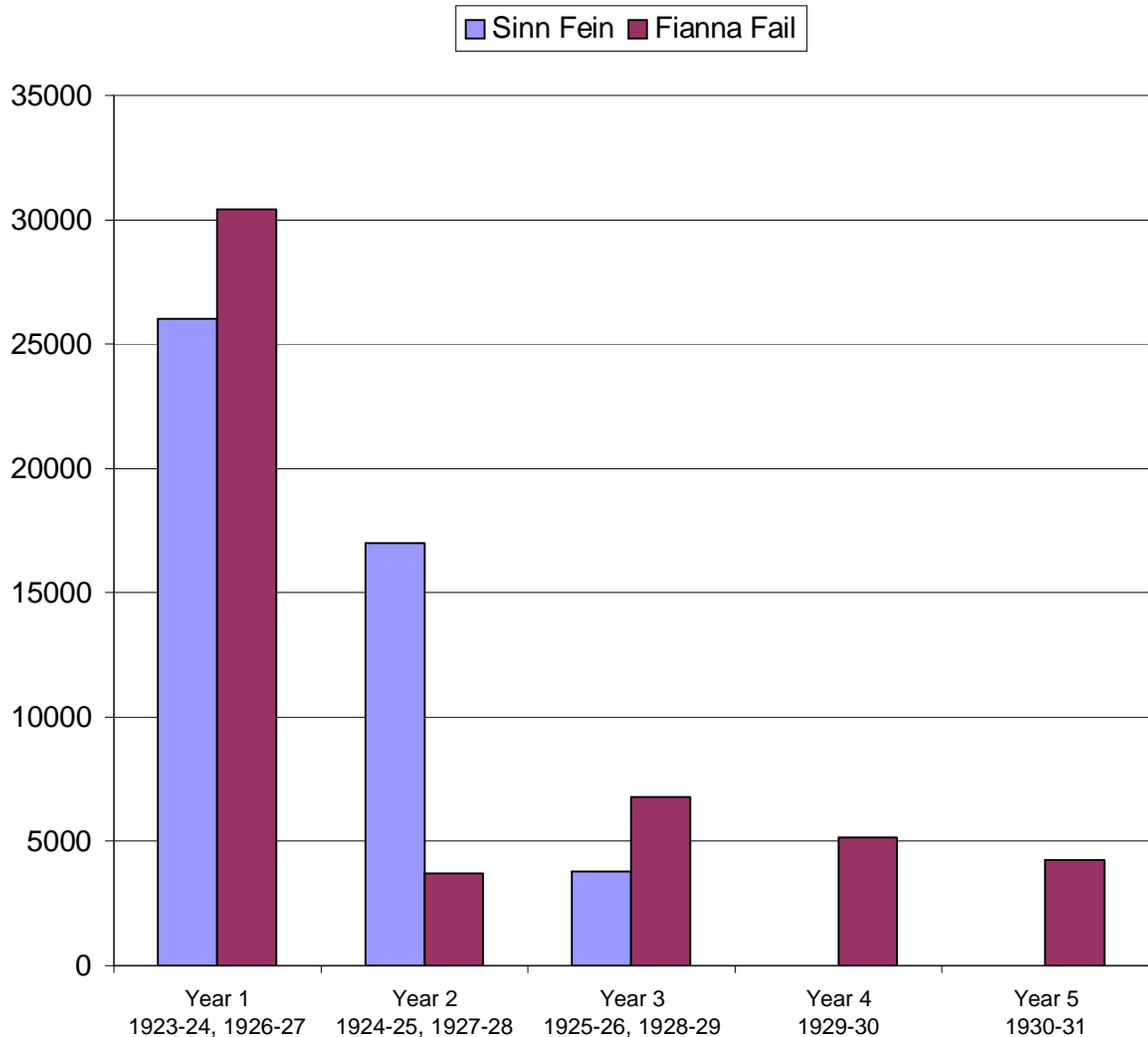


Figure 1 Amount raised (in pounds) raised by Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil for party organization.

Sources: For Sinn Féin funds Pyne 1969, 1970; for Fianna Fáil funds Honorary Treasurers and Honorary Secretaries Reports (Fianna Fáil Archives now housed at UCDA)

However, the position of Sinn Féin appears less unfavourable when compared with the experience of Fianna Fáil during its first three years of existence as an organisation.<sup>iii</sup> The Honorary Treasurers report submitted to the 1927 ard fheis reported that party income for the previous eighteen months was £30,402 of which an incredible £29,782 had been subscribed from abroad, mainly the United States and

Australia (Report of the Honorary Treasurers, 1927 ard fheis).<sup>iv</sup> This figure compares favourably with that of Sinn Féin in the year after the Civil War. Indeed it can be argued that the Sinn Féin figure of £26,000 is more impressive as it covered a 12 month period as opposed to an 18 month one, and the money was raised to contest one election while Fianna Fáil had contested two within four months and thus sought and received further foreign donations. Had there been only one election in 1927 the figure would have been considerably lower.<sup>v</sup> The report also recalled that at the party's first ard fheis the previous year it had been agreed that £4,370 would be budgeted for a 'normal year', that is a year in which an election did not occur. Moreover, a figure of £7,000 was projected as the amount needed to fund party activities for the coming year. Receipts received for the year 1927-28, however, revealed that the Fianna Fáil could only muster £3,702 in the course of the twelve month period (Honorary Treasurers' Report, 1928 ard fheis and *The Nation*, 17 November 1928 p. 2). Total income for 1928-29 increased to £6,792 - though this was £607 short of expenditure - before falling again in 1929-1930 to £5,156 (Honorary Treasurers Report, 1929 and 1930 ard fheiseanna). In 1931, the amount raised declined further to £4,252 before rising on the party's assumption of power the following year (Honorary Treasurers Report, 1931 and 1932 ard fheiseanna).<sup>vi</sup> If we were to employ Pyne's logic to these statistics we might see a faltering party heading for terminal decline - an organisation whose immediate disposable income declined to 12% of its 1927 figure within a year. Such an interpretation would, however, be misleading. What these statistics indicate is the artificiality of the figures for 1923 and 1927, both of which were election years. There is invariably an inter-election lull, and the political organisation always finds it difficult to keep the party machine oiled and members motivated.

## **Local organisation**

The second criterion used by Pyne to demonstrate the decline of Sinn Féin - *cumann* numbers - produces an equally inconclusive result. Pyne argues that after an initial post Civil War boom in membership, and a corresponding mushrooming of *cumainn*, this had levelled off by mid-1924, before going into irreversible decline thereafter. Between June and November 1923, 700 *cumainn* were established and party membership continued to expand into 1924. But, as Pyne notes, only 700 of the party's 1,025 branches were able to raise the affiliation fee for the 1924 *ard fheis* held at the end of the year. This number had declined to little over 350 by July 1925. Pyne concludes by quoting the 1925 Sinn Féin Honorary Secretaries Report, which attributed the figures to poor organisation and argued that it was obvious that the party was not adequately representing the republican population. This leads Pyne to conclude that 'there can be little doubt that the Third Sinn Féin party was declining internally' (Pyne, 1969: 42).

Again, let us compare these figures to those of Fianna Fáil during its early years of existence. Throughout 1926 and 1927 the Fianna Fáil organisation expanded rapidly so that by the party's 1927 *ard fheis* a total of 1,367 *cumainn* were registered (Honorary Secretaries Report, 1927 *ard fheis*). By 1928, however, a somewhat different picture emerges. The Honorary Secretaries reported at that *ard fheis* that *cumainn* numbers had dropped to 1,033. Of these only 354 had managed to pay the affiliation fee suggesting that most party branches existed on paper only. These

organisational deficiencies were more stark in constituencies like Cork West which possessed only one affiliated cumann; Cork city, three; Waterford and Dublin South, four. Even a republican heartland like Kerry could muster only ten affiliated cumainn. (Honorary Secretaries' Report, 1928 ard fheis and *The Nation*, 3 November 1928 p. 2). The picture was not any rosier in 1929 when the number of registered (as opposed to affiliated)<sup>vii</sup> cumainn declined in all but five constituencies. In numerous counties, the number of cumainn fell by almost 50% during the year, and in two - Mayo South and Monaghan - it fell by two thirds.<sup>viii</sup> The Honorary Secretaries were just as critical of these figures as their predecessors in Sinn Féin. Their report attributed the decline to organisational weakness: 'it cannot be said that any county carried out the work systematically', they complained. Furthermore they argued that the figures indicated that the party was not adequately reflecting the republican population as cumainn numbers had collapsed in areas where there was reportedly good support for Fianna Fáil policies (Honorary Secretaries Report, 1929 ard fheis and *The Nation*, 19 October 1928 p. 7). Once again it is evident that a reliance on cumainn figures as a barometer for organisational vitality, and an indicator of a party's future potential, could be defective. The figures for the period 1926-9 could be interpreted as indicative of a party suffering interminable decline. In fact, the party weathered the storm. Cumainn numbers picked up in 1930 and 1931, reaching 550 and 759 respectively, before increasing dramatically in the run up to the 1932 election, and in the immediate aftermath of Fianna Fáil's assumption of power (Honorary Secretaries reports, 1930 and 1931 ard fheiseanna). By the time of Fianna Fáil's first post-election victory ard fheis held in November 1932, cumainn numbers were reported at 1,387, almost exactly the same number as existed in the previous election year of 1927 (Honorary Secretaries Report, 1932 ard fheis). Despite these statistics, the organisational strength

of Sinn Féin has traditionally been underestimated while many have held an unsubstantiated belief, based largely on the party's formidable performance since 1932, that Fianna Fáil's early years of constitutional opposition were ones of unrelenting organisational momentum and expansion. For example, in his authoritative assessment of Free State politics Jeffrey Prager claims that 'only when Fianna Fáil emerged as a political force did Cumann na nGaedheal more than triple its local branches from 276 in 1924 to 797 in May 1926' (Prager, 1986: 210). This is a peculiar point to make as Fianna Fáil was only established in May 1926, and the evidence cited therefore suggests that Cumann na Gaedhael were responding to the organisational challenge of Sinn Féin, and not that of the non-existent Fianna Fáil.

## **Elections**

Finally, Pyne argues that election results from 1923-1926 demonstrate the organisational malaise within Sinn Féin. He maintains that Sinn Féin's by-elections performance 'could hardly be interpreted as a vote of confidence' and this had understandably led to disappointment 'amounting almost to despair' among key players in the party leadership (Pyne, 1969: 42). However, Sinn Féin increased its representation from forty four seats to forty eight during this period, and succeeded in augmenting its share of the popular vote. These achievements are all the more impressive considering the quantity of by-elections and the meagre funds available from Sinn Féin's natural constituency of small farmers and petite bourgeoisie. These compared unfavourably with Cumann na nGaedheal's more affluent support base, many rewarded with state jobs, and the administrative resources that were available to members of the ruling party. In the circumstances of the 1920s, Sinn Féin experienced

the added disadvantage that all transfers from pro-Treaty and/or conservative elements (for example the National League or former unionists) tended to go to Cumann na nGaedheal who always portrayed such contests as life and death struggles for the continuation of the state. (O'Leary, 1979: 23)

Sinn Féin contested all twenty one by-elections save that in Dublin County on 18 February 1926 when the party stood aside to help Labour leader William Norton defeat Cumann na nGaedheal's Thomas Healy who topped the poll but was edged out on transfers (the vacancy arose from the suicide of sitting independent deputy Darrell Figgis). This was a remarkable achievement for a party. The amount of vacancies filled through by-elections during the Fourth Dáil (27 August 1923-9 June 1927) is unprecedented in Irish electoral history. It equals in number all by-elections held in the Republic of Ireland from 1980 to the present day. This was due to the fact that resignation and disqualification occasioned the majority of contests whereas since the 1930s death has been the main reason for a vacancy.

By-elections tended to favour the government during the early years of the state. Between 1922 and 1947, the ruling party retained 79% of government vacancies and took 63% of opposition vacancies (Gallagher 1996: 43). This was in part due to the exorbitant cost of contesting a by-election, which usually reduced the number of contenders to two or three. As all other parties in the field had accepted the Treaty and supported the Free State, Cumann na nGaedheal benefited from attracting all pro-Treaty votes whereas in both by-elections and general elections, Sinn Féin stood out as the only anti-Treaty party. Therefore, while an increased Cumann na nGaedheal vote most likely reflected the size of the pro-Treaty vote but was not necessarily an

endorsement of the Cosgrave's party, a vote for Sinn Féin could only be interpreted as a rejection of the Free State regime.

These constant electoral battles put a strain on party finances – already overstretched from trying to support destitute republican families – and sometimes caused friction with the IRA from which funds were often diverted despite reservations from the latter organisation as to the wisdom of contesting Free State elections (Comhairle na dTeachtaí Minutes, 10 July, 8 August 1924).<sup>ix</sup> Expenditure in a constituency during by-elections matched or exceeded that spent on general elections. In Limerick, for example, Sinn Féin spent £1200 to promote the candidacies of three party members during the 1923 election, all of which was raised locally. The by-election of 28 May 1924, according to one estimate involved raising £600 locally along with £800 spent by party headquarters (Kate O'Callaghan, Comhairle na dTeachtaí Minutes, 8 August 1924) while another Sinn Féin leader put the figure as high as £2400 (Mary MacSwiney, Comhairle na dTeachtaí Minutes, 8 August 1924).

In the five by-elections held in November 1924 the Republican vote increased in all constituencies [see Tables 2 and 3]. In fact, Sinn Féin gained almost 29,000 votes in these constituencies over its performance in the 1923 General Election, an average increase of almost 6,000 votes per constituency (Macardle 1951: 802). In North Mayo, East Cork, and Donegal, Sinn Féin's vote increased by 40%, in Cork City by 74.4%, and in South Dublin by 77.4%. While the pro-Treaty vote in these constituencies declined by almost 50,000 votes from 149,272 to 99,755 Sinn Féin garnered an additional 28,487 votes and saw its vote increase from 48,851 to 77,338. The significance of these figures was not lost on republican leaders. In an editorial

entitled “The People Come Back to Sinn Féin”, the party paper justifiably proclaimed the results as a decisive victory for the republican cause and a clear sign that Sinn Féin was reaping handsome dividends from dissatisfaction with the ruling regime:

The people in the five constituencies have spoken. Their verdict is a bitter one for the enemies of liberty. Four of the five contested areas were overwhelmingly Free State in the last General Election when the average majority against Sinn Féin was 23,000. So great a change have fifteen months brought that a constituency where in 1923 there was a majority of 26,000 against the republic has now declared itself Republican. In all the others the tremendous Free State majorities have come tumbling down, while the vote of Sinn Féin has almost doubled (*Sinn Féin* 29 November 1924 p. 5).

The party paper declared that Sinn Féin had gained in seats and votes despite the fact that the entire print media was ‘virulently opposed to the Republic’ and had carried out a hostile campaign to vilify the Republican leadership and distort the party’s aims. In response to Sinn Féin’s increased polls, the daily press had attributed republican success to ‘skilful propaganda’ but ‘if it were a matter of propaganda, eight daily papers should undo one Republican weekly’ (*Sinn Féin* 29 November 1924 p. 5). The same pattern was evident during the nine by-elections held in March 1925 when Sinn Féin again increased its vote in every constituency and took two seats from the government, leading Dorothy Macardle to comment retrospectively that ‘the tide had already turned; the ebb that had begun with the signing of the Treaty was already over and the flow, however slow and gradual, had begun’ (Macardle 1951: 804).

Moreover, Sinn Féin's vote was hard-core and loyal. On one of the rare occasions when one of its candidates was eliminated in a by-election, its vote was overwhelmingly non-transferable. Faced with a choice in Cavan between supporting Cumann na nGaedheal or a popular farmer candidate, almost four fifths of republicans declined to register a preference, the prospect of dislodging a government party candidate being insufficiently tempting.<sup>x</sup>

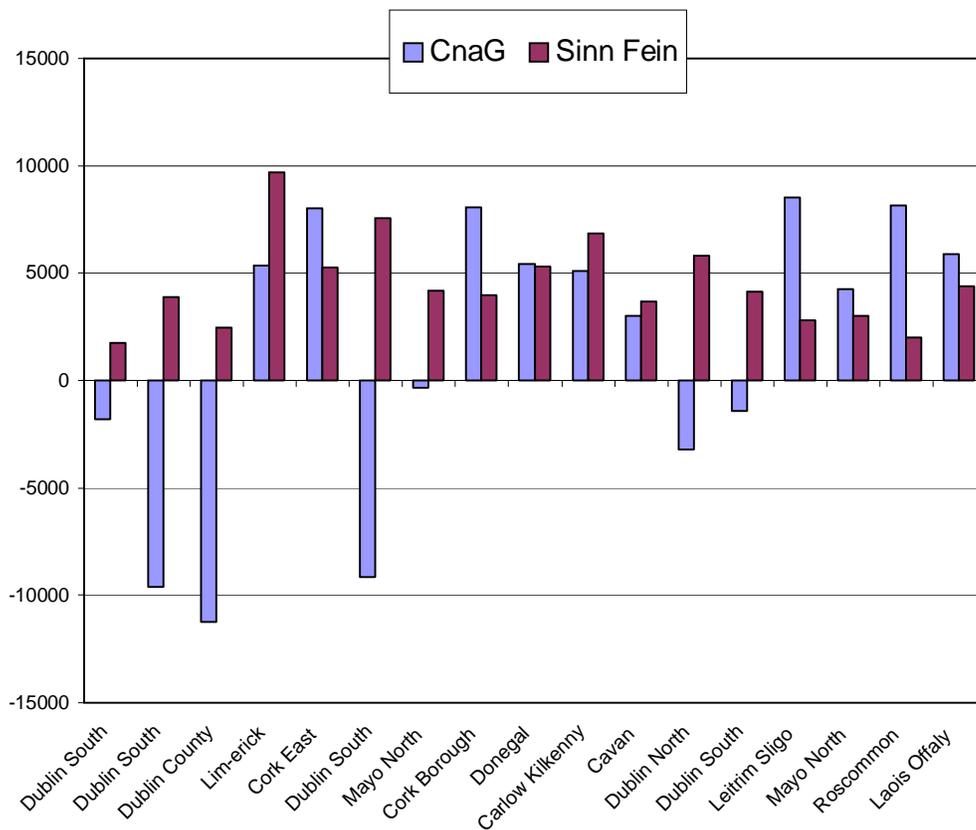


Figure 2: By election Results 1923-1926, variation in number of votes received in 1923 general election.

Full details: 25 October 1923 (Dublin South), 12 March 1924 (Dublin South), 19 March 1924 (Dublin County), 28 May 1924 (Limerick), 18 November 1924 (Cork East, Dublin South, Mayo North), 19 November (Cork Borough), 20 November 1924 (Donegal), 11 March 1925 (Carlow-Kilkenny, Cavan, Dublin North, Dublin South, Leitrim-Sligo, May North, Roscommon), 18 February 1926 (Laois-Offaly)

Note: The elections held in Dublin North and Leitrim-Sligo filled two vacancies in each constituency. Sinn Féin did not contest the Dublin County by-election on 18 February 1926 to assist the defeat of the Cumman na nGaedheal candidate by Labour's William Norton. The National University of Ireland by-election of 25 October 1923 is not included given the limited number of votes involved in what was essentially a "rotten borough" (the Cumman na nGaedheal and Sinn Féin votes increased by 20 and 24 votes respectively and no other parties contested).

Source: Adapted from Gallagher (1993) pp. 77-82

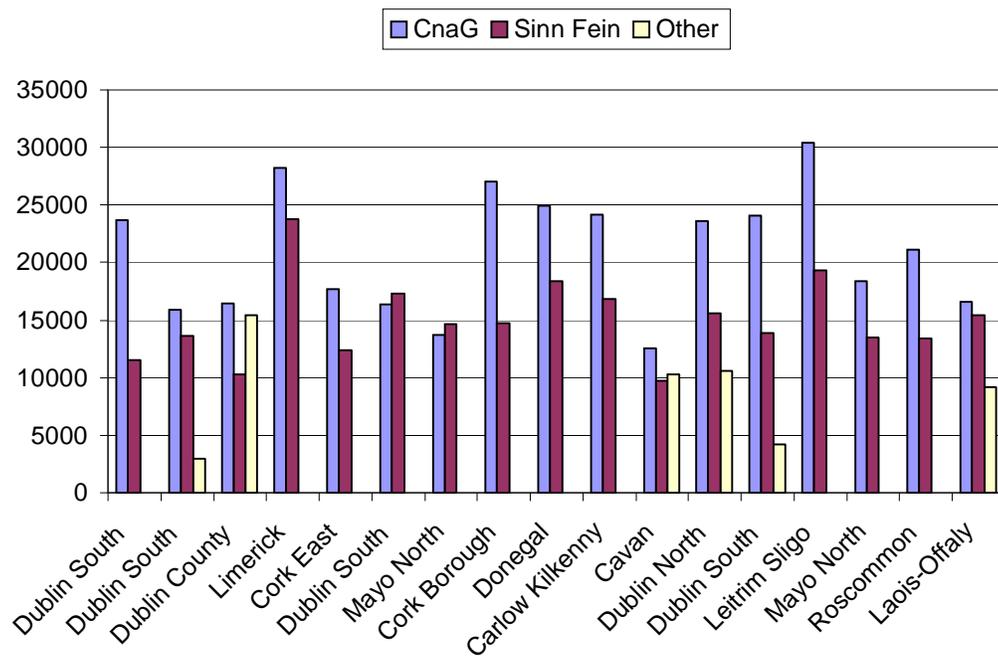


Figure 3: Cumman na nGaedheal, Sinn Féin and Others vote in absolute terms for all by-elections 1923-1926

Adapted from Gallagher (1993) pp. 77-82.

During its first six years Fianna Fáil fared no better than Sinn Féin and was confronted with much the same challenges. The party contested nine by-elections

before its historic victory in the 1932 election. Of these it won only two, almost exactly the same proportion (four out of nineteen) that Sinn Féin secured between 1923 and 1926 (see Tables 4 and 5). Three of the by-elections were occasioned by the death of Fianna Fáil TDs but only one of these seats was successfully defended by the Republican Party. The failure to retain Countess Markievicz's seat was particularly embarrassing. The constituency of Dublin South, though never a republican heartland, was the base of Fianna Fáil's rising star, Seán Lemass, who had already secured the key leadership positions of National Organiser and Honorary Secretary within the party. The combined Fianna Fáil/Sinn Féin vote had been greater than that of Cumann na nGaedheal at the June General Election but the August by-election saw the Government Party extend its lead over Fianna Fáil from 900 votes to almost 4,500. Again, Fianna Fáil was faced with the same problems that had confronted Sinn Féin during the 1923-26 period. Fianna Fáil's increase of over 3,000 can almost entirely be accounted for by a decline of over 1,000 in the Sinn Féin vote and the non-participation of Independent Republican, M.J. O'Mullane, who had garnered over 2,000 votes in the General Election. The increase of over 8,000 votes in the Cumann na nGaedheal vote can be attributed to the significant National League (a pro-Treaty Redmondite party) vote in the constituency and the support of those who had voted for an array of mainly pro-Treaty Independents. This problem was a significant factor in imposing a ceiling on Fianna Fáil's electoral advances between 1926 and 1932 just as it had for Sinn Féin previously. It is also noteworthy that Sinn Féin's four victories were at the expense of Cumann na nGaedheal whereas neither of the Fianna Fáil by-election wins made a dent in the governing party's numbers (one seat was taken from Labour, the other was a Fianna Fáil seat).<sup>xi</sup>

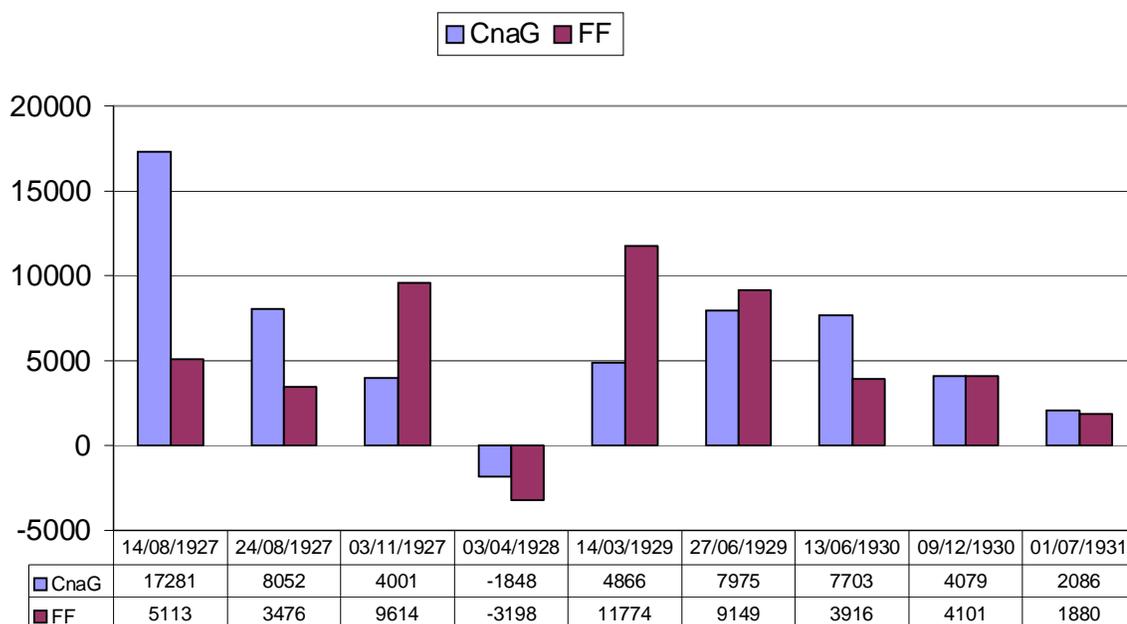


Figure 4: Increase in by-election vote over 1927 election results (benchmark for first two by-elections is June 1927 election and September 1927 election for remainder)

Full details: Dublin County, 14 August 1927; Dublin South, 24 August 1927; Carlow-Kilkenny 3 November 1927; Dublin North 3 April 1928; Dublin North, 14 March, 1929; Leitrim-Sligo, 7 June 1929; Longford-Westmeath, 13 June 1930; Dublin County, 9 December 1930; Kildare, 1 July 1931.

Adapted from Gallagher (1993) pp. 113, 144-45.

Fianna Fáil could, however, take succour from the electoral disintegration of the Sinn Féin Party. Having lost its more election-focused comrades, Sinn Féin adopted a half-hearted approach to elections. Despite having almost two dozen sitting TDs, it contested only fifteen seats in the June 1927 election (of which it won five) and none at all the following September. Depleted finances partially explain this shift away from active electoral politics (de Valera had adroitly siphoned militant Irish-American funds into Fianna Fáil coffers) though the scornful attitude of Sinn Féin towards the Free State and parliamentary politics generally were also decisive factors.<sup>xii</sup> In 1927, the people of Dublin County and Dublin South were faced with two three way battles between Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin. Though Cumann na

nGaedheal took both seats, Fianna Fáil firmly established themselves on both occasions as the republican alternative to the Government Party.<sup>xiii</sup>

Fianna Fáil made much of its victory in the Kildare by-election a few months before the 1932 general election despite the fact that the seat was won at the expense of Labour, and the party secured only 40% of the first preference vote. Cumann na nGaedheal, on the other hand, successfully defended three seats, made four gains – two at the expense of Fianna Fáil – and did not lose a single seat. Far from being ‘a notice to quit from a long suffering people’ (*The Nation*, 4 July 1931, p. 1) as presented by Fianna Fáil, such a record could quite legitimately have been interpreted as a consistent vote of confidence in the administration.

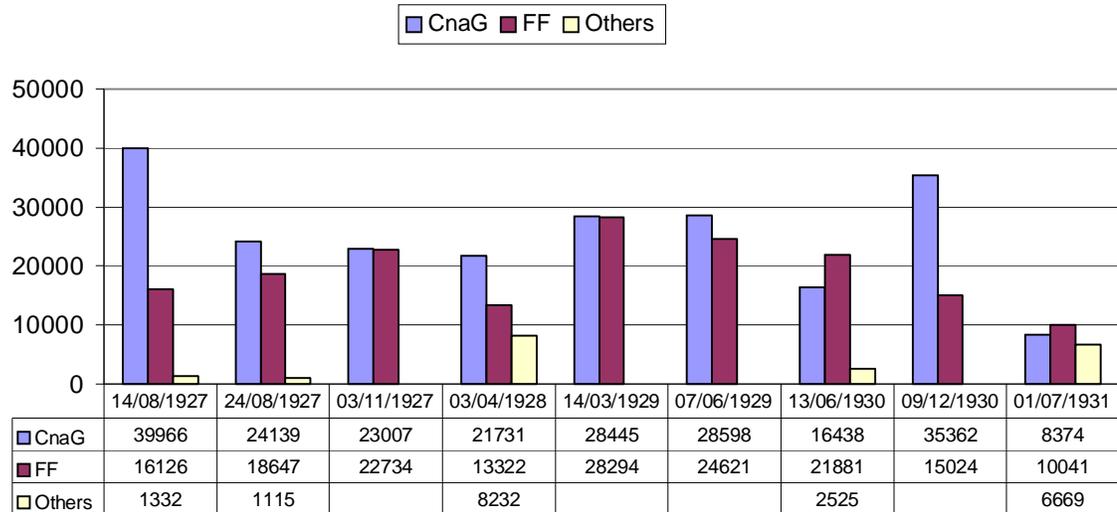


Figure 5: By-election vote for Cumman na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil and Others, 1927-1931.

Adapted from Gallagher (1993) pp. 113, 144-45.

## Conclusion

When it comes to the Sinn Féin party of the mid-1920s, how are we to measure decline? That there existed a large body within Sinn Féin who wished for a new departure is beyond dispute (Dunphy 1995, Murphy 1991, Fanning 1983, Farrell 1983, Coogan, 1993) but less clear is whether this was a symptom of decline or its cause. Just as one can talk oneself into a recession, a party can talk itself into decline. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the motivation of the key members of the Sinn Féin leadership who decided to establish Fianna Fail. Leaving aside the subjective feelings and post-hoc rationalisations of influential party elite members, the main criteria on which we can measure Sinn Féin's organisational strength are cumann numbers, party finances and by-election results. Few have attempted to *quantify* the decline of SF in the 1920s, and it is not difficult to understand why Pyne's thesis has been so popular; it has a simplicity and tidiness about it that is at once tantalising and reassuring. His conclusions, however, appear less impressive when a comparison is made with the early years of Fianna Fáil.<sup>xiv</sup> His starting point - 1923 - was an election year, which distorts much of the subsequent analysis relating to membership and income. An authoritative conclusion could have been attempted only if Sinn Féin had remained intact for a few more years and had contested another election. De Valera, however, was not willing to wait this long. It is clear from Pyne's study that there existed within Sinn Féin a body of opinion led de Valera that was eager to divest itself of the more doctrinaire, and less election focused elements within the party. The data employed by Pyne, however, certainly does not support his trenchant conclusion that Sinn Féin declined 'from its position as the second largest party in the country to that of a very minor organisation on the fringe of the political scene within the space of three years' (Pyne, 1970: 252). The argument presented here

is not that Sinn Féin was necessarily thriving; merely that the case for its terminal decline has not been cogently argued by reference to the criteria – finances, party branches and by-election results - employed by Pyne and those who rely on his analysis. When compared with the early years of Fianna Fáil, a comparable trend is evident that suggests that a decline in cumainn numbers and party finances combined with by-election losses may be due to factors other than internal party decline, over and above that which occurs within every party between general elections. When it comes to assessing the veracity of Pyne’s case on the viability of the Sinn Féin party, one must opt for the Scots verdict of “not proven”. De Valera may not have left a sinking ship; he certainly torpedoed it.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> The author would like to thank Tom Garvin, Robert Kevlihan and three anonymous reviewers who read earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> This figure may be an underestimate if figures mentioned in meetings of Comhairle na dTeachtaí are given weight. The disparity in funding for Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil in Year 2 can be explained by the volume of by elections each party had to contest.

<sup>iii</sup> It should be noted that the 1920s was marked by deflation rather than the inflationary rises that are now customary, as indicated by data available at the Central Statistics Office (only quarterly figures are available for 1922-1930, monthly figures are available from 1930). Taking July 1914 as the base (100), then the figure for the Free State in the aftermath of the civil war was 180 (1923, month 7). This figure remained the same when Fianna Fáil was established (1925, month 4) but had dropped to 171 during the inter-election period of mid-1927 (1927, month 7). By the end of 1931, on the eve of Fianna Fáil's the figure had declined further to 165 (1931, month 12). This makes Fianna Fáil's figure for the latter part of the 1920s slightly more impressive but this does not detract from the main point, which is to illustrate trends rather than absolute figures. My thanks to Yvonne Harrington of the Central Bank for directing me to the necessary data.

<sup>iv</sup> De Valera was not over stating the case when he claimed that without American assistance 'it would have been impossible for Fianna Fáil' to contest the 1927 elections. *The Nation*, 21 May 1928.

<sup>v</sup> This is clear from the Fianna Fáil cashbook for 1927. It documents a surge in foreign subscriptions prior to the June 1927 election followed by a dramatic lull only to be surpassed by yet another surge in the immediate run-up to the September election. (FF/24).

<sup>vi</sup> These figures, with the exception of the 1928-9 financial year, record the amount raised at national collections. However, the difference between the national collection figure and total income was never large, a fact indicated in the 1928-9 figures. America became less important as a source of party funds. A separate fund established for the setting up of the *Irish Press*, and this venture did rely heavily on fundraising in the United States. See *The Nation*, 3 March 1928 p. 8.

<sup>vii</sup> For some reason the Honorary Secretaries report for 1929 (FF/703) lists only the number of registered cumainn.

<sup>viii</sup> The net decline was 235 cumainn: 52 new cumainn were established 287 disappeared.

<sup>ix</sup> The IRA had lent Sinn Féin £14,000 to fight the 1922 election, all of which had been raised in America. The Irish Republican Prisoners Dependents Fund (IRPDF) continued to provide basic sustenance to the families of republican prisoners. Forty thousand pounds had been given by the Republican "Government" to the IRPDF by the summer of 1924, a colossal sum by the standards of the time but was still unable to meet requirements. The 1923 hunger strike alone had cost £3000 (Comhairle na dTeachtaí Minutes, 8 August 1924)

<sup>x</sup> Had a larger percentage of his vote transferred Sinn Féin's candidate, Philip Baxter, could easily have secured victory for the farmer candidate, John O'Hanlon, who lost by less than 900 votes whereas over 7,500 Sinn Féin votes did not travel.

<sup>xi</sup> Moreover, if we are to take the same three year time period as Pyne does for Sinn Féin (until 1929 in the case of Fianna Fáil) then Fianna Fáil won none of the half-dozen by-elections it contested, while the government party won all six taking one from Fianna Fáil, one from an Independent deputy, and one from the Irish Workers League (Jim Larkin).

<sup>xii</sup> This apathy or hostility was not always shared by the candidates themselves. Tom Maguire, for example, had been a Sinn Féin TD for Mayo South since 1922 had wanted to defend his seat but was over-ruled by the party leadership. He was told by the IRA Executive that he would be expelled from that organisation should he stand. See interview with Tom Maguire (MacEoin 1987: 301).

<sup>xiii</sup> The first by-election in Dublin County was necessitated by the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins and took place on the 14 August 1927. The results were: Cumann na nGaedheal – 39,966; Fianna Fáil – 16,126; Sinn Féin – 1,332. The other by-election in Dublin South was caused by the death of Countess Markievicz and took place on 24 August 1927. The results were: Cumann na nGaedheal – 24,139; Fianna Fáil – 18,647; Sinn Féin – 1,115 (Gallagher 1993: 113)

<sup>xiv</sup> In fairness, Pyne himself makes modest claims at the outset, stating that his study 'is offered only as an investigation of a preliminary nature, for synthesis must await the study of all relevant sources'. Pyne, (1969), 1/1, p. 29.