

Straight talking



with 'The Duke'
seamus@roscommonpeople.ie

Give Michael Finneran a ministerial position

On a personal, human level the news that Martin Cullen has been forced to leave the cabinet through ill health is very sad and I have the utmost sympathy with him and his family and I hope that he can recover from his illness. He has had a hard time over the years in his personal life and his treatment in the tabloid press during Monica Leech episode was particularly tough on him and his family and I wish the man well.

However, on a political level I don't think that Mr Cullen will be much loss to the cabinet.

I cannot think of one innovative thing that he was responsible for over many years in various ministries. He was a mighty party man and was always ready to go out and to defend the indefensible such as evoting. His departure will leave another major position to be filled in the cabinet and Brian Cowen should swing the axe now if he wants to revitalise this deeply unpopular government.

Mary Coughlan, Mary Harney and Noel Dempsey should also be shown the door at least

and he needs to shake up his ministerial team. Mary Coughlan has shown that she is clearly not up to the job. The government jobs strategy is almost non-existent. Noel Dempsey is there too long and is only interested in his own narrow agenda and political point-scoring at this stage of his career. He has been in power far too long. Mary Harney is now also well past her sell-by date and the latest controversy with regard to the x-rays at Tallaght Hospital is certainly the last straw. In fact she should resign this week.

There are plenty of others who could do a job in the cabinet and why not our own junior minister Michael Finneran?

In a Government that has been under severe pressure he has performed well in his portfolio in recent weeks and he has handled a few very difficult interviews in the national media very well indeed. He would be an ideal replacement for Martin Cullen in Arts Sports and Tourism and far more capable in my view.

This week's scandal

It would appear that we are facing a huge scandal every single week here in Ireland now. We had Willie O'Dea, then Trevor Sargent, last week we had the quite unbelievable revelation that 20 children have died in the care of the state in the last ten years. But the news this week about the x-rays in Tallaght Hospital takes the biscuit altogether.

It would be understandable if there was a problem over four days, or even four weeks if the hospital was short staffed, but for 58,000 x-rays to have been read by people who were not qualified to read them over a four year period is off the end of the scale altogether. Was there no-one, a doctor or a nurse or an administrator to say this is wrong or to call it into question, over a four-year period? It points to a system where people couldn't care less about the wellbeing of the patients.

In typical fashion in this country there is no one responsible. The HSE say it's not their problem. Mary Harney says it's not her problem and as usual no one will pay any price for this gross negligence. I'll tell you what will happen. There will be an investigation, a report will be drawn up and that will be the end of it. What should happen is that Mary Harney and Brendan Drumm should resign this week as a result of this scandal.

If they don't resign then Brian Cowen should sack them both. It's about time that people started taking responsibility for the jobs they are doing. These people are being paid enormous salaries. Ordinary people are getting sick of this serial gross incompetence and it is coming up almost every week now.

One bright light out of this whole controversy is the performance of the new CEO of Tallaght Hospital Kevin Conlon who has performed very well. The frightening question that one needs to ask in all this is as follows: If this can happen in a modern well-funded hospital God only knows what happened in other small and poorly funded hospitals all over the country. I think that this story is far from finished yet. It has to be a resigning matter for Mary Harney who, by the way, hasn't been seen for the past six months.

Agreeing with Vincent and Emily

I never thought that I would be singing for the same hymn sheet as Vincent Browne but his assertion that The Dáil is deeply undemocratic is largely correct. TDs have no real say. They act in accordance with party policy and they have to obey the whips when they vote regardless of how they feel on any issue. The Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly said the same thing in a major speech only this week in which she said that the Dáil was deeply undemocratic. I quote her as follows: "Parliament in Ireland has been sidelined and is no longer in a position to hold the executive to account" - that's the sad reality of the institution that runs our country. Vincent Browne reckons it will take 40 years to effect change in this area. If that's the case then I'm wasting my time highlighting it here and so is he and Emily O'Reilly too!



Roscommon Drama Festival Committee members on opening night of the Roscommon Drama Festival. Left to right: Con Connolly, Pauline Byrne (adjudicator), Fr. Eugene McLoughlin, Marie McCrann, Joe Nally (Treasurer), Mary Cox (Chairperson), Mary Finn (Secretary). Missing from photo: Deirdre Kelly, Eilís Gilvarry and Paraic Brennan. Pic: www.hursonphotography.com

Public union strikes are not the answer

I have huge sympathy for public servants on low incomes who have had their pay cut in the past two years. People in the private sector know all about it as we have all had to take serious cuts over the past two years too.

However, I have to say that going on strike will not solve anything and it is very clear that the Government is not going to reverse last December's pay cuts. Going on strike and closing schools, hospitals, and refusing to answer phones is not the answer as far as I can see. If the people I work with decided tomorrow to stop answering the phone this business would not last two weeks. The same goes for every other small business in the coun-

try that are struggling as it is.

If the unions want to change things then they should lobby TDs for a change of Government and make sure that pay cuts are not on the agenda of any possible alternative government. The bottom line is that this country is now broke and it simply cannot afford to reverse the pay cuts. All the strikes in the world are not going to change that regardless of who is in government.

You hear public service union leaders complaining about a public versus private divide among workers. Strikes that affect the public in the coming months will only widen that gap and cause huge anger.

Enjoy the national holiday

Next Wednesday is St Patrick's Day and the country will stop to celebrate our national holiday. Our poor little country has taken some battering over the past two years and it is a much different place to live now. However I hope that people can forget their troubles for one day and have a good time.

There are plenty of parades and other events going on and it is great that communities are still able to get together and hold parades to highlight what is going on in their local areas. There is loads of sport on as well with the

club finals on the TV and the Roscommon U 21 team in action too. There is Cheltenham racing, soccer, rugby and much more. I hope people go out and enjoy the good weather and the big day. Heaven knows we all need a little light relief these days.



Dear Seamus Duke

Have just been listening to the news about latest health service scandal and was sickened to hear that the Minister is in New Zealand prior to her St Patrick's Day junket. It is a disgrace that she should be out of the country when she knew this was emerging. Today is the 10th March. St Patrick's Day is the 17th. Do the math. More pies anyone?

Disgusted and upset reader

Vote for Olwyn

Well done to Olwyn Murray on reaching the final of the all Ireland talent show. She will have serious opposition in the final on Sunday night next and she will need every vote she gets. Her Roscommon connections are very strong and there will be a huge Roscommon crowd in Dublin for the final on Sunday night. Give her a vote if you can and we wish her all the best of luck.

