

Seanad

We were told yet another serious untruth this week – that the events surrounding the appointment of John McNulty to the board of IMMA and his nomination represented a one-off lapse in the standards of the Fine Gael party which will now be fully restored. That claim is clearly untrue.

The cover-up and brazen peddling of lies to the public that we have witnessed even since the Taoiseach apologised and pretended to take personal responsibility for the affair shows that the interests of the Fine Gael party comes way before minimal political accountability and the maintenance of public confidence in the politics of this state.

Why do I say that? Heather Humphreys falsely claimed that she was “not at liberty” to disclose who had suggested the IMMA appointment or why it had been suggested.

Let’s get it straight. She is perfectly at liberty to disclose that information. It is not secret or confidential in any sense. There is no reason not to reveal it. Unless, that is, what she really meant was that she is constrained from telling the truth because the Taoiseach has instructed her not to do so.

She falsely claimed that the identity of the person who told her to make the IMMA appointment was “a Fine Gael matter”.

What did she mean by that? The Fine Gael party receives €4.9 million every year from the taxpayer. It uses that taxpayers’ money to pay its officials. (It also spent €800,000 of that money refurbishing its Mount Street head office last year at our expense. Yes – that Mount Street.)

It is not a private “party matter” if a member of the Government is instructed by a paid official of that party to appoint a party member to the IMMA board. It is a quintessentially public matter.

If Heather Humphreys cannot understand that it is not a private matter, she is not fit for any office, let alone cabinet office. It is no more a private matter than if she had made the appointment on the say-so of a paid political lobbyist – the type that the Government pretends that it wants to register and regulate. Sometime.

We are being collectively insulted by the new pseudo-contrite, Kenny-Humphreys line- the absurd suggestion that the IMMA appointment was not connected in Minister Humphrey’s mind with the Seanad by-election nomination. If a party official instructed Heather to appoint McNulty to the board, she must have wondered why? Unless, that is, she was told why or unless she is a supine cypher of the publicly funded Mount Street machine.

If she didn’t ask the party official why she was being told to break the Government’s own decision that no more than 9 members were to be appointed to the IMMA board, she must already have known why. When she, in turn, instructed her departmental officials to make the board appointment, they must have known that this was a breach of the Government’s decision. That decision was on file in her

Department. Did they point it out to her? Did they seek permission from Brendan Howlin's expenditure Department, DEPR, to breach the Government's formal decision. Did they get the go-ahead from DEPR? Or did those public servants decide to keep DEPR in the dark?

If the anonymous Fine Gael official did not disclose the Seanad by-election rationale for the appointment, did he or she give any reason at all? Was this done by a written instruction? Or was there a conversation? Did Heather think it was solely the initiative of the party official or did she assume that it was done with the authority or at the request of the Taoiseach? Did the party official act on the authority or at the request of the Taoiseach? Did party officials in Mount Street have the authority of the Taoiseach to give such instructions or make such requests to Ministers?

These issues are not private "Fine Gael matters". There is nothing confidential about them. To refuse to disclose the answers to Dail Eireann is very serious political misbehaviour. If these are now the public political "standards" of Fine Gael, we have a very serious problem. We have a Taoiseach and we have Ministers who have publicly resorted to evasion and deception to protect their party from elementary accountability in respect of interfering wrongly in the business of government and state.

I think John McNulty is about to be elected to the Seanad. His nomination paper personally signed by Enda Kenny describes him as an IMMA board member. So does the ballot paper. The Government's Oireachtas members, including Labour's Alan Kelly and many of his colleagues want to give themselves the choice of having John McNulty in the Seanad against his own wishes or coercing him into a humiliating resignation so that they can have another by-election to put someone else in his place.

How contemptible is this behaviour? How contemptuous is it of the Seanad, the Oireachtas, the Constitution and the public?

We are now also told that an anonymous Fine Gael official has also taken possession of marked ballot papers so that the party could obtain a ruling as to whether its members could re-mark the ballot papers or get new ballot papers. On whose authority did that happen? Just how is it possible that ballot papers can be intercepted and stored in this way? By the way, where were those papers marked? Why were they given to a Fine Gael official? Were their markings supervised in Fine Gael rooms? Was it a secret ballot at all? What are we to believe?

These matters, far from being a "Fine Gael matter" are properly matters for the Standards in Public Office Commission.

It cannot be a case of "next business please".

If Enda Kenny was in any way contrite he would now reform the Seanad which the people voted to retain. In a crude threat before the Seanad referendum, he told the public he would not reform the Seanad if they voted to retain it. Having received his "wallop" from the voters, he then told the Seanad he would consider reform. He then tabled legislation that would leave 90% of the Seanad elected in the exact same way they have been elected in the past.

Do you remember the speeches by Fine Gael about how terrible it was that some few people had seven votes in Seanad elections while the majority of people have none. What happened? They all voted to keep that system. Those are the Coalition's real standards. Do you remember the "Save 20 Million Posters – Abolish the Seanad" posters? The Fine Gael party machine will receive €25 million in the term of this Government to pay its officials whose shameful behaviour is a "Fine Gael matter".

A year after the people in referendum stood by the Constitution, the Seanad and democratic accountability, Fine Gael and Labour have shown their true colours and their true standards.

Sending pathetic spokesmen to blather and stutter about this affair in the media underlines the threadbare, abject side of the "new politics", a glimpse of which has shocked the public.

Contrast their inarticulacy with the vivid, unforgettable language deployed by the Driver/Director Hilary Quinlan: "Three years ago we were all eating out of bins".

Be grateful and leave them alone, in other words, to get their snouts back in the trough.