

Statement by the Fine Gaël (February 1979)

Caption: In February 1979, in anticipation of the first direct election to the European Parliament, Fine Gaël, an Irish centre-right party, makes a statement on the past and future role of Christian-Democrats in European integration.

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Christian Democrats

The Fine Gael involvement with other European Christian Democratic parties is for Ireland a natural and beneficial alliance. Natural, because the Christian Democratic philosophy accurately reflects the ethos of the Irish people; beneficial to Ireland because it gives Ireland a foothold in one of the two major political movements in Europe.

Political groups in the European Parliament, as in European national parliaments are allocated their seats in accordance with their relationships to the political centre. It is worthy of note that the Christian Democrats sit in the centre of the European Parliament hemi-cycle. To their left are the Socialists and the Communists. To their right are the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Gaullist/Fianna Fail EPD group. The occupants of the centre have the best opportunity and the greatest duty to achieve the consensus which is essential to the operation of the Parliament and indeed to the success of all the institutions of the EEC.

At the heart of Christian Democratic philosophies is the recognition that the individual and the family, the natural units of society, cannot achieve their fullest potential without freedom. Combined with this approach is a conviction that a caring society is also necessary to give similarity of opportunity and equality of protection against life's hazards. In a caring society the fortunate accept the duty to help the less fortunate. Christian Democrats distrust socialist bureaucracy and nationalist divisiveness.

Europe and South America are the main centres of Christian-Democratic movements. This has arisen out of historical experience. Both regions have been imbued with Christianity for many generations. Both areas have also suffered because of man's departure from the teachings of the humble Christ. Modern Christian Democrats, while respecting as best they can in their private lives their religious obligations, accept the importance of separating in a contented pluralist society the respective functions of church and state. This attitude led the Christian Democratic parties of the European Communities to adopt as their collective title for the direct elections to the Parliament the name *European People's Party*. This emphasises that irrespective of nationality, creed or class all of us who live in Europe have a common interest.

All members from Ireland in the directly elected European Parliament will have an obligation to press Ireland's interests. This will be a priority of Fine Gael members. What is at issue apparently in the direct elections campaign is how that "Irish interest" can be best pursued. Fine Gael-Christian Democratic (EPP) candidates believe that we should seek Community solutions to our problems, if for no other reason than that comparatively poor Ireland could never match national aids with those which could be given by the richer states were Europe to return to the excessive nationalism of the nineteen thirties and other eras.

It seems that there will also be much argument about whether or not the new Parliament should have more power than the Assembly that is now on its dying legs. Christian Democrats and Fine Gael are in no doubts about this. There are three good reasons why a directly elected parliament should get more power. Firstly: European parliaments, including our own Oireachtas, have ceded power, indeed part of national sovereignty, to the EEC. What is at issue now is whether the power thus surrendered is to be exercised by bureaucrats or by parochially orientated Ministers from Governments which temporarily hold office. Secondly: Parliament to date has proved itself to be a friend of the poorer regions of the Community, including Ireland. In opposition to the Council of Ministers Parliament has invariably demanded much greater Regional and Social Funds. This is not surprising. In all democracies Parliaments tend to be more generous than Governments! As a nation that is a net gainer of any EEC financial arrangement Ireland has a vested interest in having a more powerful Parliament. Thirdly: The history of all parliamentary democracy is that the people's elected representatives have to wrest power from Kings or Governments before progress can be made. There is a moral here for the electors in next June's elections.

With only 15 out of the 410 members of the directly elected Parliament, Ireland's MEPs are going to have their work cut out for them. Some people mistakenly believe that it would be in Ireland's interests were her fifteen representatives to belong to the one group. The truth is that by having members in different groups

Ireland can hope to influence many more members of Parliament to take cognizance of Irish needs. During most of the life of the indirectly elected Parliament, the Christian Democrats have been the strongest group numerically: at all times because of their central position, they have been the most influential. A very good reason for voting in next June's elections for *Fine Gael-Christian Democrat – European People's Party!*

by Richie Ryan, T.D.

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