

Fine Gael
Priorities for Government
1992-1997



**LET'S BRING OUT
THE BEST
IN THE COUNTRY.**

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT
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Many people in Ireland have lost faith in politics and politicians. Huge problems face the country but politicians often seem to have other priorities. It's high time we all started to build a new future. A future we can be proud of.

Fianna Fail have been in office for the past six years. They have had their chance. They have left unemployment and interest rates at the highest level in our nations history.

It is time for a change.

We need a Government that will restore pride in our country, pride in ourselves and pride in our politicians for the way they confront the problems facing us. We need imagination in tackling those problems. We need to take charge of our future - now.

Fine Gael wants to do things in a new way. My Government will work together as a team, with common objectives, clear policies and strong leadership. I believe our first aim must be jobs for all our people. The next Government must change the system so that more Irish people can create jobs for themselves - and for others. The next Government must work to break the logjam in the Northern Ireland talks, through an understanding of the needs of both communities.

The next Government must have the policies, the vision and the talents to build pride into the country - now. I want to lead that next Government because Fine Gael has the necessary qualities. We know there are many outside the party who share our values and Fine Gael will seek their support.

Let's bring out the best in the Country!

LET US BRING OUT THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY

FINE GAEL'S PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENT 1992 - 1997

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BUILDING PRIDE IN OUR COUNTRY

In recent years, Irish people have taken immense pride in our international sporting and cultural achievements. But that's not enough. We also need to be proud of the way our country is run at home.

The events of 1987 and 1988 which led to the Beef Tribunal have damaged that pride. It now needs to be restored - fuelled by the confidence that we know what needs to be done, across a variety of vital areas.

We cannot allow things to drift along as they are. We must manage our own affairs.

We must restore trust in politics, build confidence, and bring out the best of the peoples' talents.

Together we can overcome the crippling and demoralizing problem of unemployment.

Irish people must take control in developing their own economy.

We must use our influence to get Europe to adopt the policies that will bring down interest rates and promote economic growth.

We must make our system of Government stable and accountable, with politicians who can be trusted, and we must manage our economy on the basis of fair competition - and not for the benefit of an inner circle.

Vulnerable members of our society must be protected from crime, be treated with dignity and equality by our social services, and be offered a chance to contribute to society to the utmost of their abilities.

The Irish Government must take a lead in bringing an end to the murder, the maiming and the political hopelessness in Northern Ireland by a policy of constructive dialogue on all sides.

Fine Gael's policies are designed to liberalize our society so that the talents of all our people get full expression. Policies in employment, education, housing, social security, health and social services have a greater impact on women's lives. We want women to play a more active role in shaping the future, in politics, in the workplace, in business, as well as in the family.

All Irish people must take back real control of their own affairs through the reform of the Dáil and through the devolution of real power to Regional and Local Authorities.

It's only when we come to grips with these problems that we can truly be proud of the way we manage our affairs.

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC STABILITY

Jobs will be top priority of the next Government. The first step towards creating a jobs economy is the achievement of economic stability. Fundamental to this objective in Ireland today is the establishment of an agreed budgetary programme.

Fine Gael is committed to agreeing in advance, and publishing, the parameters for each of the following five years, so that there will be a full acceptance and understanding of the limits within which choices have to be made. These parameters will be consistent with the disciplines of participation in the common European Currency, and will thus create the sense of confidence needed to bring down interest rates. They will require that the ratio of public debt to national income falls to 80% by 1997, and that the tax take as a proportion of national income will be reduced from its current level over the same period.

We wish to emphasise that the priorities in this document will themselves have to be achieved by the redistribution of resources within these agreed budgetary parameters.

Economic stability, backed by agreed budget parameters is one of the key components in creating confidence in our exchange rate within the EMS. Only this confidence, if maintained, will enable us to bring down the level of interest and mortgage rates in Ireland.

Confidence in the exchange rate will also be enhanced if we show that we have a plan to overcome its short term social consequences. That is why Fine Gael's comprehensive Job Protection Policy is vital.

In the meantime, to offset the cost to families of soaring mortgage rates, especially on new mortgages and young households, Fine Gael:

- (a) re-iterates its commitment to maintaining the system of tax relief for mortgage interest
- (b) proposes to introduce in the next budget a mechanism so that if interest rates rise, the maximum tax-allowable interest will also rise.

In addition, in Government Fine Gael will seek to lower interest rates further by means of concerted action within the E.C. Fine Gael, in Government, can do more than any other Irish political party to get Europe to adopt a coordinated strategy for economic growth. As part of Europe's Christian Democrat Group, a Fine Gael Taoiseach will be at the centre of Europe's inner policy making circle. Christian Democrat Prime Ministers meet well in advance of each E.C. summit to plan strategy. With good political leadership, Ireland need not be the victim of what happens in the world around us. A Fine Gael led Government will have the capacity to influence European policy, and it will have the courage and clarity of mind to use it.

Fine Gael, in Government, will also use this influence in Europe to ensure that, in the ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the desire of Irish farmers to expand production on a competitive basis is given maximum scope. Given that one quarter of total Irish employment relates to this sector and the paramount need for job preservation, Fine Gael will be publicising, during the campaign, detailed sectoral proposals for Agriculture and Food.

CREATING A JOBS ECONOMY

Fine Gael must lead the new Government after this General Election. We seek office because we believe we need to tackle the main problems affecting families in Ireland today.

The two most immediate problems are the lack of employment, and the appallingly high burden of mortgage and interest rates.

EMPLOYMENT

On employment, Fine Gael has drawn up a detailed employment policy entitled "*Towards the Jobs Economy*". This will provide us with a full agenda for action in Government. It outlines a comprehensive programme to reform the structure of the Irish economy. The concepts underlying it are simple.

These are:

1. To make creating a job for someone else the most profitable thing any Irish person can do with his or her money. It is the least profitable at the moment. Business people must also feel that investing, creating jobs, and making profits for themselves is an activity valued by the Community.
2. To make sure that every unemployed person who takes up a job gains financially from so doing. Many people, particularly those with family responsibilities find that they lose financially by taking a job.
3. To make sure that if somebody loses a job, the opportunity to take immediate retraining for a new job is available. Many redundant workers now gradually drift into longterm unemployment because of the long wait for a relevant retraining course.

These are the Fine Gael objectives, but we have no monopoly of ideas on this subject. We want all parties in the Dáil to contribute. We are determined to pool the best ideas in the country. We will set up a Jobs Forum in the Dáil, representative of all parties, in which our Cabinet Ministers will take a full part, and to which they will answer directly to questions, to generate further employment creating ideas.

But most importantly, we will immediately go ahead with our own comprehensive programme of action, set out in our document "*Towards The Jobs Economy*"

These are some of these key points:

1. We want to make it worthwhile to create a job by implementing the following measures
 - * Employers P.R.S.I. is a direct tax on each job created or maintained. We want to halve employers P.R.S.I. in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors. Halving employer P.R.S.I. would reduce the cost of providing or preserving a job by 6%.

This measure has two purposes. The first is to preserve jobs in indigenous and labour intensive industries. Many such jobs are threatened by the exchange rate situation. The second is to make a permanent downward shift in the general cost of creating or preserving a job. This is vital in a country with such huge unemployment. We want the help of the social partners in making this proposal work. We will call an emergency jobs summit of the social partners to discuss the implementation of this proposal, and to hear additional proposals from them on how to make job creation more financially attractive.

- * We want to give a real incentive to companies to provide jobs for young people. Thousands of jobs could be created for young people, if employers did not have to collect income tax from them. To bring about such job opportunities, Fine Gael will introduce an extra annual tax free allowance of £5,000 (or its equivalent) to every person up to the age of 23. This will apply in his or her first two years at work, or in self employment after having completed full time education. It will apply to those commencing work on or after 5th November 1992. This will make it very attractive to employers to offer young people job opportunities here in Ireland. It will reduce emigration. It will keep talent at home. It will give thousands of young people the first vital steps on the ladder to a successful career at work in Ireland.

- * We will introduce, on a phased basis, a tax break on labour intensive home delivered services, like child care, nursing care, and home repairs. Much such work needs to be done in peoples homes. Now it will be done. This will generate additional employment and help provide a widely required social service.

- * We will allow approved new businesses to defer profits tax for the first two years of operation without incurring interest. This will help new businesses over those difficult first years, when so many of them fail because of cash flow difficulties.

2. To make it worthwhile for every unemployed person to take a job Fine Gael will

- * introduce a working dividend, payable through the PAYE system, that will guarantee take home pay that is at least £25 per week over and above social welfare entitlements, to anyone working for more than 20 hours per week.

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- * make access to all means tested entitlements depend on a uniformly defined disposable income, regardless of source. All schemes will be redesigned to provide for graduated tapering of entitlements to benefit, rather than a sudden cut off on passing a particular threshold. At the moment, means tests are so complex and contradictory that working harder can often mean becoming worse off. This Fine Gael proposal is a major step towards integrating the tax and social welfare codes.

3. To make sure that those who lose their jobs do not drift into longterm unemployment, Fine Gael will

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- * give redundant employees an entitlement to a personal training fund, which they themselves can use to buy immediate retraining, rather than have to wait a year or more for a FÁS course. Redundant workers will be free to shop around for the best course, in the public or private sector, rather than just accept what FÁS has on offer. This will be additional to statutory redundancy entitlements.

- * establish within FÁS an Integrated Opportunity Programme where workers who are out of work for six months or more will be offered a choice between return to education, retraining, subsidized employment, or work programmes - on a personalized basis. The purpose will be to keep people active, and prevent the demoralization of longterm unemployment.

The action to be taken under the three headings above will be part of an integrated programme, across all Government Departments. This programme will be designed to shift the balance of the Irish social system in favour of the creation of jobs. This programme will be coordinated by the Taoiseach, and the agenda of every Cabinet meeting will have a primary focus on jobs.

Administrative barriers and Departmental demarcation will be set aside in a concentrated action programme.

To drive this forward, Fine Gael will establish an employment Secretariat to assist the Taoiseach in maintaining this overriding governmental focus on jobs. Other priorities will not be allowed to deflect the cabinet from the central task of solving the unemployment problem.

INTEGRITY AND POLITICAL STABILITY

Fine Gael wants Irish people to be proud of their politicians, to see them as servants of the public, working to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in all democracies. We will create the basis for trust in politics by the appointment of a Parliamentary Ethics Commission comprising the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Ombudsman and a Judge of the High Court.

This Commission will supervise compliance with a well understood code of practice for elected representatives, which will be backed by appropriate disclosure of politicians' interests.

Confidence in Government, and in the economic policy, will also be restored by ensuring that the Cabinet itself is seen to be subjected, on a daily basis, to effective scrutiny in the Dáil. Present procedures prevent this: Fine Gael will introduce a comprehensive Committee system to submit every Government proposal to line by line examination. This new Committee system will also vastly increase the legislative workrate of the Dáil and will ensure value for money in the spending of all taxpayers' money.

Fine Gael will change the current rules governing Question Time and Dáil debates, so that all TDs can be questioned by their colleagues on the points they are making.

Fine Gael will restore confidence in public administration by devolving power to the level closest to the people affected. Ireland has one of the most centralized systems of Government in Europe. Fine Gael will establish a network of Regional Development Authorities, similar to SFADCO, for each Region. These Authorities will have to frame an effective local jobs strategy, operate a regional venture fund, and tackle their regions' infrastructural priorities. They will be allowed direct access to Europe for funds within an overall national framework. One of the new Regional Authorities will be a Greater Dublin Authority that will ensure that

roads, water, transport and waste management services are properly planned for the capital city. All Regional Authorities will be fully accountable to local councillors by a system of regular public hearings.

Fine Gael will restore political stability to Ireland by guaranteeing that a solid framework will be agreed in advance by those forming the next Government. We have done the preparatory work, and will take the steps necessary to ensure that this framework is durable. As stated earlier, it will contain clear parameters for budgetary policy. Equally important, one of the provisions in this framework will be a method of dispute minimisation, including regular joint party meetings to increase mutual understanding. Mutual understanding and respect are the only basis on which there can be stability in any Government. Fine Gael will ensure that the next Government is built on that foundation.

By restoring political stability, Fine Gael will underpin the conditions for restored economic confidence, and reduced interest rates.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN IRELAND

Fine Gael will restore the pride of Irish people in their own country. Every Irish person, of whatever tradition or allegiance, feels diminished by our collective failure over the past twenty years to end violence, and achieve reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and between the two traditions on the island. The employment prospects of the entire island suffer from this failure.

3,000 people have been killed, and thousands more maimed for life. It has been estimated that 75,000 extra jobs could be created if the violence came to an end and we could develop the economy of the whole island together.

This will only be achieved if politicians on both sides of the border are prepared to take risks for peace.

The three strands of talks, initiated by Secretary of State Brooke, offer a framework within which a solution can be found. But they are no more than a framework. Unless some party in these talks is prepared to take an initiative, the process could drag on inconclusively.

Fine Gael will seek an early resumption of these talks. When they recommence, we will indicate a positive willingness to recommend changes to the present wording of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution as part of an overall settlement or agreement. Fine Gael notes that these talks are taking place on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. There is already a sufficient guarantee that the ultimate settlement will include a strong recognition of both nationalist and unionist identities, and that it will do so in a form that can be endorsed by all the people on this island.

We want to move quickly in that direction.

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CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE IN OUR SOCIETY

Many Irish people feel excluded from the mainstream of life. They see themselves as victims of decisions taken by others, rather than as fully participating members of our society.

The elderly, people with a disability and those who care for them, victims of crime, those on public waiting lists for health care, and those who must wait in line for social welfare payments all feel, in different ways, that they do not count in modern Ireland.

Fine Gael is determined to include everybody in the mainstream of Irish life, as dignified and respected members of a caring society. We start from the basic Christian Democrat principle, to which all the parties in our European movement are committed, - *that every person counts*.

To give effect to the principle that *every person counts*, Fine Gael will:

- * introduce a Charter for Carers which will give clearly stated rights to support services for those looking after the elderly and infirm in their own homes. Eligibility for the carers allowance will also be liberalized, by having more generous means test for applicants.
- * Introduce a Patients Guarantee Fund to cut waiting times for basic treatments. This fund will be made up 50/50 by the National Lottery and the Department of Health. The Patients Guarantee Fund will be separated from other elements of the Health budget. It will go exclusively for the reduction of waiting lists, and will not be absorbed in administration. It will be given top priority for Lottery funding and will thus allow a rapid reduction of waiting lists.

W * Give those claiming Welfare payments of any kind a right to privacy when communicating personal details at public offices. There will also be a code of conduct for medical referees in Disability Benefit cases, and a guarantee that appeals will be heard and determined within 8 weeks. There will be a more transparent and uniform system of decision making by Community Welfare Officers.

W * Families will be kept together. We will allow social welfare "child" allowance to be paid to any dependent in full time education regardless of age. We will discontinue the practice of reducing the Unemployment Assistance of applicants over 25 years of age, who are living with parents who have an income.

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— * Victims of crime will be given greater compensation by granting the Courts wide powers to demand payments to the victim by the convicted person. This will be achieved by giving the court powers to confiscate the property or attach the income of the convicted person and use it to directly compensate the victim. The criminal law will be radically overhauled to ensure that the work of the Gardai is properly backed by the Courts system. People must be allowed to feel safe in their homes and on the streets and we will be publishing further proposals on crime in the course of this campaign.

E * Fine Gael is very conscious of the fact that many talented young people lose a chance of third level education because this burden is too heavy on their families. This is particularly so where more than one child qualifies for college. To alleviate this, we will allow income tax relief on the full college fee, and on a sum in respect of maintenance equal to the maximum level of the relevant Higher Education Grant awarded to students eligible for such grants. Pro-rata arrangements will be made for students on reduced grants. The relief will apply to new entrants to third level colleges in 1993 and subsequent years. New entrants from that year will not be eligible for

tax relief on covenants. Neither will students who are awarded full Higher Education Grants. Tax relief will continue to apply to covenants drawn up to the benefit of existing students.