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Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Sean F. Lemass, at  
Annual Dinner of Cumann Seosamh Hudson Fianna  
Fáil, Ross's Hotel, Dunlaoghaire, Tuesday, the  
26th January, 1965.

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The characteristics of Fianna Fáil are those of a national movement rather than of a political party. It draws its membership from people who are dedicated to the long-term objectives of national effort rather than those attracted by normal day-to-day political party work. Political work has of course a very necessary place in Fianna Fáil activities, but our plans and measures are prepared to serve a comprehensive national policy, and are never conceived as short-term expedients to attract political support. Fianna Fáil has, since its inception, shown a remarkable consistency of national purpose, which is the true explanation of the position which it has retained in the nation's public life.

Nobody could think of Fianna Fáil ever contemplating the sacrificing of any one of its basic national aims for reasons of political expediency. Expediency is never entirely absent from political activity but with us it is related only to such matters as the presentation and timing of policy decisions. Our aims are not, and never will be, for sale in any political bargain.

We have, for example, been warned on various occasions that our policy for the restoration of the Irish language could turn away the political support of many who might otherwise be attracted by our economic and social policies. There may indeed, in the past, have been some evidence that this was so. We would not abandon or modify our policy for the restoration of Irish for this reason. If it should happen that any extension of this attitude should offer danger to our political majority, then we would judge that we had a task of education and enlightenment to complete, and certainly not a situation calling for any lowering of our aim.

So far as the language is concerned, all the decisions required for the fulfilment of our targets for the next ten years have been taken, although in respect of some of them detailed plans for their application have yet to be completed. There are some who have commented on the manner in which these decisions have been expressed, but nobody as yet has, so far as I am aware, suggested that in any important respect they were wrong decisions.

Any comprehensive policy, such as that now presented for the restoration of the Irish language, must in some degree be flexible in its application although constant in its purpose. When the Consultative Council, on which we have decided, is set up and functioning, the means will exist by which the views of a representative body can be brought effectively to bear on the detailed development of national policy in this matter. This is the normal democratic method of working in which we believe and which we try to operate in all sectors. The new phase of the campaign for the language will begin when this Council has commenced to function.

There are, of course, a few people who are so concentrated on this one national aim that they urge compulsions of the most rigorous kind for its achievement, and appear willing to



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sacrifice democratic freedom and even some fundamental human rights to this end. We do not share this attitude, and indeed it is our conviction that, while strong Government leadership is essential, the restoration of the Irish language requires, more than anything else, the building up of enthusiasm for its wider use, and reliance in the main on patriotism and voluntary effort.

There is nobody now, under 40 years, who has not had an opportunity of learning Irish and few who could not use it, to some extent, if encouraged to make the effort. There is much more Irish in the country than some people believe. What we need is a climate of public opinion in which people will be proud of their knowledge of Irish, and which will encourage everyone to use it freely, even if ungrammatically, without being considered either an enthusiast or a crank.

For our part we have made our plans and we intend now to operate them, as they have been defined, with determination and confidence in the outcome. I doubt if any other political party will contend that, so far as Government action in this regard is concerned, a more comprehensive programme than we have proposed is feasible. It is noteworthy that none of the opposition parties has yet made any comment on the White Paper. It would be a very useful contribution to progress to have their positive endorsement and active support.

I must refer also to the recent meeting in Belfast. It seems that Captain O'Neill has considered it desirable to restate his position. I do not think there has been any misunderstanding of our position, but it may be advisable to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding arising. Our aim is to reunite the Irish people in one nation and one State. We recognise all the realities of the situation. Recognising realities has never been a difficulty with us. Because of the realities we have envisaged the possibility of an arrangement under which the Northern Government and parliament would be maintained with their existing powers. Our method is to strive to remove the barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice which have divided the Irish people in the past, to build brotherly regard and respect for the national heritage, and to promote agreements which will result in practical benefits while helping to emphasise the basic similarity of the problems and possibilities in all areas of Ireland, and the advantages of working in unison. This will require patience and perseverance but we can go on in the knowledge that all the forces which are now operating so strongly throughout the world to shape the future are working also to our advantage in this national purpose.

In this connection I wish to direct attention to and express appreciation of the statement, made last week by the then British Foreign Secretary, that Britain has no longer any desire to intervene in Irish affairs, that the British Government is not maintaining Partition and that this problem is one to be settled in Ireland by Irishmen. When the significance of this statement is more widely understood, it is certain to have a profound long-term influence on public thinking in both North and South. Because this declaration has been made, many old arguments and attitudes will now be seen to have become irrelevant. It helps us all to visualise our national problem far more clearly and will assist us in deciding on the course to the realisation of our aim of



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reuniting the whole Irish family in harmony and agreement.

Recently a few people allowed themselves to get agitated about a private visit to Ireland of a member of the British Royal Family, who came here to meet her "in-laws". I can think of nothing which would mark more strikingly the great changes of our times or the strengthening of our republican self-respect than to see a member of the British Royal Family coming to Ireland on a private visit, travelling freely around Ireland, without anybody paying any special attention.

We have always understood that our national aims in every sphere depend for their full realisation on the success of our economic development programme. Only an economically strong Ireland can accomplish all that we desire for her. I have on many occasions expressed my personal view that the main national duty falling on this generation of Irishmen is to consolidate and make secure the economic foundations on which the country's future must rest. If we should neglect or fail in this task, later generations could not easily remedy the consequences of our default. As we succeed, all our highest hopes will become very much easier of achievement.

Because we are a national movement, we are primarily concerned with people - with the welfare of all the individual families which make up our national community. We believe in the principle of community action, organised by the Government, to assist those families who, for no fault of their own, are unable by their own work and industry to secure reasonable living standards. We know that our power to do this is related directly to the success of our economic development policy.

Because of the additional resources won for the nation by economic expansion we have since 1957 been able to allocate funds more generously to all the social purposes which form an integral part of our national policy. Almost £10 million more is now available for Social Welfare, £14 million more for Education, £5½ million more for the improvement of Health services and so on. All this higher expenditure has not yet given us, however, the social structure we desire and intend ultimately to build, and there is a great deal more to be done.

In the small farm areas, where the traditional way of life, and traditional attitudes to life, are giving way before modern needs and expectations, there are tremendous tasks yet to be faced to supplement what has already been attempted. Our Social Welfare system, costly as it is by our standards, is still inadequate and it would be our wish that new resources created by economic progress should be devoted, in increasing measure, to the easement, of all social problems. We have enormous and costly responsibilities to meet in the extension of our educational system at all levels to make them fully suitable to the requirements of the 1970's. We have still much to do in completing the great housing drive which Fianna Fáil initiated and to bring the amenities of modern living, including piped water as well as electricity, to every home. The road ahead stretches far and we cannot expect to reach its end in one year or two but there can be no question about our determination to press



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along at the maximum possible speed, or about our final objectives in all these matters,

Our capacity to achieve our national aims in all respects depends of course on our retention of public support, which can fluctuate under the impact of conditions or be influenced by the often unscrupulous propaganda of our political opponents. Our weapon to rally public support for our policy is the Fianna Fáil organisation. The future of Ireland depends almost entirely on the strength and vitality of our movement, and on the constancy of its members. By far the most important contribution to the nation's welfare and progress during this crucial period is being made by those who have devoted themselves to sustaining the strength and the efficiency of Fianna Fáil. Without them we could achieve little - with them there is no national purpose in which we will not succeed. When the history of these times comes to be written, the discerning historian will see in the Fianna Fáil organisation the real explanation of our accomplishments, and the justification for our confidence that, year in and year out, national progress will go on, with each year recording new gains, and each succeeding generation better equipped with resources and knowledge to lead the country to ever greater achievements.