



# The Just Republic

BUILDING A CITIZEN FOCUSED REPUBLIC IN IRELAND



# THE COLLINS INSTITUTE

*"Before we were a Tiger we were a Republic." <sup>1</sup>*

The Collins Institute is a new policy think tank which will examine the long-term challenges facing Ireland and suggest possible policy responses. In particular, it will look at the way in which a Just Republic might be established in Ireland as we approach 2022, the centenary of both the founding of the Irish state and the death of Michael Collins.<sup>2</sup> By Just Republic we mean a republic which empowers its citizens so that they have both the supports and capabilities they require to reach their full potential. In seeking to articulate a vision of such a republic the Institute has drawn inspiration from Declan Costello's/Fine Gael's Just Society document of the mid 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

The Institute's name recognises the crucial role which Michael Collins played in the creation of the Irish state and the special position he occupies in the affections of many citizens today. Collins has been variously described as "the father of Irish democracy";<sup>4</sup> an "ideas person, as much as a soldier and a political leader";<sup>5</sup> and a man who "has given us a compelling inheritance of politics and leadership as they should be."<sup>6</sup> His pragmatic idealism, sense of proportionality and his focus on long-term goals are a continuing source of inspiration.

The Collins Institute is a Fine Gael initiative. It is supported by, but will operate independently of, the party. The goal over the longer term is to establish it as a stand-alone organisation. Its work will be overseen by a Director, Dr Sean Faughnan,<sup>7</sup> and a Board which is chaired by Marion Coy.<sup>8</sup> A key objective of the Institute is to work closely with like-minded institutes and think tanks in other countries, particularly those which are associated with the Martens Centre - the think tank of the European People's Party. All papers published by the Institute are intended for discussion purposes only and do not represent Fine Gael policy.

## TOWARDS A JUST REPUBLIC

*"A Republic – Res Publica – is always and must be always about the public and their affairs" <sup>9</sup>*

The Collins Institute will examine how a Just Republic might be established in Ireland where individuals are viewed principally and primarily as citizens in a society rather than as consumers in a market or as clients of the state. We want to see a republic in which the active involvement of citizens in decision-making is a key goal of public policy. A republic in which both rights and responsibilities are examined concurrently.

The Institute will, as a starting point, explore four key components of a modern republic:

**1. Powerful Citizens:** The goal of public policy should be to create Powerful Citizens - fully empowered individuals who, with the right supports and capabilities, can exercise as much control over their own lives as possible. To this end the Institute will seek to identify the mechanisms required to enable a significant devolution of power both within the state itself and from the state to the citizen, their families and their communities. The Institute is mindful of the changes in mindset that must accompany any changes in process.

**2. A Social Market:** The Collins Institute will examine a range of policy options which will help deliver both full employment and a more just society in Ireland. The Social Market proposition does not seek to prioritise the private over the public or, indeed, the public over the social. Rather, it looks to promote pluralism and diversity over monopoly and uniformity. In all of this we will explore how government can play a vital role in ensuring that markets work for the benefit of society as a whole.

**3. An Enabling State:** The Collins Institute will examine a range of policy options which will increase overall social productivity. In keeping with the idea of a citizen focused republic, we will propose policies which will help more

people reach their potential through their active involvement rather than through any imposed solutions. The role of the state in safeguarding the interests and needs of the vulnerable will always form a vital part of our analysis.

**4. Strong Communities:** The Institute will examine and report on different ways to support the growth of a wide range of strong communities and organisations across Ireland. In doing so the Institute will take into account the different challenges facing urban and rural communities and the diversity of contemporary family structures.

### Key Principles

The Collins Institute has identified six key principles which we believe can help support the creation of a Just Republic in Ireland. Our starting point is Fine Gael's Just Society document and the three fundamental principles which it promoted:

- Freedom of the Individual;
- Equality of Opportunity; and
- Social Solidarity.

The Just Society insisted on the vital importance of both "freedom and equality" in creating a fairer and more dynamic Ireland. It saw no inherent "conflict between the public and private sectors, for both can stimulate and aid the other." The title of the document also emphasised the importance it attached to the role of solidarity in a modern democracy.

In examining the possible architecture of a Just Republic the Institute will also focus on three additional principles:

- Accountability;
- Sustainability; and
- Subsidiarity.

## IRELAND'S RECOVERY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The collapse of the Celtic Tiger brought Ireland to the very edge of bankruptcy and placed huge financial, social and emotional strains on its citizens. It also helped create a sense of powerlessness for many individuals. People now want a different future and want to ensure that they can have real and sustained influence on its development. Both Labour and Fine Gael, as the parties of Government, have introduced important reforms in very difficult circumstances and have indicated their intention to continue this work. The Institute will seek to build on progress to date.

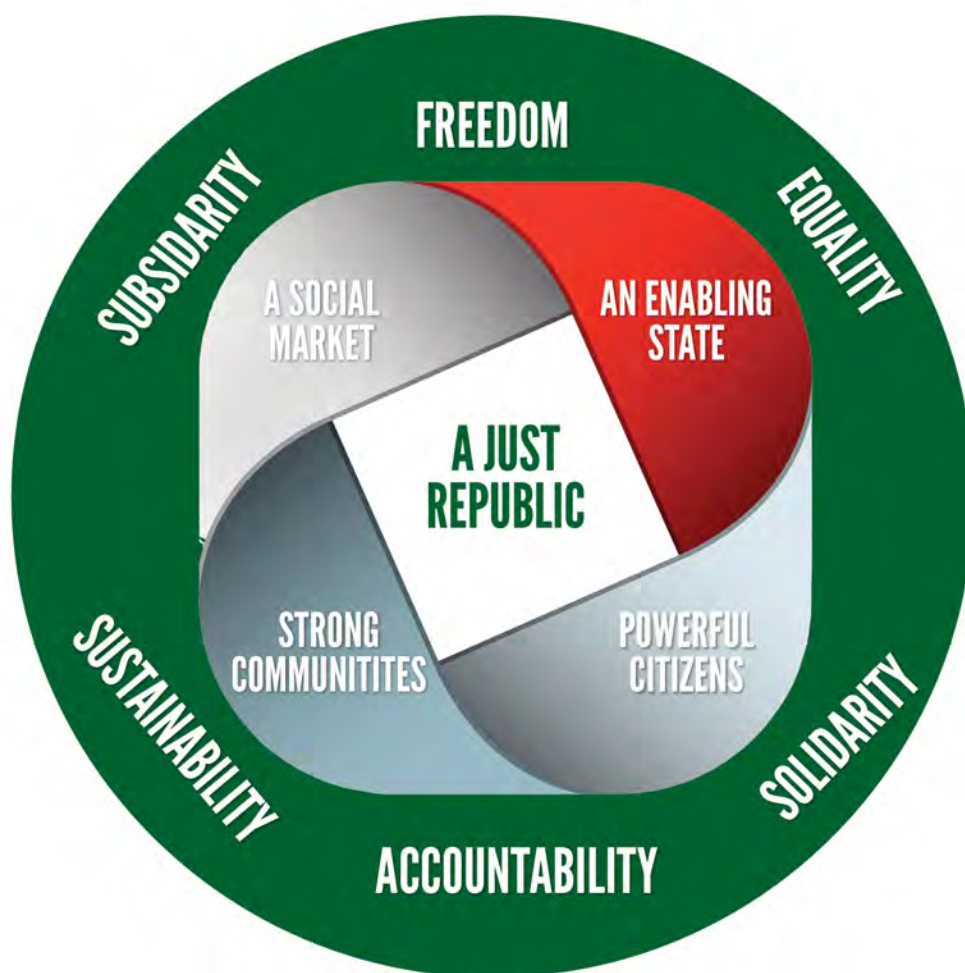
Ireland's economy is now recovering much faster than most analysts had expected. The good news on the economy makes it even more important that there is now a vigorous examination of the policy options which should be adopted over the next five to ten years. Falling unemployment, in particular, will release extra resources which can be used to reduce the tax burden, fund targeted investment in key services and support further reform of the state. The opening up of Irish society and its economy in the 1960s, driven by the work of individuals such as Sean Lemass<sup>10</sup> and T.K. Whitaker,<sup>11</sup> has shown what can be accomplished when there is a clear long-term vision directing public policy.

The challenges confronting Ireland cover a very wide spectrum of issues, ranging from the creation of an environment which will promote indigenous business growth to the impact of globalisation on our society and economy; from the challenges of promoting citizen engagement to the imperatives associated with the creation of personalised health and



education systems; and from the issue of inter-generational inequality to the creation of social and cultural cohesion. This is not intended to be a comprehensive catalogue; rather the issues selected here form part of a much more complex and interwoven landscape. There will - and should - be vigorous debate about how best to tackle these and other challenges.

As part of its contribution to this debate the Institute will publish, over the next 12-18 months, a series of discussion papers examining how the interests of the citizen can best be protected and promoted in a Just Republic.



(Endnotes)

- 1 Enda Kenny (the leader of Fine Gael and current Taoiseach or Prime Minister), MacGill summer school, 2009.
- 2 Irish revolutionary leader and Minister for Finance, who became Chairman of the Provisional Government and Commander-in-Chief of the National Army in 1922.
- 3 2014 is the fiftieth anniversary of the drafting of a set of policies which were published subsequently as Fine Gael's 1965 manifesto, *Towards a Just Society*. The Collins Institute will host a conference in 2015 on the theme of "From the Just Society to the Just Republic".
- 4 Michael Noonan, Minister for Finance.
- 5 Simon Coveney, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Minister for Defence.
- 6 Enda Kenny.
- 7 Sean Faughnan was an advisor to Enda Kenny from late 2008 to early 2011. He was also a special adviser in the Department of Health for a short period before returning to work in Fine Gael in early 2012.
- 8 Former President of GMIT (Galway - Mayo Institute of Technology).
- 9 Enda Kenny speech at MacGill summer school, 2012.
- 10 Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, 1959-1966.
- 11 Former Secretary General of the Department of Finance and author of the First Programme for Economic Expansion in 1958.



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