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**RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

Paper by

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The Republic of Ireland, unlike most other member states of the European Union has never had a radical right candidate in Parliament. Furthermore, the Republic of Ireland has been badly hit by the economic crisis. Therefore it is necessary to look more closely at the severity of the crisis in Ireland and its consequences that, in Europe, seem to have favoured a rise in popularity of radical right parties.

The Republic of Ireland gained its independence in 1921 and has been a member of the EU since 1973. In Ireland, the 90s represented a period of unprecedented growth. The increase of prosperity was such that it was not rare to talk of the “Celtic Tiger” in reference to Ireland. However, in 2009 the Irish economy suffered one the deepest recessions of the Euro Zone, suffering a slash of 10%. Finally, after weeks of speculation, Ireland accepted an international bailout of 85 billion Euros from the IMF and the EU in November 2010.

In this dissertation it will be demonstrated that even though Sinn Féin situates itself on the extreme left of the political spectrum it is not irrelevant to analyse the added support that this party gained and might still gain as the economic and political crisis unfolds. Furthermore the uniqueness that the Irish party system presents means that it is also necessary to evaluate the popularity of political parties that are not radical or extremist in the slightest, primarily Fianna Fail which was until recently the governing party.

How can one explain the absence of a radical right party in Irish Politics? (I) Are the conditions that seem to favour the materialization and success of such a party not present? In the dissertation it will be argued that this is in fact not the case. It is imperative that this issue be addressed because a renewal of success of radical right parties has been witnessed elsewhere so Ireland might not be immune to a similar phenomenon. Furthermore the recent economic crisis has given rise to an acute political crisis. After having established the main features of the political crisis and explained how an economic crisis degenerates into a political crisis it will be important to ask ourselves what the future holds for Irish Politics (II).

When looking at the absence of a radical right party in Irish Politics it will be argued that the political and social structure present in Ireland seems to favour the presence and eventual success of a radical right party. From the presence of a post-industrial society, to a recent increase in immigration, to the dynamics of party competition, Ireland seems to be a fertile breeding ground for the success of such ideologies. It will be shown that one could suggest that the uniqueness of the Irish party system and of Irish society and its values could partially explain the absence of radical right parties. Next the idea that potential supporters of such ideologies have a tendency to vote Sinn Féin will be put forward, since the profile of Sinn Féin supporters can be compared to that of those who vote for radical right candidates in other countries. Finally, in reference to Irish national mythology and the history of

nationalism in Ireland it will be shown that Sinn Féin, because of its history must be pro immigrants' rights so as to present a coherent nationalist ideology and not harm its image.

When looking at the severity of the economic crisis and its social and political repercussions the idea that this had led to a complete upheaval of the previous state of affairs will be addressed first. Not only has the "Celtic Tiger" phenomenon come to an end but the usual dynamics of party competition has as well, in the sense that the "two party" system seems to be coming to a close. For as long as most people can remember Irish politics has been dominated by two centre-right parties: Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. With Fianna Fail's rapid loss in popularity this important trait of Irish Politics will soon be a thing of the past. Next, it will be demonstrated that all the speculation that surrounded Ireland's acceptance of the IMF/EU bailout and the Irish population's annoyance of the way the government managed the situation was a catalyst in the sense that it made all underlying tensions come to the surface, taking sometimes violent forms. Finally it will be shown that an economic crisis has given rise to a political crisis with the opposition demanding anticipated elections which finally took place end of February 2011. Lastly opinion polls running up to the elections showed quite clearly that Fianna Fail's loss in popularity was such that the Irish Independent was not out of context when it made "Fianna Fail, the end of history" the title of one of its sections covering the political crisis. Also it is evident that amongst other parties the Sinn Féin benefited from this loss in popularity. An opinion poll from December 2010 showed that in four months (from September to December) the Sinn Féin saw its popularity more than double, going from 7% to 15%! Although the Sinn Féin did not go on to come first, second or even third in the elections it did win 14 out of 166 seats in the Dáil which is 10 more than it won in the previous elections.

The renewed success of radical right parties in Europe, especially those known for their violent rhetoric and racist views has led to a great deal of speculation and concern in the field of political science. The hypothesis that such a party has not managed to implant itself in the Republic of Ireland because of the fact that Irish nationalism constitutes a constant and unfinished struggle seems plausible. As for the economic crisis and its consequences there is no doubt that they will significantly affect the dynamics of Irish politics and party competition. The results of the recent general elections show that they have as a matter of fact done so already. However when taking into account Ireland's political and historical heritage, the specificity of party competition in Ireland and traditional voting behaviours, the emergence and success of a radical right party does not seem very likely.

Annexe:

General Election (25/02/2011): Details of elections for 31st Dáil

Summary of Seats Won (Change since previous election)

FF	FG	Lab	SF	Soc	PBP	Others	Total
20	76	37	14	2	2	15	166
-58	+25	+17	+10	+2	+2	+9	166

<http://electionsireland.org/>