

**Politico-Administrative Relations under Coalition Government : The  
Case of Ireland**

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## **1. The administrative, constitutional and political framework of Irish Government**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Ireland is an ‘island behind an island’ and is also one that is composed of two jurisdictions, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This paper will concentrate on the impact of coalition government on public administration in the Republic of Ireland (from herein referred to as Ireland), and in particular from the period 1989-2002 whereby all governments have been coalitions. The succession of coalition governments is a recent, but likely to be persistent, feature of the Irish political landscape.

The proliferation of coalition governments has required structures to facilitate politico-administrative relations and coordination. However, as Murray and Teahon, 1997 argue: the greatest impact upon the Irish politico-administrative framework following independence has stemmed from 3 key factors :

- Accession to the European Union
- Irish social partnership<sup>1</sup>
- Strategic management for delivering better government<sup>2</sup>

### **1.2 The development of the Irish administrative system**

Political independence did not precipitate administrative problems as Ireland inherited a well-established structure based on the British model – a parliamentary democracy with a cabinet system of Government, and a central structure of ministerial Departments which, along with the Local Government system absorbed almost all public business. Approximately twenty-one thousand civil servants, many of whom were senior officials, transferred their services to the new state. These officials - steeped in the British tradition - did not deem it necessary for the state to create new administrative machinery. Thus, despite a break in constitutional theory, the political institutions were built on pre 1922 roots; with the new Irish Government centralising virtually all aspects of central administration into Government Departments under Cabinet Ministers. At the political level Ministers wanted clean and economical administration not ‘jobs for the boys’ and this was reflected in the rapid creation of the Civil Service Commission, 1923 (O’Halpin,

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<sup>1</sup> A system of social partnership involving trade unions, business and employer organisations, agricultural interests, and most recently community and voluntary groups, now exists in Ireland. The longer term thinking inherent in this process has been published in a series of three year programmes since 1987. The development of social partnership, particularly since 1987, has resulted in a number of processes and mechanisms being established which contribute centrally to policy making and implementation process.

<sup>2</sup> Under the Strategic Management Initiative launched in 1994 and the White Paper Delivering Better Government, 1996. The previously mentioned Public Sector Management Act 1997 is a key piece of legislation that is part of this wider process of civil service reform.

1991:288). The 1930s witnessed the introduction of the Constitution 'Bunreacht na hEireann', 1937 which, though republican in nature, ironically tended to enshrine the British system of Government. Therefore, in the wake of independence, the response of the new Irish administration was largely of one that had wholly absorbed the organisation and principles of its predecessor.<sup>3</sup>

A second distinctive feature of the Irish system was embodied in the Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924, providing the legal basis for the civil service. This is the principle that the Minister, and the Minister alone, is responsible for the acts of his Department. The 1924 Act established eleven Departments and indicated the work allocated to each. The Minister in charge of each Department was designated a 'corporation sole', whereby the Minister would essentially be the Department and the acts of the Department would be the acts of the Minister for which he would be responsible to the Dáil (lower house). Consequently, a considerable quantity of detailed business came to be discharged at high levels of the administration. Therefore, senior officials, instead of being preoccupied with broad questions of policy, became immersed with matters of detail. Under the general programme of public administration reform the Public Service Management Act 1997 has amended this and sets out a formal structure for assigning authority and accountability within the civil service. Amongst other issues, it aims to clarify the roles and duties of individual civil servants. Under the Act, each department and office must publish a strategy statement every three years, or within six months of the appointment of a new minister. The then Taoiseach John Bruton (Fine Gael), when introducing the bill, spoke of Ministers 'releasing their grip' on some of the levers of power. Yet the clientelist nature of much of Irish politics puts significant pressure on politicians to involve themselves in detailed matters. Also the distinction between Ministers being responsible for policy and outcomes and civil servants being responsible for policy advice and outputs, while attractive, may in practice pose difficulties. In reality, setting the boundaries as to who does what is unlikely to be crystal clear.

### **1.3 Party system**

The party system in Ireland is different to most European party systems because it is not based, as much as elsewhere, on social cleavages. There is a distinct lack of significant ideological divisions between the main parties as this was weak at the formation of the system. The division of the country into two separate states had largely removed the main cultural cleavage between the Protestant Unionists and the Catholic Nationalists. The major issue after independence in 1922 was the Anglo-Irish Treaty and it was precisely the 'national question' that largely produced and formed the basis of appeal and commitment to political parties. In contemporary times, civil war politics has faded into the background and alignment to political parties is now more so on the basis of loyalty and economic factors. The current leaders of the main parties have no family connections with civil war leaders. The principal Irish political parties are Fianna Fáil (soldiers of Ireland) [FF] and Fine Gael (Irish race) [FG] which are centre right parties.

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<sup>3</sup> The main feature of Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937 (replacing the Constitution of the Irish Free State in 1922) include the Republican and unitary nature of the state, separation of powers, a bicameral (two chamber) legislature – the Oireachtas is composed of an upper house Seanad Éireann (the Senate whose role in the legislative process is quite restricted) and a lower house, Dáil Eireann, together with a President, a government and independent court system. The principal architect of the constitution was Eamon de Valera, the leader of the main political party, Fianna Fáil.

These two major parties originated from a split in the original Sinn Féin (ourselves alone) party, whose success in the 1918 Westminster election led to Irish independence in 1922. Other parties include the Labour party, the Progressive Democrats [PDs], Sinn Féin [SF] and the Green Party. In respect to the Labour party, it may be noted that Ireland records a low level of electoral support for left wing politics. Other interpretations include that by and large the main Irish parties tend to be run on personalist lines, which has meant that internal disputes have focused largely on personalities rather than on policies. Divisions exist within each of the four main Irish parties, though these have rarely impaired their ability to act as unitary actors when it comes to coalition bargaining (Laver and Schofield, 1990:228).

Some features of the key political parties will be described below. The principal political parties are Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael represent farmers. As well as the gulf of policy between them on the national question, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil were therefore initially separated by intellectual / social barriers, urban and rural. Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are to the right of center.

### **FIANNA FÁIL**

In the fifty years following the establishment of the state Fianna Fáil evolved into the biggest 'catch-all' party drawing its support from all sections of society. It was the dominant force in Irish politics until 1989 when the party had to enter coalition for the first time. The party was founded in 1926 by the anti treaty leader Eamon de Valera who resigned from Sinn Fein after the signing of the treaty. Fianna Fáil claimed support from the less well off sections of society and were traditionally supported by landless farmers and farm labourers who had given their support to the anti-treaty side. Charlie McCreevy, the current Minister for Finance once commented that, 'In our house, every great Irishman, including St. Patrick, was automatically assumed to be an early Fianna Fáiler' (Irish Independent, 14th October 1990).

*The Fianna Fáil leaders who participated in coalition government are Charles Haughey (1989-1992), Albert Reynolds (1992-1994) and Bertie Ahern (1997-2002)*

### **FINE GAEL**

The Fine Gael party has its origins in the other side of the divide on the national question – support for the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty preserved trade links with Britain and served to bolster larger business owners, merchants and big farmers's economic position and political position within Ireland. They supported Cumann na nGaedheal, which, in government between 1923 and 1932 followed a policy of free trade intended to protect Ireland's markets in the UK. In 1933 the National Centre Party, Cumann na nGaedheal and the National Guard merged to form Fine Gael. The National Guard, commonly known as the 'Blueshirts', had been formed as an unofficial defence force for Cumann na nGaedheal which felt threatened by the growing support for Fianna Fáil.

*The Fine Gael leaders who participated in coalition government are Liam Cosgrave (1973-1977), Garret Fitzgerald (1981-1982 and 1983-1987), John Bruton (1994-1997)*

### **LABOUR (INCLUDING DEMOCRATIC LEFT)**

The Irish Labour Party is the oldest party presently operating in the Republic of Ireland, having been formed as a wing of the trade union movement during the First World War (Collins and Cradden, 2001: 20). The party predated independence and was established in 1912. Its success with voters has been intermittent, with its greatest achievement being the general election of November 1992. In the cities where it would be expected that Labour would do well the Labour Party was almost completely outflanked by Fianna Fáil for many years. Fianna Fáil's superior grass roots organisation and its popular socio-economic policies brought it the support of the majority of the urban working class, which left Labour on the margins. Like the two biggest parties the Democratic Left's origin was bound up with the 'national question'. At the outbreak of severe troubles in the North in 1969, the IRA which had been simmering for years, broke into two - the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA. The former was socialist/revolutionary. A year later the political wing of the IRA - Sinn Fein - followed suit and a party known as Official Sinn Fein emerged. By 1977 the name had been changed to Sinn Fein the Workers Party. By this time the depth of hostility between the old Sinn Fein Party and this more communist oriented group was obvious. In 1992, after a bitter but democratically fought battle for control of the party, there was yet another split and the Democratic Left was born. Following the poor electoral showing in the 1997 general election, the Democratic Left merged with Labour to form one Labour Party serving as the platform for politics left of the center.

*The Labour leaders noted for participating in coalition are Dick Spring (1983-1987, 1992-1997) and DL - Proinsia De Rossa (194-1997)*

## **PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS**

The Progressive Democrats were founded by Desmond O'Malley, an arch adversary of Charles Haughey who lead Fianna Fáil during the 1980s. The PDs are clearly on the political right and some of their policies have been interpreted as being akin to Thatcherism. It may be implied that the emergence of the Progressive Democrats transformed the politics of coalition in Ireland. The PDs have also used coalition to ensure that its policy voice be heard. It offered a new coalition partner to Fine Gael while denying Fianna Fáil an overall majority in the 1987 election. Ironically the PDs have never participated in government with Fine Gael or Labour to date and their coalition bed-partners have been their previous adversaries, Fianna Fáil.

PDs have used coalition to ensure their policy voice is heard

*The Progressive Democrats leaders who have participated in coalition are Des O'Malley (1989-1992) and Mary Harney (1997-2002).*

### **1.4 The development of a mature coalition system in Ireland?**

Since 1977 there has not been a majority single party government. Since 1981 every government formation bar 1987 has required negotiation after polling was completed and that negotiation has become progressively more problematic. Ireland is no longer a uni-polar system. With the exception of the very short lived Charles Haughey administration of 1982 (sustained in office by independent deputy Tony Gregory and the Workers' Party) and the minority Haughey administration, 1987-89, (essentially maintained in office by a broad consensus on fiscal and economic policy with the main opposition parties), coalition has been the normal form of government since 1981. Two of these

coalition governments have been formed without a general election being called – 1992 (FF-PD) and 1994 (FG-L-DL). This is all in marked contrast to Irish government formation in earlier years.

The establishment of coalition governments in Ireland has predominantly advanced as a result of the demise in the dominant position of Fianna Fáil (FF) which managed to identify itself as a “national movement” rather than a partisan organisation (Farrell, 1992:146). The development of Fianna Fáil into the main catch-all party made the formation of an alternative government very difficult and it was not until 1948 that this became possible. The so-called ‘interparty’ (coalition) governments of 1948-51 and 1954-57 involved parties whose policies, particularly on socio-economic issues, were remarkably diverse. However, dissimilar parties were inevitably drawn together by the dominance of Fianna Fáil and disillusionment with its then insular economic strategy. This trend was repeated in the 1970s and 1980s when the Fine Gael (FG) and Labour (L) coalition governments (1973-77, 1981-82, 1983-87) were put together with the exclusive aim of excluding Fianna Fáil. A change to this pattern occurred in 1989 when Fianna Fáil formed a government with the Progressive Democrats (PDs), a right wing party that had been established by break-away Fianna Fáil deputies in the early 1980s. This ended the latter party’s principle of not entering coalition government and is perceived to have come about due to its then leader Charles Haughey’s reluctance to cede personal power and to relinquish government to Fine Gael and Labour. Since 1989, Fianna Fáil’s overall share of the vote has not recovered and it must contemplate a coalition partner if forming a government is to be a possibility. Following 1989 there have been a succession of coalition governments, 1989-1992 (FF-PDs), 1993-1994 (FF-Labour), 1994-1997 (FG-Labour-Democratic Left<sup>4</sup> known as the ‘Rainbow coalition’), 1997-2002 (FF-PD). This succession has altered the nature and perception of coalition government and the complexity of post election bargaining, whereby small parties exert greater leverage and independent Teachta Dála (Dáil deputies, TDs) may hold the balance of power.

The coalitions of contemporary times had their roots in the coalition experiments of the 1970s and 1980s and the formation of the PDs in the early 1980s. During the 1973-1987 period the Labour party was divided on the issue of coalition. A more left wing faction, often identified with the then party chairman Michael D. Higgins, opposed coalition with FG. A more right wing faction, typically centred on the leader of the parliamentary party, favoured coalition. The Garrett Fitzgerald coalitions of the 1980s therefore had to indirectly manage this division as well as the coalition relations and themselves and long meetings were deemed to be the norm in an effort to reach consensus. In 1987 Labour ministers walked out of coalition over the failure of the coalition partners to agree upon the shape of the 1987 budget. Fianna Fáil capitalised on this in its manifesto to save the country from weak and indecisive government and formed a minority government in 1987 on the premise of no compromises and no deals.

The Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, called an election in June 1989 as it was perceived that FF would fare better at the polls and regain its position as a government with an overall

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<sup>4</sup> Following electoral losses in the 1997 general election the Democratic Left was merged within the Labour party in January 1999.

majority. Ironically it lost seats and so began the process of dependence on other parties in order to enter government. Labour and the Worker's Party ruled out any participation in government. The PDs, who had entered into a coalition agreement with FG during the election campaign and performed badly, formed a coalition government with FF in mid July 1989. Connelly and O'Halpin (1989) stress that Fianna Fáil's pragmatic conversion to coalition politics just at a time when the state's acute public financial problems were fading and when the first evidence of economic improvement was emerging after a decade of disaster, helped to remove the aura of perpetual crisis management that had surrounded previous coalitions (Connelly and O'Halpin, 1999: 251).

Although Charles Haughey was generally deemed to be careful not to upset the junior coalition partner and took the support of the PDs very seriously, his successor, Albert Reynolds' attitude was that the PDs were a dispensable component of government.<sup>5</sup> For example, decisions concerning the taxation of farmers were taken without prior consultation with the PDs. This in turn was followed by serious disagreements over the abortion issue, Maastricht Treaty, local government reform and the beef tribunal. Des O'Malley, the leader of the PDs, criticised the method of governing which had been followed since Reynolds became Taoiseach. Indeed O'Malley believed that decisions were being taken by the Taoiseach and his colleagues outside the cabinet structures to exclude the PDs. When he wrote on one occasion to Reynolds concerning these matters, the Taoiseach did not deign to reply (Irish Times, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1992).

This rather acrimonious government finally broke down following the evidence given by Albert Reynolds at the Beef Tribunal which was derogatory to Des O'Malley and the former refused to apologise. The outcome of the 1992 election was a victory for the Labour Party vis a vis the proportion of seats gained by the party. Although Labour had been highly critical of the FF-PD administration and called for the formation of a truly alternative administration during the election campaign – it ironically turned to FF in the aftermath. This is explained by the reluctance of Dick Spring, the Labour leader, to go into coalition with FG due to the personality clashes and poor relations in general during the 1983-1987 government. These will be explained in the paper in the context of the policy making process. The Dail met on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1993 and elected Albert Reynolds as Taoiseach. Labour obtained 6 cabinet posts, 5 junior ministries, a restructuring of government, and a new office of the Tánaiste, as well as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for Labour Leader in the bargaining process. The government included new ministries for Equality and Law Reform, Employment and Enterprise, and Arts Culture and Gaeltacht and a regrouping of some others. From the outset the Labour Party strategists had determined that it was necessary to restructure government in an effort to deal with the needs of coalition as against single party government. This was a concerted effort to strengthen the Labour leader's role in government and it also led to the introduction of programme managers to monitor policy implementation.

This government lasted until November 1994, by which time relations between the coalition partners had seriously deteriorated. Two issues acted as a catalyst to end the

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<sup>5</sup> Ironically it was the Progressive Democrats that finally forced Charlie Haughey's resignation as Taoiseach and leader of the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party in January 1992.

‘partnership for government’: the publication of the Beef Tribunal report<sup>6</sup> and the disagreement over a judicial appointment. An election was not necessary as FF resigned from government and the ‘Rainbow’ coalition was formed in December 1994. This coalition with the unlikely combination of FG-L-DL proved enduring and presided over the emergence of the ‘Celtic Tiger’. The coalition partners put forward a joint campaign for re-election. However, the Labour success of the 1992 election was reversed as the party performed badly. Democratic Left also performed badly at the polls and later merged with Labour to create a broader platform for the Left. Fianna Fáil, while not increasing its overall share of the total vote significantly, managed to gain 9 seats through an effective vote management strategy under the STV system. In July 1997, FF and the PDs formed a minority government with the support of 4 independent deputies.

### 1.5 Electoral rules

Fighting an election as a coalition can be of great value because of the Irish electoral system. This is proportional representation (PR) by the single transferable vote (STV), in multi member constituencies. Each constituency returns between 3 and five TDs. The elector can vote for all the candidates, listing them in numerical order of preference. A ‘quota’ is worked out according to the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Total valid poll (number of votes cast)}}{\text{number of seats} + 1} + 1$$

When a candidate reaches the quota he or she is deemed to be elected. It is here that transferability kicks in. The surplus of the candidate’s votes above the quota, namely those votes not needed to elect them – is then allocated to the other candidates according to the subsequent preferences recorded on the ballot papers. Thus, if two parties have a coalition pact before an election, they can ask their supporters to give their second preference vote to the partner party. A pre-election pact between Fine Gael and Labour in 1973 yielded considerable benefit in returning both parties to government. However, while a formal agreement or strong indication of preferred coalition partners may aid accountability and minimise the complexity of a post election bargaining environment, they also limit the parties’ flexibility in the negotiating arena (Seyd, 2002:24). Prior to the general election in 1992, the Labour Party was asked by Fine Gael to form a pre-election alliance with themselves and the Progressive Democrats. This was rejected by the Labour Leader, Dick Spring, since he anticipated that Labour would perform well at election time and therefore boost its bargaining powers in the aftermath. A general election in Ireland will be held in May 2002 (date to be decided) but to date none of the main parties have entered into coalition pacts. It may be added that there does not appear to be any significant pressure from the electorate for them to do so either. It may also be noted that heavy electoral reverses have usually afflicted the smaller parties after participating in coalition governments and it will be interesting to see how the Progressive Democrats perform after five years in government as junior partner to Fianna Fáil. Recent controversies, in particular the Naughton scandal are not deemed to have

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<sup>6</sup> The Beef Tribunal examined irregularities in the beef process industry and accusations of corruption. Its report in August 1994 raised disturbing questions about the quality of public administration in Ireland, the relationship between business and politics, and the issue of political funding (Collins and Cradden, 2001: 92).

benefited their electoral chances.<sup>7</sup> Laver and Schofield (1990) note, however, that some commentators argue there is a potential for proportional representation electoral systems and coalition government to undermine democracy, by taking the choice of government away from the electorate and giving it to politicians in smoke filled rooms. (Laver and Schofield, 1990:89). In short, the membership of coalition government may not ultimately reflect the wishes of the electorate.

## **2. Formation of coalition governments following elections**

When governments are formed by a single party, no delay is necessary when one administration falls and another is formed. But in multi-party conditions, elections may not be 'decisive' and governments may only be formal following a process of inter-party bargaining. In recent times these negotiations, along with the formal written agreement to which they give rise, is an obvious difference between single party and coalition administrations. The 'winning' parties must compromise on their manifestos, depending on their bargaining position, and pool their commitments. Since 1993, this has taken the form of an explicit agreement in the form of the Programme for Government. The current programme is entitled 'An Action Programme for the Millennium, 1997'. Such agreements are also seen as an insurance against a policy priority being rejected later by the other. On the other hand, if an issue is not already contained in the agreement, its ability to reach the government agenda at a later stage is greatly diminished.

In Ireland the negotiation of agreements normally takes two to three weeks – the 1992 election being exceptionally long as Labour, basking in a victory for the party with more seats in the Dáil than ever before, explored its options. Negotiations are typically undertaken by a small group of senior figures from the bargaining parties. After the 1997 election, coalition negotiations between Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats were conducted by eight people: two senior TDs from each party, each group aided by two senior party advisers. The party leaders, Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney, were not involved directly in the negotiations, but determined their broad parameters at the outset (Mitchell, 1999:254). Senior civil servants played a background role in informally proofing the viability and cost of the proposed programme for government and offered advice in ascertaining whether targets could be realistically achieved.<sup>8</sup> It was noted that in the 1997 coalition negotiations the Progressive Democrats' representatives would have liked additional resources, in the shape of 2-3 civil servants, to advise the party on its policies, in particular on their 'downstream' implications (Seyd, 2002:68). It is likely that civil service involvement in providing advice to coalition negotiations is going to increase. Other issues on which the parties typically seek civil service advice are the state of the social partnership, EU issues and the internal structure of government. There are no formal arrangements covering the provision of such advice and requests by the parties are sent to the relevant department directly. It must be stressed, however, that civil servants have no role in decisions in relation to appointments but they may be involved in discussions in changes to departmental structures and composition.

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<sup>7</sup> The PD Junior Minister, Bobby Molloy was recently forced to resign his position following the revelations that he made representations to a judge on behalf of the accused, a member of his constituency in a rape trial.

<sup>8</sup> These are generally accurate but occasional inaccuracies do occur e.g. the impact of the 2000 budget tax cuts on revenue was underestimated by Finance officials.

### 3. Coalition Structures in the Government

#### 3.1 The Role of the Prime Minister

The first step in the government formation process is to identify a potential new Prime Minister. In the case of Ireland, the Taoiseach, as the head of the executive has been consistently a powerful actor since the introduction of Bunreacht na hÉireann in 1937.<sup>9</sup> The Taoiseach has important prerogatives with regard to the operation of the cabinet, even though coalition government is now the norm and has somewhat restricted the head of government's power in these respects.

In a coalition the Taoiseach, is the leader of the senior coalition party. It is generally perceived that in a coalition government the Taoisesach has the role of 'chairman' as opposed to 'chief'. The current Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern (FF), is perceived as consensus orientated and chairman-like politician. Taoiseachs of the past e.g. Charles Haughey would tend to attempt to follow the chief-like role but this is not really an option in the current run of coalition governments. Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney meet and go through the agenda before cabinet meeting and business is conducted in a non-confrontational manner. As one official commented 'they are determined to avoid a number of veto cards getting played. We have had leaders (in coalition) who depart from the collective and this is inevitable as parties do have separate identities'.<sup>10</sup>

Elgie (1999) illustrates how the impact of coalition government can be seen in four ways. Firstly, the Taoiseach's power of appointment is restricted; it is shared with the leaders of other parties participating in the coalition. The ministerial nominations made by the coalition partner must be tolerated and special arrangements are sometimes introduced to accommodate the junior partners representation in government. Second, in office representatives of the coalition partner may be in a position to shape the development of policy in the departments that they head. For example, Ruairi Quinn was a high profile Labour party Minister for Finance in the 1994-97 'Rainbow' coalition. Third, it may also mean that the Tanaiste becomes a significant political actor. The Tanaiste's formal role is limited to standing in for the Taoiseach should he be away or die in office. It was only in 1993 when Labour went into government with Fianna Fáil for the first time that the office gained a more substantial role. This model was a new departure for government since it is only the Taoiseach who is seen to operate outside departmental boundaries (Farrell, 1993: 156-8). During 1993-1997, Dick Spring, leader of the Labour Party was, in tandem with his position as Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs. His influence on foreign and Northern Ireland policy was greater than that of the typical Foreign Minister. Finally, if the Taoiseach rides roughshod over the concerns of the coalition partner, then the government runs the risk of collapse. There is nothing inherently unstable about coalition governments, but circumstances can conspire to render them extremely fragile, as the coalition break-ups of 1992 and 1994 showed (Elgie, 1999: 243).

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<sup>9</sup> The Constitution officially designates the Taoiseach as head of government under Article 13.1.1 and Article 28.5.1.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Government Secretariat, Department of Taoiseach, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

### **3.2 The Carve-Up - Distributing Posts in a Coalition**

Following the appointment of the government (a maximum of 15 ministers), the Taoiseach will in due course nominate up to 17 junior ministers of state outside the cabinet. With the exception of the Chief Whip, these are not entitled to attend government meetings unless invited specifically to speak on a particular departmental matter. In coalitions special arrangements can be made to facilitate the junior partner. In the 'Rainbow' coalition Pat Rabbitte of the Democratic Left was allowed to attend all meetings of the cabinet with his leader and then Minister for Social Welfare, Proinsias De Rossa even though the constitutional limit of 15 ministers had already been reached. In the current administration the same facility has been extended to the Progressive Democrats so that Mary Harney does not feel wholly isolated in cabinet meetings and to fill in for her when she is absent. The Progressive Democrats were allocated an additional "super minister" who attends cabinet but without voting rights. Up until his recent resignation Bobby Molloy undertook this position. In addition the Tánaiste's Programme Manager has an office in the Taoiseach's office, not in the Department of Enterprise and Employment where Mary Harney is based. This enables the two Programme Managers to liaise closely and also gives the junior partner a stronger voice at the centre of government.

### **3.3 Coordination and Conflict Resolution**

Governments serve under Article 28.4.4 of the Constitution as collective entities, underpinned by strong collective cabinet responsibility. But Ministers are expected to restrict their activities to their own departments which have been described as 'mini-corporations'. The Department of Taoiseach is the department which has the greatest overview of policy. The focus of conflict management is predominantly the cabinet which remains the key forum for discussion and via bilateral meetings between the Taoiseach and Tánaiste who are the principal political actors involved in coordination of a coalition. Major ideological conflicts are generally not likely to occur. Differences are more likely to arise over differences of opinion of policy and the allocation of public expenditure.<sup>11</sup> Informal mechanisms of coalition coordination have been perceived to work quite well and commentators like Chubb (1992) believe that the advent of continuous coalition governments since 1989 has served to weaken the discipline of collective cabinet government.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the Progressive Democrats have not been convinced of the merits of the establishment of embryo National Stadium – more commonly known as the 'Bertie Bowl'. In addition, a scandal arose over the allocation of sub-contracts for the building of stadium and the Director, Paddy Teahon, a former Secretary General of the Department of Taoiseach, was forced to resign.

During the rainbow coalition 1994-97 much management of the government took place during meetings of the three party leaders immediately prior to cabinet. This operated as a clearing house and levels of discussion in cabinet fell with some cabinet members becoming concerned at their detachment from decision making. As noted, Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney also meet before full cabinet meetings but there seems to be less sense that these sessions channel important issues away from cabinet (Seyd, 2002:104). The Taoiseach's power as chairman of the cabinet is reflected in the rule that no item can be put on the government agenda without his approval.

Murray (1997) notes that the proliferation of coalition governments have required structures to facilitate them (Murray and Teahon, 1997: 40). The Fianna Fáil-Labour government of 1993-94 is noted for the introduction of more formal mechanisms for coalition management. From the outset the Labour Party strategists had determined that was necessary to restructure government in an effort to deal with the needs of coalition as against single party government. These mechanisms will be discussed below. The overall context of existing arrangements for the FF-PD government is set by the programme for government the parties agreed to prior to taking up office. The current programme is entitled 'An Action Programme for the Millennium' and it sets out in broad terms the key strategic issues for government and the programme of action. The Secretary General to the Government plays an important advisory role and under him there are three divisions – the Government Secretariat, Protocol, and European and International Affairs – providing for interdepartmental coordination and the smooth and efficient running of Government. The Government Secretariat services all government meetings, drawing up the agenda, circulating documentation to Ministers and communicating decisions to government departments. The current strategy statement illustrates the central mission of the department is to provide the Taoiseach and Chief Whip with the policy advice, information and support necessary for the effective leadership, coordination and strategic direction of Government policy- from policy formulation through to decision making, implementation and monitoring. There is no dedicated coalition committee and no coordinating, political management role for cabinet committees. One of the more recent innovations in coordinating mechanisms has been the establishment of the government legislation committee which brings together the Government Chief Whip, the Attorney General together with a representative of the Parliamentary Draftsmans office, programme managers to the Taoiseach and Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and senior staff of the Taoiseach's department. The remit of the committee is to establish the government's legislative programme, to prioritise work, to consider resource issues and to monitor progress.

#### **3.4 Politico-Administrative Relations and the Creation of Programme Managers**

A number of distinct developments in the central administration may be directly attributed to facilitating coalition government partners. The 1993-1994 (FF-L) coalition saw the creation of a new class of public official – the Programme Manager. The Programme Manager is deemed to have had its genesis in the facts of Irish electoral life rather than in the tortuous history of mainstream civil service reform (O'Halpin, 1996) and operates along the blurred borders between politics and administration. In 1993 the Programme Managers were established at the request of the Labour government as a

coordinating mechanism between departments and as a method of keeping Ministers fully aware of policy developments.<sup>12</sup>

Labour was fully aware of the difficulties that the PDs encountered in coalition with FF between 1989 and 1992 whereby they sometimes became informed of policy developments through the media as opposed to from their coalition partners. In tandem was their own unhappy experience of coalition in the Cosgrave (1973-1977) and Fitzgerald (1981-82, 1983-87) coalitions. Those governments were put together with the straightforward aim of excluding FF from office. Policy was secondary to this goal. Any advisers during these administrations did not become involved in any executive roles within departments. Programme Managers were perceived as a combination of advisers and managers operating along the lines of an underdeveloped ministerial cabinet system.<sup>13</sup>

Each Minister had one Programme Manager and the Taoiseach and Tánaiste had two each. The Programme Manager was supposed to be pitched at the level of Principal Officer. The Labour party brought in more political affiliates from the outside who were deemed to have maneuvered the more cautious career officials upon whom FF relied on. Such a mechanism would, it hoped, enable the party to maximise its strength in a coalition and to exercise influence across a range of issues, including those where Labour ministers had no direct responsibility but on which the party itself had some view or definite policy position. After some discussion it was agreed that these new officials would be termed Partnership Programme Managers rather than chef de cabinet, the initial preference of Labour negotiators. In the words of one civil servant, 'ministerial cabinets are not on the agenda' (Personal interview, Department of Taoiseach, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2002.) This tallies with Brian Farrell's comments that the notion of employing the idea of ministerial cabinets as mechanisms for ensuring that government policy was both in line with the agreed coalition outline and implemented accordingly was likely to meet considerable resistance within the existing public service. (Farrell, 1993: 158). In the long run political imports would damage the apolitical ethos of the Irish civil service.

The new system also provoked hostility from TDs from within the Labour Party itself. One label coined to describe the Programme Managers was the 'Tánaiste's non-elected kitchen cabinet' and 'spin doctors' for Ministers. They were accused of neglecting relations with the parliamentary groups and some Labour TDs felt marginalized in the decision making process.

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<sup>12</sup> The Civil Service Commissioners Act, 1956, and the Civil Service Regulation Act 1956, grant the minister of finance wide powers relative to regulating the civil service and allow certain exceptions to the requirement that positions be filled by competition. Ministerial advisers, personnel secretaries, and programme managers from outside the civil service are appointed to "excluded positions". These appointments are temporary and end when the minister's term of office ends.

<sup>13</sup> In reply to a parliamentary question on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1993 the Minister for Finance stated: The role and function of the new managers is quite distinct from that of departmental secretaries general and senior line managers. Senior civil servants will continue to have responsibility for the development of policy proposals, the overall management of schemes and programmes and have charge of their departments generally.

The provision for joint meetings of Programme Managers certainly represented a new departure in Irish administrative practice as convention was that there were to be no established meetings of departmental secretaries as this could be interpreted as supplanting the role of the cabinet. The Programme Managers met weekly on Wednesdays, the day after the cabinet's normal meeting and the main purpose of these meetings was to review progress under the programme for government on a department by department basis, to identify blockages in the system, to facilitate interdepartmental exchanges on matters of common interest and shared responsibility, to ensure legislative targets were in process of attainment and generally to provide a forum where difficulties could quickly be ironed out.

The system of Programme Managers continued to operate during the 'Rainbow coalition' 1994-1997 (FG-L-DL) and were criticised for excessive cost and politicisation of the administration through the employment of party staff affiliates on the public pay-roll.<sup>14</sup> O'Halpin, commenting in 1997, noted that Programme Managers appeared set to become a standard feature of Irish administrative life, at least under coalition governments. Civil servants, at least in relation to legislation, had identified the desirability of a coordinating mechanism at an administrative level between departments, even before it became a political imperative. However, the current administration (FF-PD, 1997-2002) has discontinued the practice of Programme Managers for each Minister save for the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste and there is no comparable coordination mechanism for the other Ministers. A corresponding emphasis is now placed on the role of the Ministers of State in achieving the implementation of the objectives of government. The civil servant comment on the Programme Manager episode is that they were deemed "a step too far" (Personal interview, Department of Taoiseach, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2002). To others the Programme Managers were an instrument to facilitate more genuine inter-party partnership as opposed to old style coalitions.

The role of special advisors, on the other hand, is expressly political and their contracts co-terminous with the duration of the life of the government. In addition to providing expert advice, special advisors also offer advice of a political nature on individual policy issues. The presence of special advisors reduces access to the Minister. There are between 30-40 advisers operating in the full range of departments in the current administration. Ministers are hard pushed to meet all departmental responsibilities and time for coalition management is difficult to find. Ideological differences are also a factor in the appointment of advisers as they are sympathetic to the political orientation of the Minister. The practice commenced with the 1973 FG-Labour coalition whereby several Labour ministers appointed advisers from outside the civil service to provide them with non-departmental advice. As noted, this practice has since been adopted to varying degrees by subsequent governments. One viewpoint put forward by a civil servant in the Department of Taoiseach is that the number and proliferation of advisers is reaching a "saturation point" and that it is questionable that so many advisers are necessary. There is concern that advisers can have a discouraging effect on some elements of the service and some policies may not be given the attention they deserve

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, John Bruton (FG) and Proinsias de Rossa had been vociferous themselves in their criticism of the Programme Managers and their cost to the public purse when they had been in opposition.

when they are forwarded. This may have the potential to impact upon medium term to long term strategic policy making - as policy decisions become based on short term political priorities. The Programme Manager network is gone but special advisors have filled in the gaps. The Taoiseach has 6-8 advisors and at times they are in competition with each other for his attention.

### **3.5 Innovating Politico-Administrative Structures under Coalition Government**

The leader of the Labour party and Tánaiste (deputy prime minister), Dick Spring, also insisted on the creation of an Office of the Tánaiste that in some respects resembled and was designed to shadow the Department of Taoiseach (prime minister) in its leadership and policy overview role. The Office of the Tánaiste was supported along the lines of the Department of Taoiseach. A Minister of State, Eithne Fitzgerald, and an Assistant Secretary were instated. The Labour Leader thus received all government papers and not simply those relating to his own ministerial portfolio of foreign affairs. The public view of the office was that it was superfluous and expensive with Dick Spring posing as a 'mini-Taoiseach' and the FF-PD government abolished it when they entered office in 1997. However, in hindsight many actors believe that the larger Tánaiste's office during the earlier coalitions was beneficial for the junior coalition partner. Some actors within the PDs believe that the party should have retained the office to help it keep abreast of activities across government departments. With only four seats in the Dail, the PD's are not well represented. Some officials within the civil service have also recognised that the Tánaiste's office was in ways a worthwhile institution within coalition government. If in a position to plan a new coalition government, the present Taoiseach and Tánaiste may revive it for its usefulness as a monitoring tool for the junior coalition partner and in the mediation of disputes.

## **4. Coalition Related Issues in the Policy Making Process**

### **4.1 Agenda Setting and Decision Making in Coalition**

When a single party forms a government, its ideas may be fairly broad and open to change through Cabinet reconsideration and civil service advice. The agreed programme for government in a coalition determines policy. Collins and Cradden, (2001) note that subsequent civil service reservations may therefore count as little. To ensure a coalition survives, individual ministers may view it as their primary task to 'deliver' on a policy promise, despite reservations from within their own party or department (Collins and Cradden, 2001: 56). Coalition government is also underpinned by arrangements for information sharing and policy documents are now routinely copied to the Taoiseach and Tánaiste at draft stage (Murray and Teahon, 1997:42). However, the flow of information tends to be shaped by the habits of, and relations between, Ministers, so that the junior coalition partner can sometimes be left out of the decision making loop by virtue of not having seen the relevant official papers. Earlier coalitions did not have these mechanisms and when the principles of one party did not align with that of the other – the result was a clash. For example, statistics on government meetings demonstrate that in 1986 (FG-L) 91 meetings and 724 memoranda took place whereas in 1998 (FF-PD) 51 meetings and 1065 memoranda took place. Hence, in relation to agenda setting there is now a formal document between the parties that is reviewed mid-way through the government. The programme is the statement of intent and the strategy and detail is

developed in the department which also has a clearing house role and is responsible for implementation. There is a clearer idea of what is required of government departments and this is taken into account in the framing of the strategy statements.

In relation to effective management and decision-making, Irish coalition governments may be divided into two phases. The first phase being the coalitions of the 1970s and 1980s and second phase being the 1990s. The coalition of the 1970s was led by Liam Cosgrave (FG) during 1973-1977 and it came to be as the only workable alternative to Fianna Fáil. All parties subscribed to government on this basis and one reason why the coalition proved workable was that it was driven to a large degree by the lack of expectation of the junior partners. At this time it is perceived that the Labour mindset was such that it was almost sufficient reward in itself to achieve a change of government and to have a role in that alternative FF government. The coalitions of FG-L led by Garret Fitzgerald in the 1980s had a steep learning curve. By that time Labour expectation had risen to having policy input into government. The Labour Party at this time was still characterized by an older generation of people who held to a politically principled philosophy (organized labour principles) that made coalition difficult with Fine Gael. The 1983-1987 government did serve its term but its method of 'business management' left some legacies that informed their participation in later coalitions whereby greater premium was put on avoiding the irretrievable rifts between the partners.

It is important in a coalition that procedures (such as outlined in the cabinet handbook) are adhered to as far as possible and that there is acceptance and trust that departures from the guidelines are not intended to subvert the process of less consultation than the guidelines takes place, or that the process is accelerated. In Fitzgerald's government items did come forward to the cabinet table which still had intractable problems at principle where neither party would yield. Differences of this magnitude should not be dealt with at the cabinet table and should be settled between Ministers. However, the problem arises that unless a framework to manage such conditions has been developed – interpersonal relationships between Ministers may not resolve such differences of opinion.

In the Fitzgerald government it was decided to divide the decision making agenda into part one and part 2. So any item on the part 1 agenda that the government had failed to deal with within a reasonable period – months more than weeks – was then forwarded to part 2. The arrangements for part 2 were to protect the interests that had relegated the issue into this backwater. An issue could not be taken out of the part 2 agenda to be actively considered again without giving several weeks notice to the other sides. So if an issue e.g. the breaking up of a state company had been forwarded into the part 2 agenda as an intractable item and for reasons between the parties it could not be resolved : for political reasons it could not come off the agenda altogether and remained in the parking lot. Towards the end of the 1983-87 government the agenda had become divided into part 1, 2 and a part 3! The part 3 agenda was recognized to be a graveyard beyond the parking lot which was already agreed to be intractable and which it was now agreed that no party was going to try to come to agreement on any more; but for reasons of external politics and public perception it was still necessary to say the issue was still on the

government agenda. By the end of this government there was a whole list of items that had failed to produce policy. In attempting to find a solution to this impasse, Garret Fitzgerald, in the last twelve months of the FG-L government made the first initiative towards recognizing what was until then an unappreciated consequence of coalition, namely agendas part 2 and part 3 (Personal Interview with officials, Department of Taoiseach, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2002). Garret Fitzgerald appointed the Chief Whip, Sean Barrett to an informal role was declared as the Taoiseach's 'chief of staff'. This role of the Taoiseach's personal agent meant that the latter would seek to broker an agreement between the parties on items that were held in abeyance in order to reduce the volume of agenda 2 and 3 respectively. Barrett had the secondary function of dealing with the active items on the part 1 agenda in order to halt them sliding into agenda 2 and 3. if there was any way to salvage the items before going in to park 2 compound. This was deemed to be reasonably successful as Barrett was uninvolved by a ministerial function and he attempted to mediate with a common sense approach. This strategy was deemed to be successful but was introduced too late in the term of government.

The succession of coalitions since 1989 has altered the nature of decision making and cabinet government. For example, during 1989-1992, the PDs discovered that, having forced FF into coalition, they could exert considerable leverage and were able to push through action on taxation and other issues close to their hearts. More significantly, they found that the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, took the threat of PD withdrawal from government so seriously that he was willing to antagonise his own party in order to maintain the coalition PDs major concessions. The historical relationship between FF and the PDs took careful management of interpersonal relationships and ensuring tensions did not come to the boil. The business of government was deemed to be conducted in an open way but it was also recognized that a volume of work 'disappeared off the table'.

#### **4.2 Ideological Differences and their Reconciliation**

In December 1992 the Labour leadership did not wish to be sucked into a FF dominated coalition without a well articulated programme for action and a mechanism for securing its implementation. Intense and lengthy post election negotiations took place and as previously noted this now characterises coalition formations. Fianna Fáil negotiators found themselves dealing with a policy focussed Labour Party with definite aims across the spectrum of government. The Labour Party of course recognised that they would always be the junior coalition in government but that in order to develop their role in government they had to be proactive in developing models to optimise their position. The Programme Manager system, special advisors and the Office of Tanaiste has already been discussed. In relation to decision making management each Minister's advocate met before cabinet and try to transact business and sort out issues. In this way controversial issues/ideological differences were addressed before the cabinet meeting without individuals principles being compromised at full cabinet and without the individual Minister losing face.

There is no doubt that the decision making process in coalition is slower than in single party government given the ideological principles and opposing views on policy that

characterise the divide between one political family and another. It may also be the case that components of decision making may be improved given the checks and balances that have been introduced as politicians have learned from the early experiences of coalition governments in the 1970s and 1980s. Junior partners in coalition may also be given policy wins by the senior partner, in which they are allowed to claim responsibility for a popular initiative, or even secure a policy that the senior partners does not favour. For instance, during the rainbow coalition, between 1994-97, FG were opposed to the policy of ending water charges but allowed its Labour and Democratic Left partners to pass this issue to assuage their supporters.

### **4.3 Civil Servants and the Policy Making Process in Coalition Government**

O'Halpin (1991) notes that ministers in most governments have accepted the apolitical nature of the civil service without difficulty (O'Halpin, 1991:291). The key test was probably in 1932 when Fianna Fáil came into office for the first time. There was no clear out of senior officials and no infusion of political appointees to departments. When FF finally lost power in 1948, however, the interparty government which succeeded it showed some reluctance to trust all the senior civil servants they inherited. But the service did not become politicised. There are only two occasions when Secretaries of departments clearly been forced out disputes with their ministers (O'Halpin, 1991:292). Those in question, E.P. McCarron and Dan Donovan would not carry out specific instructions . McCarron had exceeded his authority in sanctioning an appointment, while Donovan refused to implement the suspension of an official of his department. In neither case was there any suggestion that either man was removed on grounds either of policy or of party politics. Joseph Brennan, the key civil servant in the early years of the state, voluntarily quit the Department of Finance in 1927 after repeated differences of opinion with his Minister (O'Halpin, 1991: 293). Peter Berry, the Secretary of the Department of Justice from 1961-1971, who had played a key part in the handling of the 1969-70 arms crisis, resigned despite pleas from the government to remain in office. The Government failed to give him adequate support and protection when through doing his duties he became identified with aspects of national security policy. In January 1987 Sean Donlon the secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and one of the main architects of the Anglo Irish agreement, resigned at the early age of 48 and took a position in the private sector. It was claimed that his decision was linked with the likelihood of a general election which the coalition government (FG-Labour) was expected to lose. He later returned in the reincarnation of a Programme Manager.

Overall, there are almost no cases of a complete breakdown in relations between Ministers and civil servants that have become public knowledge. There have been clashes of personalities and policies but this tends to be contained within departments. One such incident that was portrayed widely in the media was that of the 'strains' between the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews (FF) and his Secretary General, Paddy MacKernan in October 1998 over a series of issues - disputes over official appointments and the leaking of secret department dispute documents during the presidential election - stand-off between them became a matter of public and political debate. There were two issues at the heart of the controversy. One was the break down in relations between the Minister and the Secretary General and the other was the decision by the Minister to use

his legal power to personally select three people for senior promotions, hence politicizing appointments. Recommendations from the promotional system within the Department, the Management Advisory Committee, in favour of certain officials was rejected by David Andrews in favour of individuals known personally to him. An ancillary problem was the way in which a number of ambassadors were given foreign assignments by the Minister against their wishes.<sup>15</sup> Andrews fortified his defence in the Dáil with the phrase “I am a Minister – not a rubber stamp.” The Opposition parties attempted to draft the Taoiseach and Tánaiste into the row but it had no implications for coalition relations. The Tánaiste offered her full support to the beleaguered Ministers, but it was confirmed that representations of a sort were made by her in relation to one of the three positions filled.

According to Page (1995) cohesion among top civil servants is commonly claimed to have two effects upon the policy process. First, it is generally argued to strengthen the role of the civil service in decision-making. An internally divided body does not have the status or power of one that speaks as if with a single voice. Second, cohesion imparts a set of interests: since an elite is a distinctive group, it may have distinctive group interests (Page, 1995: 262). The Irish senior civil service is small and deemed to be cohesive. In respect of the policy making process, it would be strange if as individually and collectively, that public servants did not develop coherent and generalised views of where the public interest lies – namely the departmental line. It is clear that Irish ministers are at a significant disadvantage in seeking to impose themselves on their departments and drive them in new directions.

Farrell (1994) refers to the civil service is identified as the “permanent government” (Farrell, 1994 : 83). This portrays senior civil servants as an entrenched, professional and protected elite group of puppet masters manipulating the transient, part time, and vulnerable amateur ministers, who are no more than titular lords of their departments. This representation is as unrealistic as the opposite image, the conventional dichotomy between politics and administration which continues to survive as convenient fiction as opposed to a description of any reality (Campbell and Peters, 1988: 81-82). In Ireland civil service and legislation is seen as providing a framework for new accountabilities and working relationships. Under the Public Sector Management Act 1997, Ministers are requested to release their grip on some of the levers of power. Yet Ireland does not have a tradition of legislative change to guide public service reform. It may be questioned that the government’s commitment to changing power relationships between Ministers and top civil servants is yet to be tested. The focus on strategic management itself raises issues about the role of civil servants. Zimmerman (1997) notes that Lindblom’s mutual adjustment model is of value in explaining ministerial-secretarial relations in Ireland where secretaries have no statutory duties (Zimmerman, 1997:541)

From another perspective, and as previously noted, effort has been employed to use ministerial advisers to facilitate Ministers anxious to achieve change, but their expertise

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<sup>15</sup> David Andrew’s promotion of the three diplomats prompted the opposition to accuse him of politicising the department and it has caused a great deal of anger amongst most of the staff at Iveagh House, Department of Foreign Affairs, who see it as undermining the normal structure for promotions in Foreign Affairs.

in a particular policy area is likely to be offset by their inexperience in dealing with the administrative apparatus and its personnel. There is the added problem that time is a scarcer resource for the part time and transient minister than for the full time and permanent civil servant. As discussed, the role of the Programme Manager was not really a policy advice one. At the bottom line the Programme Managers gave opinions but policy advice in respect of collective wisdom, historical recall and number crunching is what you contributed from a civil servant.

After examining ministerial autonomy and collective responsibility Farrell (1994) explains how Ministers were asked questions on matters relating to their own department and what kind of decisions did they take on their own. Responses fell into four categories : issues involving cost, innovation, coordination, or those regarded as politically sensitive. Ministers were unanimous in identifying the Department of Finance as a major constraint on their capacity to run their own department let alone advance new policy proposals (Farrell, 1994:77). This is the case in both single and multi-party government.<sup>16</sup>

## **5. The Role of the President of the State**

The President is the guardian of the rights of the Irish people and guardian of the Constitution. However, in guarding these rights very few powers are left to the President's own discretion. The Irish Constitution of 1937 sets out these powers. The office is largely ceremonial, rather like a constitutional monarchy, with very little leeway for exercising discretionary powers. Elgie (1999) argues that there is no doubt that the Presidency is a secondary political office and there are no expectations that the President should exercise political leadership (Elgie, 1999: 232).

The President normally acts on the advice and authority of the government. The Constitution emphasizes in several places that the President requires the approval of the government before taking action. In the identification of a Taoiseach after an inconclusive election result in multi state conditions - the President is left out of the start of the process which is a matter for the parties alone. The parties bargain among themselves until one party, or a combination of parties in coalition believes it has sufficient strength to form and operate a new government. The head of state then plays a ceremonial role in formally appointing new Taoiseach. The President does not play any tangible role in managing coalition government at all.

But there are six independent powers where she may exercise her own exercise her own initiative independent of the government (regardless of its complexion). Two of these have particular significance for government (single or multi-party).

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<sup>16</sup> Attention was recently given to tensions between the Department of Health and the Department of Finance in relation to spending in relation to the new government health strategy 'Quality and Fairness: a system for you'. The strategy constitutes massive investment to improve quality, capacity and service (in particular waiting lists and primary care) in the current health service and promote horizontal actions.

1. The President is part of the system of checks and balances on the legislature and she may refer a government bill to the Supreme Court to test its constitutionality following consultations with her Council of State (a symbolic body).
2. The most arguably important independent power of the President is the very wide power under Article 13.2.2 which enables her, in absolute discretion, to refuse to dissolve the Dáil on the advice of a Taoiseach who has ceased to retain the support of a majority in the Dáil. This power has never been used. The President cannot dissolve the Dáil without the request of the Taoiseach.

## 6. Data Collection

The following table indicates the parties who have formed coalitions, when the government was formed and what the balance of power has been in the Dáil.

TERMS	NAME OF PARTIES	No. of Ministers	% of Ministerial positions	Proportion of seats held by the coalition government as a percentage of total number of seats in Dáil Éireann
(1) 18.02.1948	Fine Gael	6	46	45.6%
	Labour	2	15	
	Others	5	39	
(2) 02.06.1954	Fine Gael	8	62	50.3%
	Labour	4	31	
	Others	1	7	
(3) 14.03.1973	Fine Gael	10	67	50.7%
	Labour	5	33	
(4) 30.06.1981	Fine Gael	11	73	48.2%
	Labour	4	27	
(5) 14.12.82	Fine Gael	11	73	51.8%
	Labour	4	27	
(6) 12.07.89	Fianna Fáil	13	87	50.0%
	Progressive Democrats	2	13	
(7) 11.01.1993	FF	9	60	60.8%
	Labour	6	40	
(8) 15.12.1994 (no election)	Fine Gael	8	53	50.6%
	Labour	6	40	
	Democratic Left	1	7	
(9)	FF	14	93	48.8% Reliant on the

26.06.1997	PD	1	7	support of 4 independent TDs
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Source: Coakley, John & Michael Gallagher (eds.), 1999. Politics in the Republic of Ireland, p.376

- Others include two Clann na Poblachta, one Clann na Talmhan, one National Labour and one independent in 1948, one Clann na Talmhan in 1954
- Dáil support refers to Dáil seats held by parties participating in government as percentage of Dáil membership immediately after the formation of the government

## 7. Conclusion

To conclude, it would appear that coalition government, whatever its complexion, is likely to be the mode of government following the upcoming election in Ireland. However, the experience of coalition in Ireland is moderate in comparison to, for example, Denmark, Germany. Coalition management in Ireland appears to have stuck closely to the Westminster model with relatively few adjustments in the transition from single party rule (Seyd, 2002:104). The concerns of the coalition partners are two-fold : how to coordinate matters within the executive, and how to ensure adequate support for their measures in the legislature. This paper has concentrated on the executive. In respect of the legislation, in Ireland during the 1980s in particular, intra-party conflicts generated as much government instability as interparty conflicts. In response coalition governments will often commit their members to disciplined behaviour in the legislature. In general strong discipline is required in the legislature unless it, for example, a moral issue such as abortion.

Initially, coalition government was perceived as a weak alternative to strong government led by the dominant party player, Fianna Fáil. However, since 1989 all governments have been coalitions and this trend is set to continue. The notion of coalitions being weak and without capacity for effective leadership and policy has faded into the past. The unprecedented growth of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy together with the dramatic achievements of the Northern Ireland peace process in the 1990s were overseen by a succession of coalition governments. As Connolly and O’Halpin (1999) suggest, these successes disposed of the old argument that coalitions were simply a poor substitute for single party government and could not provide strong and resolute direction of national affairs (O’Halpin and Connelly, 1999: 251). They also note that the absorption of the Democratic Left into Labour and the possible extinction of the Progressive Democrats may eventually see the re-emergence of the ‘Fianna Fáil versus the rest’ paradigm that dominated government formation for over 50 years. One feature that may complicate this is an increase in the number of independent deputies elected to the Dáil. Given the clientelistic nature of Irish politics and the trend of the last election in particular, this is not an unlikely possibility. The current administration is a minority government supported by four independent TDs who regularly meet with the Chief Whip, Seamus

Brennan (FF). Coalition governments almost certainly entail a shift of decision making away from cabinet and can be initially transacted in informal settings.

The real agents of development in coalition government have been the Labour Party. They recognized a growing role in government within an understanding that the likelihood of any, or most, government formations would result in Labour being the junior coalition partner. Therefore, Labour has been the most proactive party in providing and testing models to optimized their capacity to influence government and have a detailed horizontal overview of the policy making process. Three instruments in particular have been illustrated : the programme for government, the introduction of special advisers and Programme Managers and the establishment of an Office of Tánaiste (1992-1997). The strengthening of the Tánaiste's office and the deployment of Programme Managers in 1992 are the most serious attempt so far to give a more formal structure to coalition management and enhance the power of the junior partner (Seyd, 2002:107). The Tánaiste's Office was deemed to be a good model for coordination and enhancing the identity of the coalition partner.

Prior to 1992 programmes for government did not exist and there was not even a skeletal document prepared to mark a treaty between the coalition partners or prioritise and plan policy. Special advisers were first introduced in the Cosgrave coalition (FG-L) of 1973-1977. Ministerial advisers are perceived to be effectiveness for the political know-how and ability to respond quickly to public concerns. The civil service accepts that this role is useful up to a certain point. The civil service system may not be as quick to get its mechanisms in place in comparison to these actors working at a political level. However, there is some concern that the system of advisers is almost at "saturation point" and that the civil service tradition should not be relegated to the background. On the other hand, a layer between the civil service and the Minister can be useful in the drafting of policy. The Programme Manager system has been curtailed to a limit of the Taoiseach and Tánaiste being the only members of the government with Programme Managers. The civil service view the development of the Programme Manager system during 1992-1997 as the "edge of tolerance" (Personal interview with official, Department of Taoiseach, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2002). The Programme Managers were an additional layer between civil servants, advisers and Ministers that disturbed a carefully balanced system as they operated as a collective as opposed to the singular role of a political adviser. The Department is perceived to be the arena and have the capacity to bring policy forward efficiently and effectively. To this end the Facts/Interest model as advocated by Aberbach et al, 1981 would appear to be the most appropriate and the political role of the public service in Ireland is generally avoided by senior politicians and politicians alike.

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