

## Embargo 18.30pm 5<sup>th</sup> April 2016

Speaking at a reception at the RIA, Dawson Street, Dublin 2, at 6.30pm, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2016, at which **Senator Feargal Quinn** will be in attendance, **Michael McDowell** said:

“It is vital that the cross-party and non-party consensus that recently existed in the Dáil and Seanad for reform in the way Seanad Éireann is elected and functions is not lost at this point.

The out-going Government established an advisory group chaired by Dr Maurice Manning on reforming the Seanad in response to the decision of the people to retain the Seanad and in response to the Quinn-Zappone Seanad Reform Bill.

The out-going Government appeared to accept the proposals set out in the Manning Report. But nothing was done to implement those proposals.

That failure was deeply regrettable. It added to the sense of disillusionment about the prospects for political and democratic reform in the Oireachtas.

## Seanad Reform Now

We should remember that there is absolutely no constitutional obstacle to the passing of a Seanad Reform Bill now that would:

- Allow the vocational panel Seanad seats to be directly elected by citizens
- Introduce the concept of “one person, one vote” for Seanad elections
- Give every citizen the right to choose which panel to vote on
- Give the vote in Seanad elections to passport-holding citizens in the Diaspora
- Give the Seanad a role in EU affairs
- End the ridiculous system where the vocational panel electorate is confined to roughly a thousand elected politicians with multiple votes.
- Open the door of our democratic parliament to the voices of civil society

There is no reason why voting for the University seats is still confined to NUI and Trinity graduates – **especially since the people voted in a referendum to allow the vote to be given to the graduates of other universities and institutions such as DCU and UL some 37 years ago in 1979.**

Nor is there any reason why even the present register for University seats is so hopelessly out of date as to omit the great majority of eligible graduates, or why postal voting should not be possible on-line.

I am determined that the campaign for Seanad reform should not end with the departure from the House of reforms greatest champions – **Feargal Quinn, Katherine Zappone and John Crown.**

It was on that basis that I took up Feargal’s challenge and have gratefully accepted the nomination of **Feargal Quinn and Prof John A Murphy** to contest the NUI election.

There is no good reason not to implement Seanad reform now.

## **Seize the Moment**

There is now a real appetite for parliamentary reform.

I am confident that we will, one way or another, in next few weeks have a newly elected Government with a mandate to reform the Oireachtas and to make our constitutional institutions work in reality for the people – not merely work in theory.

Lastly, I want to say this – democracy needs politicians with a vocation to serve their fellow citizens.

But citizenship in a republic is not only about rights – it is also about duties.

Article 9 of the Constitution states clearly that loyalty to the state is the “fundamental duty” of all citizens. That rules out a cynical abandonment of democratic participation.

Loyalty to the State entails active support for democratic process and for our democratic institutions.

We need participative citizenship and politics - now more than ever.

We need to make our democratic institutions serve the people and promote the common good. That is what a Republic is all about.

ENDS