

Text of Address

By

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To

The Trinity College Debate on the Seanad

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The “Save €20 Million” Lie

The **Irish Times** has usefully researched and analysed the motives and understanding of the voters on the Seanad referendum. That research published today suggests that the Government’s **“Save €20 Million” lie** has so far worked.

We now know that a dishonest and cowardly Government has successfully created the wholly false impression that by abolishing the Seanad there will be an annual saving of €20 million.

This has been done by plastering the country with expensive, misleading posters.

Fine Gael, a party that receives **€4.8m annually in taxpayers funding**, has refused to allow its leader to even face a single public debate from which the truth about the “savings” claim might emerge.

In truth there will be absolutely **no savings of any kind until 2016**.

Even then, after 2016, the only annual, after-tax difference to the Exchequer from abolition is likely to be €6.5m which when divided over the population amounts to approximately **€1 euro 60 cent per person per year**.

That saving, by the way, is **less than 1% of the annual budget of Dublin City Council**.

I find it an irony that we should close down a House of Parliament while we allow the Government to keep **Farmleigh House open and empty for €2 million a year** and to pay **€3.4 million every year** to their unelected special political advisors.

A Blindfold Amputation Procedure

On Friday next, the people of Ireland are being asked to authorise the carrying out in 2016 of by far the most destructive amputation procedures on their Constitution ever attempted.

This amputation operation will, as I will explain, be attempted blindfold.

Why?

Because very few of the people who will vote for the amendment will have ever seen or read the text of the amending Bill which runs to 57 pages, or had its consequences explained to them.

If the amendment is carried out, we are in for some nasty surprises and major disappointments in the years following 2016 when the abolition amputation kicks - in an Ireland in which a very different Government, quite likely with Gerry Adams as Tanaiste, holds office.

Sadly, most of our media have signally failed to highlight or analyse the exact nature or extent of the Constitutional amendment.

This is no simple procedure to reform our Constitution; it is a crude amputation that will **deform** our Constitution, leaving our democracy more unbalanced and more dysfunctional than ever.

The Amendment Bill entails the deletion of seven entire articles and/or the amendment of all but 11 of the 50 Articles in the Constitution.

It does less than nothing to address the greatest dysfunctionality in our democracy, - the complete subjection of our parliament to the will of the Executive. Sadly, the amendment presages the enthronement of the party whips as the new oligarchs with absolute power.

Consequences of the Greasy Till Amendment

To save us each €1.60 per year, we will have:

- Taken away from the President the right to refer Bills to the People under **Article 27** which will stand repealed
- Taken from the Taoiseach the right to appoint expert non-TD Ministers under the amended **Article 28**
- Taken away from the Irish people the **Article 29** “double lock” we put in place after the Lisbon Treaty on the power of our Government to surrender our EU vetoes (including our EU tax veto) without consulting the People in referendum
- Removed **all parliamentary checks and balances from the Constitution**, leaving the whips in the Dail free to use their power to guillotine through all and any legislation they like without debate or parliamentary scrutiny in the way we have seen “emergency legislation” enacted in hours in recent times.
- Ended for ever the possibility of any Northern members like **Gordon Wilson, Seamus Mallon** and **Brid Rogers** in our parliament.
- Thrown into the dustbin of history the chamber in which **Yeats** spoke up for the civil liberties of Protestants (“we are no petty people”) against Roman Catholic supremacism, where **Mary Robinson** fought the lonely battle for the right to contraception and woman’s and children’s equality, and where **David Norris** spoke out effectively against the persecution and for the emancipation of gay and lesbian citizens. All of these causes had no champions in the Dail.
- Ended for ever the chance of real involvement of **Civic Society** in our parliament which will be composed solely of TDs elected on the present clientelist system
- Put an end to the hope that our parliament will take any of its **EU scrutiny and legislative functions** seriously in future.

Without any referendum we could give every citizen, wherever they live, one equal vote in the Seanad panel election of their choice, and sweep away the present elitist political rotten borough system of elections.

All that is necessary is to vote No and pass the Quinn Zappone Bill.