

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CONDUCT OF MANY IRISH REFERENDAS AND HOW THE SITUATION CAN BE IMPROVED

Just after the Repeal of the 8th Amendment in May 2018, Mr Liam Weekes wrote a very informative article in *The Sunday Independent*, Mr. Weekes is in the Politics Department in UCC. Some interesting facts revealed are:

1, For voter registration, Ireland is rated as the 156th worst in the world coming between Uganda and Tanzania, in some people being registered a number of times at different addresses. Giving each individual a registration number would enable duplicates and triplicates et cetera to be detected electronically.

2, In general, a large section of the electorate does not vote at all. Voting could be made mandatory, as in Australia, for referenda or, like Italy, annulling the referendum if the turnout does not exceed a certain turnout.

3, Mr Weeks quoted the cynical comments of Josef Stalin that it is not the voters but the counting of the votes that matters. Electronic voting would appear to answer that problem more satisfactorily but preferably be done twice by two different groups. The divorce referendum in 1995 was very contentious. The stated results were very close but no thorough recount had been made just a count of bundles and all political parties favoured divorce. Those who opposed divorce considered they had won but lost their victory in the count.

4, The McKenna case at the Irish Supreme Court in 1995, unanimously decided that it was unconstitutional for the Government to campaign using public funds in a referendum using public money. The judgement came only a week before polling day. One could be justified in being suspicious that this also happened in the 2018 abortion referendum, to some degree.

5, Ireland is supposed to be a democracy and a referendum should express the views of all the people. The media, particularly State funded media should be impartial. Foreign funding should be absolutely forbidden as well as political activities of some social media groups which they brazenly admitted. A referendum should have a level playing field. The Referendum Commission should be chaired by a Supreme Court judge and should fearlessly give accurate information on the pros and cons of a referendum truthfully and without fear-ignoring the political and media spin doctors.

REFERENDA ON ABORTION

| Date and Subject | Votes as % of Turmout | | Turnout | % non- Voters Incl Spoiled Vote |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------|---------|------------------------------------|
| | Valid Votes Cast For | Against | | |
| 7/9/83 Abortion | 66.9% | 33.1% | | |
| As of Electorate | 35.9% | 17.8% | 53.7% | 46.3% (0.7% Sp.) |

Comment: The turnout in rural Ireland was surprisingly low. There was a rural bus strike, unusually bad weather and undoubtedly Garraet Fitzgerald's alarmist address to the nation on the eve of the election had some effect. Dr. Brendan Mary Walsh of the ESRI speculated that the rural turnout had been the same as in the previous General Election, the vote for the Amendment would have exceeded 72%,

| 24/11/92 | Abortion | Valid Votes | | Turmout | % Non Voter Inci Spoiked |
|----------|----------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-----------------------------|
| | | For | Against | | |
| | Votes | | | | |
| | Abortion Main Issue | 65.4 % | 34.6% | 68,2% | 31.8%(4.1%Sp) |
| | AS % of Electorate | 44.6% | 21.5% | | |
| | Abortion Travel | 62.4% | 37. 6% | 68.2 % | 31,8%(4.3%Sp) |
| | As % of Electorate | 42.5% | 25.6% | | |
| | Abortion information | 59.9% | 40.1% | 68,2% | 31,6%(4.2%Sp) |
| | As% of Electorate | 40.8% | 27.3% | | |

Comment: This was triggered by the 1992 Supreme Court decision in the X case allowing abortion if the woman was suicidal. The Reynolds Government proposal on the main issue was quite pro-abortion but it was forced to change it after protests from a number of gynaecologists and a firm stand by the then Archbishop Desmond Connell. The electorate followed their lead in endorsing the main issue but went the other way on travel and information. The main issue won but travel and information from a pro-life viewpoint.

| 6/3/2002 | Aborttion | Valid Votes Cast | | Turmpot | % Npn Voters Incl Spoil Votes |
|----------|--------------------|------------------|---------|---------|----------------------------------|
| | | Against | For | | |
| | AS % of Electorate | 50.4% | 49.6% | 42.9% | 57.1%(0.5%Sp) |
| | | 37.9% | ..37.3% | | |

Comment: The proposal here was excellent on the main issue of restoring the Amendment to its pre X case position. It left other issues like the protection of human embryos unresolved but with abortion itself out of the way, the pro-life movement could concentrate on those matters. The vote was narrowly lost due to the activities of Dana and John Smeaton of SPUC England which split portions of the pro-life movement.

| 23/5/2018 | Abortion | Valid Votes Cast | | Turnout | % Mon Voters Incl Spoiled |
|-----------|-------------------|------------------|---------|---------|------------------------------|
| | | For | Against | | |
| | As% of Electorate | 66.4% | 33.6% | 64.2% | 35. 8% (1.5%Sp) |
| | | 42.6% | 21.6% | | |

Comment: The abortion proposals were the most savage and ruthless the country had ever faced and pro-life support was the lowest it had ever been. The Together for YES Campaign was well funded with massive media and Government support, the latter most probably infringing the terms of the McKenna judgement. There was little unity on the pro-life side too

few speakers on the media and no literature sent to every house in Ireland through An POST. Of all referenda on abortion supporters of the pro-life cause as a % of the electorate was at its very lowest.