

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

■ Government back from the brink as snap December election averted — but FG parliamentary party told to prepare for a vote in mid-January



Charlie Flanagan: Under fire



Maurice McCabe: Whistleblower's allegations have engulfed the Government



Frances Fitzgerald: Embattled



Alan Shatter: Resigned



Leo Varadkar: Distracted



Enda Kenny: Tarnished



Noirin O'Sullivan: Retired



Martin Callinan: Retired

Elaine Loughlin, Daniel McConnell, Juno McEnroe, and Fiachra Ó Cionnaith

The country is facing a snap general election in January after Taoiseach Leo Varadkar refused to sack his Tánaiste, Frances Fitzgerald, over the Maurice McCabe email saga.

It came after Fianna Fáil decided to table a motion of no confidence in her, effectively ending the confidence and supply deal, which has underpinned the minority Government for 18 months.

Just four months into Mr Varadkar's premiership, Fianna Fáil called for Ms Fitzgerald's resignation after inaccurate information led the Taoiseach to inadvertently mislead the Dail on several occasions.

Mr Varadkar was greeted with "resounding applause" at a meeting of the Fine Gael parliamentary party called

for 10pm last night to rally support for Ms Fitzgerald.

The Taoiseach told his TDs and Senators to prepare for an election in mid-January. One minister suggested it could take place on Friday, January 12.

Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin has called an emergency meeting of his front bench for 9.30am today to discuss the full-blown political crisis.

Several ministers, speaking to the *Irish Examiner*, said an election earlier than that would cause major complications as it would see Mr Varadkar attending a Brexit summit in Brussels in mid-December as a "lame duck" Taoiseach and prevent the passage of the finance bill.

At an earlier meeting of Fine Gael ministers, Mr Varadkar told his colleagues he would not be sacking Ms Fitzgerald, did not expect her to resign and did not want her to resign.

Mr Varadkar told ministers he did not want a general election but would not allow the Tánaiste to be thrown under a bus.

"We will not allow Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil dictate who stays or who goes in our party. If it causes an election, we will be ready," one minister told the *Irish Examiner*.

Fine Gael sought to heap the blame for risking an election at the door of Fianna Fáil, who were accused of being "entirely irresponsible".

"It is Fianna Fáil's decision as to whether there is an election," Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy said. "To have an election now would be entirely irresponsible. The confidence and supply is a deal between us and Fianna Fáil. If they do not vote confidence in the Tánaiste, then they are breaching the agreement and we can't have a Government."

Justice Minister Charlie

Flanagan also became embroiled in the latest scandal when it was revealed that he was told of the email a full week before the Taoiseach was informed.

Despite having knowledge of the email, Mr Flanagan sat at the side of the Taoiseach as he gave incorrect information under questioning in the Dail on November 14, claiming the Department of Justice had "not been able to find any record of being informed before the fact of the legal strategy the Commissioner was going to pursue".

Mr Flanagan said he was told of the email "in passing" during a telephone conversation with the secretary general of the department Noel Waters on November 13, who told the minister he was retiring during that same discussion.

Fianna Fáil's justice spokesman Jim O'Callaghan said the party is ready to fight an election should Ms

Fitzgerald refuse to quit.

The Independent Alliance last night threw its support behind the Tánaiste, with a senior minister saying "if there is an election, so be it".

In the Dail, the Tánaiste made a last-ditch, passionate attempt to exonerate herself, strongly denying claims that she tried to suppress the email which detailed a legal strategy to discredit Sgt McCabe.

Sinn Féin decided to put down a motion of no confidence after their deputy leader, Mary Lou McDonald, said: "She failed Maurice McCabe and it is now abundantly clear that it is time for the Tánaiste to go."

Mr Martin spoke with Mr Varadkar for a second time last night in 24 hours, reiterating that Ms Fitzgerald must go. Despite suggestions of a compromise, both sides refused to back down.

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'Clear injustice' by denying Laundry survivors redress

Conall Ó Fátharta

Magdalene Laundry survivors have suffered a "clear injustice" by being wrongly denied access to compensation, according to the ombudsman.

A scathing report by Peter Tyndall, whose office spent almost a year investigating possible maladministration of the scheme by the department, found:

■ The department used an overly narrow interpretation of the scheme to deny women access to redress;

■ The department was overly reliant on evidence by religious groups "to the exclusion of other evidence" when wrongly refusing some

women access to redress. The personal testimony of survivors was only considered "as a last resort";

■ Some vulnerable survivors who lack capacity have yet to receive any payments and were "effectively forgotten" by the department;

■ The failings in how the department administered the scheme has served to reinforce the feelings of "marginalisation and deep hurt" of some survivors instead of contributing towards healing and reconciliation.

Mr Tyndall said that, from the start of the investigation, his office found "elements of injustice creeping into the way the scheme was administered".

The investigation found some women had been denied redress due to an extremely narrow interpretation of the scheme which meant that only women who were recorded as having been directly admitted to one of the 12 listed institutions were granted redress.

This resulted in some women and young girls who worked in the laundries, but had been admitted through training centres or industrial schools attached to the laundries, being denied access to the redress scheme.

Mr Tyndall said the department has refused to move away from this narrow interpretation and this was "difficult to account for". He said the women had "waited long enough for justice".

In its response, the secretary general of the department disagreed with this assertion and said allowing these women access to the

scheme would "involve double payments, as persons in industrial schools have had a separate compensation scheme" and "would involve a very significant increase in the number of potential applicants way beyond the number envisaged by the Government when the scheme was approved".

The ombudsman has recommended the department reconsider all applications — with a view to accepting them — where there is evidence a woman worked in one of the 12 listed institutions but was officially recorded as having been "admitted to" a training centre or industrial school located in the same building, attached to or located on the grounds of a laundry.

Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan said his department would give "full and careful consideration" to all the recommendations.

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We can help our children to engage in the true meaning of Christmas by helping others and focusing on presence, not presents. **Page 15**

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