

**Remarks for retirement in
Department of Finance
10 February 2006**

Metrics

- ❖ Pin down the metrics- won't hold you more than 10 minutes, that's 4 years service per minute.

Thanks

this occasion

- ❖ Gratified the turnout
- ❖ Thank Eamonn for the kind words. Some of it highly exaggerated but it won't stop me trading on it
- ❖ Appreciate gift, but will not open it now
- ❖ Thank CSD/Dept for this occasion, facilitating transition to pensionhood, bouquet for Nóra.

life more generally

- ❖ At the top of my personal thank you list - thank my wife Nora for her unfailing, and not always deserved, support, often in very difficult circumstances; for rearing our family and all that goes with that; and for putting up with me ... (so far). She's not here, in part for health reasons, and, in part, due to the Department's claims on my work/life balance, of which more anon.
- ❖ My younger son Eoghan is here in the crowd somewhere and our older lad is carrying on the family tradition in computer security in OZ.
- ❖ Like to get on the record at this stage that I have met and worked with a lot of very dedicated and competent people over the years in the Department, and outside it; they taught me a lot; their friendship is valued; and, of course, the mistakes are my own.

Things Change – from when I came in

- ❖ in **1967**: Jack Lynch was Taoiseach, CJH Minister for Finance, Whitaker Secretary, CHM AS “planning”, MFD Principal, Jim McMahon AP and ME.
- ❖ **Industry** chapter 3rd Programme, harassing the then I&C ► now, exiting nearly 40 years later, harassing its successor ETE (+DAF & Craggy)
- ❖ **staff evaluation**: AP was originally forbidden to show completed appraisal

form to the AO ► now we have “reverse appraisal”. The old form had categories for such qualities as “prolix”, “time spent on personal phone calls”, etc. An average rating was supposed to give you the required profile, but if you actually rated someone average on all counts, the picture painted would not encourage you to have anything to do with them. This reflected the negative bias to evaluation then prevailing..

- ◆ **Technology**: from snail-mail and manual copy-typing ► photocopying ► email ► dumb computer terminals ► PCs ► laptops ► mobiles ► palms - all of which assume you will do your own typing, and none of which is counted as increased productivity in the media perception of the Civil Service.
- ◆ All this starting from a period when I had the (possibly unique) distinction of having been **forbidden** by my superior officer to type on the job. Now is that progress or isn't it?
- ◆ Since my marriage in 1975, my Church **marriage certificate**, duly stamped by the diocese, served all manner of form filling. In submitting documentation for this retirement, the cert was refused by pensions section. I mention this solely as a commentary on social change.

Work/life balance

- ◆ A big change is the current emphasis on work/life balance. Achieving a reasonable work life balance still has a long way to go in the Civil Service, and from my own experience and observation, increasingly so at the higher levels. And this despite much **caricaturing of Civil Servants** in the media.
- ◆ I would hope for a better work-life balance in the future for those remaining in employment, but it will only happen if it is taken seriously by employers. This goes beyond mere goodwill and lip service. It involves changing the structure and quantity of the work and the adequate resourcing of whatever blocks of work remain.

Milestones

- ◆ There are a few personal milestones that stand out for me over the period I worked in the Department.
- ◆ **EU membership**: (and particularly its presidencies) liberated Ireland (or at least the civil service and particularly the Department of Finance) from the psychological domination of Whitehall.
- ◆ **DEPD (1977-79)**: while I served in that Department for all of its existence, I was never asked, nor did I apply, to join it. It simply grew up around the

- macro-economic section I was in at the time. It was an interesting, but flawed, experiment in the complex circumstances of the day.
- ❖ **EBRD** (1990 – 2001): particularly all that led to the setting up of the Bank just as we took over the EU Presidency from the French. Exciting times and Michael Somers has a Légion d'Honneur to prove it.
 - ❖ **NI**: developments from 1969 on, through Sunningdale and more recently the 1996 ceasefire and the 1998 Belfast Agreement with its EU topping.

Steady as she goes.

- ❖ I cannot avoid mentioning a few of the people who crewed for me, so to speak, and who have subsequently risen to fame or notoriety as the case may be.
- ❖ **John FitzGerald**: who combined an acute perception of policy needs with an unrivalled ability to milk econometric data for every scintilla of relevance.
- ❖ **Noel O'Gorman**: who brought serious economic insights to the work of the Department, but never, alas, in time for Dr Clarke's deadlines.
- ❖ **Brigid McManus**: who kept the EIB from losing the run of itself; minimised our contribution to the EU budget in the face of a hungry Commission; and made no small contribution to Michael Somers's standing with the late lamented President Mitterand.
- ❖ I'm not sure, on mature reflection, whether I ran the ship or they did..

Computers

- ❖ Some people will expect me to mention the “c” word – computers:
- ❖ when I came into the Department we did not have any interactivity with computers. We filled out data sheets; which were sent to OPW to be translated into **punched cards** ; these were returned for checking; were sent to Lands to be run on the computer; were again returned for debugging; and, finally ended up producing results for Wally Kirwan's “instant long term economic model of the Irish economy” ... a few weeks later!
- ❖ Incidentally, at that time, the Department got sold on **econometric modelling**. Anyone remember Abdul Khan? Eamonn Clarke ran the ensuing model, and I remember Anne Mulligan and another CO carrying the huge display panels down the corridor like a pair of plate glass glaziers. Someone asked “what the hell is that”. The response was instant. “That”

- retorted Anne “is the model”. May we never lose our sense of awe at such.
- ❖ I later came partly to grips with Troll and the economic model which ran on the main computer in Kilmainham. Today, if you **hang your computer** you can reboot. In those days, if you inadvertently got yourself into an infinite loop in Kilmainham, it required an abject call from the Department to the Sysop to sort it out. Great preparation for FOI.
 - ❖ I consider myself a “**friendly hacker**”: test the system and, if you beat it, tell the IT unit to fix it. I remember particularly being able to run any programme on the Department's PDP 11 minicomputer, which I was not entitled and should not have been able to do. That hole was quickly plugged. I also recollect sorting out the small matter of a lapsed software licence which threatened to put the national debt management programme out of commission for a week. Glorious days.

Next

- ❖ What will I do now to fill the horrendous gaps in my life from a lack of PQs, FOIs, AEVs, REVs, the PAC, SMI, PMDS and Big MACs, to mention but a few of the myriad of current mnemonics?
- ❖ I'm certainly hoping to avoid PMDS, or **Post-Management Distress Syndrome**.
- ❖ For starters, I will have to try and re-establish contact with my wife and family and persuade them that I still have the potential to evolve into a real human being.
- ❖ I might then find the time to add to my website.
- ❖ And, I might even persuade Bob Curran to vet my memoirs!
- ❖ [Meanwhile: all invited Foley's round the corner]