

## BOOK REVIEWS

GARRET FITZGERALD. *All in a Life: An Autobiography*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991, 674 pp. IR£24.99 hardback.

Until quite recently one barrier to the study of modern Irish history has been the reluctance of leading politicians to write memoirs. Political figures of such diverse backgrounds as Kevin Boland, Noel Browne, Gemma Hussey and John O'Connell have now put some of their recollections in print, but although all of these are either present or former ministers, they were privy to only part of the action taking place during their careers. Garret FitzGerald's *All in a Life* is a far more substantive work, and constitutes a real breakthrough in terms of its coverage of recent political events by a central participant. At the start of the book Dr FitzGerald declares that political autobiography is not history. That may be, but there is no doubt that this book is a fascinating history of its time in its own right as well as an indispensable source for professional historians.

The main outline of FitzGerald's life is fairly well known. Born in Dublin in 1926, he grew up in Bray and graduated in history and modern languages from UCD before joining the fledgling Aer Lingus. Here he was appointed a "research and analysis officer" in the sales department, and since no-one knew quite what this entailed, he had to invent his own work. He found himself increasingly interested in statistics and economics and entered the academic world in the late 1950s — he does not mention the perhaps apocryphal tale that when he left Aer Lingus he had to be replaced by three men and a computer. He became a Fine Gael Senator in 1965 — his political career perhaps hinged on the fact that he had spent family holidays at the hotel of one of the nominators, whose support proved decisive in securing him a nomination by just one vote. In 1969 he entered the Dáil, finding national politics "less emotionally strenuous" than the academic variety. As a TD from 1969 to the 1990s, Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1973 to 1977, Fine Gael leader from 1977 to 1987, and Taoiseach from 1981 to early 1982 and again from late 1982 to 1987, FitzGerald was one of the major players on the political stage for almost twenty years.

Autobiographies have to be read with care, of course, but this book is far removed from what might be the popular expectation that a politician's memoirs will be both self-serving and mendacious. Few would question the honesty of FitzGerald's version of events — which is not to say that the full story always emerges. The veil of discretion is drawn over cabinet discussions, for example, and while we learn that FitzGerald opposed the 1974 "Tullymarder", was concerned about the "heavy gang" allegations in 1976-77 and thought that President Ó Dálaigh was wise to refer the 1976 emergency legislation to the Supreme Court, we are not told how the other members of the cabinet lined up on these issues. Likewise, there is little information on exactly how the cabinet posts were shared between the two parties in the coalition governments of the 1980s, and the author's laconic comment, after listing the Labour ministries in the 1981-82 government, that Labour had not made "a particularly successful choice of portfolios", suggests that there is plenty more to be said about this.

Far from being relentlessly self-justifying, FitzGerald is very willing to acknowledge possible criticisms of his decisions and, indeed, to admit to mistakes. Early in the book he recalls from obscurity a youthful indiscretion, of the sort that other autobiographers might prefer to forget, in which he made some wild accusations of communism in

what he terms an "outrageous diatribe". Later, he admits that Liam Cosgrave was right, and he (along with nearly all the rest of the Fine Gael parliamentary party) was wrong, in his assessment of the Fianna Fáil government's security legislation of December 1972. He also acknowledges — somewhat belatedly — that his rash pledge in April 1981 to introduce a "pro-life" amendment was a mistake.

He recognises that the "conventional wisdom" is that his second government should have brought the financial situation under control more quickly after 1982, when public opinion was relatively conducive to policies of fiscal rectitude. This would have involved two or three years of harsh cutbacks but with the prospect of better times both economically and politically by 1987. FitzGerald is reluctant to see the strategy pursued as mistaken, suggesting that the alternative policy might have delivered a terminal shock to the economy. Instead, his last government pursued policies that engendered a feeling of four years of austerity and yet managed to double the debt, leading to an electoral debacle for Fine Gael, whose vote plunged in 1987 to its lowest level for thirty years. While FitzGerald takes understandable pride in having led Fine Gael to record heights in the early 1980s, there is little or nothing on the shell-shocked state in which he left the party in 1987.

FitzGerald's account of his last government, indeed, gives the impression of a degree of detachment from and disillusionment with many aspects of domestic politics. Of the six chapters on this government, three deal with Northern Ireland and one with the EC. It seems that the government decided early on that it was highly unlikely to be re-elected no matter what it did (p. 427), and economic policy-making became a "dreary" and demoralising process (p. 635). The rather unfortunate picture presented is of a government overawed, mesmerised and despondent in the face of the scale of the problems confronting it. The reader is left wondering how, if Dr FitzGerald's fatalistic analysis is correct, both his own minority government of 1981-82 and the 1987-89 Fianna Fáil government were able to take such decisive and courageous action on the economy and still enjoy high approval ratings from the public.

There seems little doubt, although it is not stated explicitly, that FitzGerald enjoyed his first term in office more than his last. Between 1973 and 1977 he carried the flag for Ireland within the EC (of which the country had become a member only two months before he became Foreign Minister), and earned plaudits both domestically and abroad. The Irish presidency of 1975, for which expectations had been so low that the French made contingency plans to take over in case the Irish effort collapsed in mid-stream, was an outstanding success, due in no small part to FitzGerald's own energy, openness to ideas, intellectual ability and fluent French.

Besides the EC, FitzGerald's other main responsibility as Foreign Minister was Northern Ireland, the subject that looms largest (with six chapters) in the book. Three chapters cover the Sunningdale Agreement and its aftermath. The Sunningdale negotiations appear to have been conducted in a surprisingly amicable spirit — indeed, the only acrimony to emerge was between the Departments of Finance and Foreign Affairs as to within whose sphere of responsibility certain matters lay. (Reading of this and other incidents, it is now less surprising than it seemed at that time that Richie Ryan was not given a post in FitzGerald's 1981 government. A certain exasperation with Conor Cruise O'Brien is also evident.) FitzGerald now feels that the government might have been best advised to hold a constitutional referendum on Articles 2 and 3 in the immediate aftermath of the Agreement but, as he acknowledges, this would have been a gamble.

Three further chapters deal with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, whose evolution is traced in considerable detail. Several points emerge from this. First, at an early stage FitzGerald identified joint authority as the most promising way forward and worked hard, without revealing the depth of his support for it, to ensure that the New Ireland Forum included it among the acceptable options. Second, a major motivation behind the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a fear that Sinn Féin might overtake the SDLP in popular support in the North and attempt to destabilise the Republic (pp. 496-497). Third, he faced an uphill battle in getting the British, especially Margaret Thatcher, to attach real priority to the Northern Ireland problem, and they often seemed unaware of aspects of the problem with which one would have thought any reader of the serious British newspapers would have been familiar. Fourth, in 1985 an American diplomat confirmed what FitzGerald had suspected, namely that the Americans had electronically eavesdropped on Anglo-Irish telex communications (p. 535).

In the face of the obstacles confronting him, the completion of the Agreement can be seen as a major achievement. The question remains as to just what the Agreement itself achieved, and the critical view that, however much it improved communication between the two governments, within the North itself it greatly increased unionist alienation without significantly reducing that of nationalists is not discussed. It evidently absorbed a huge amount of Dr FitzGerald's time and energies in 1984 and 1985, to the resentment of the southern electorate, as he acknowledges (p. 547). However, whatever verdict historians pass on the ultimate significance of the Agreement, they are unlikely to find a more authoritative account of its genesis than the one given here.

Many other unrelated but intriguing insights emerge from the book. In 1961, Charles Haughey, of all people, apparently attempted to draw FitzGerald into Fianna Fáil by asking him to analyse the party's election performance. In 1966 FitzGerald learned that John A. Costello, long-serving Fine Gael TD and twice Taoiseach, never actually got round to joining Fine Gael. In 1973, when he entered government, his income dropped by 40 per cent, while as Taoiseach from 1983 to 1987 he and his wife lived in what he plausibly describes as the most modest accommodation occupied by any prime minister: two rooms, afflicted by rising damp, with a corridor serving as a kitchen. In November 1980 George Colley (then Tánaiste) proposed a bizarre arrangement whereby he and other Fianna Fáil TDs would abstain on a vote and thereby secure the defeat of the Haughey government.

Perhaps it is unreasonable to ask for more, but there are aspects of the political process that Dr FitzGerald is in a position to analyse more fully than is done here. One concerns the rôle of the Taoiseach. It seems that FitzGerald may have felt able to wield more authority in his minority government of 1981-82 than in the majority 1982-87 government, because in the latter he was convinced that at all costs the government must remain in office to keep Fianna Fáil out (pp. 424-425). This led him to go to great lengths to prevent the government dividing along party lines, with the risk of a Labour walkout, and he acknowledges that some Fine Gael ministers felt that he allowed too much discussion of certain issues. Moreover, when discussing his somewhat botched reshuffle of 1986 he says he decided against dropping any ministers because there is "no tradition" of doing so in Ireland — a strikingly conservative argument at odds with his sometimes bold and imaginative initial appointments. It would be interesting to know whether he thinks this tradition (of which Albert Reynolds is evidently unaware) has merits that outweigh its obvious disadvantages.

A second aspect is the relationship between ministers and civil servants. His appreci-

ation of the officials in Foreign Affairs is evident, but he is clearly less impressed with the attitude of those in some other departments, especially Finance. In a number of cases he discusses they display a dogmatic opposition to any proposals for change, seemingly because this would make their lives more complicated, and on at least three occasions erroneous information appears to have been passed to the government (pp. 403, 446-447, 454). This key relationship is strikingly under-researched in Ireland, and FitzGerald's tantalising glimpses of it confirm that it is a subject overdue for analysis.

All in all, one could not expect a better set of memoirs from a still practising politician. The book is immaculately produced (apart from the consistent misspelling of the name of George Shultz), excellently indexed, and written with clarity and style. We can but hope for a similarly sized and equally honest volume of autobiography from Charles Haughey.

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ALAN MATTHEWS. *EC Trade Policy and the Third World. An Irish Perspective.* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan in association with Trocaire, 1991. xiv + 246 pp. IR£15.00 (approx.) hardback.

This book by Alan Matthews, Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at Trinity College, Dublin, is a timely contribution to the literature on North-South trade policy. Its particular value lies in its attempt to equip the development lobby for debate in this arena of increasing importance for developing countries (LDCs). The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and other trade arrangements have long been the domain of technicians and industry lobby groups, where "the LDCs' interests often go by default" (p. xi). The author therefore provides the reader with a clear and very detailed review of the implications for LDCs of recent developments in world trade and investment, the issues currently under discussion in the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations, possible changes in the EC's trade policy, and what this means for Ireland. While drawing on a wide range of academic sources, the text and its statistical tables are accessible to the uninitiated.

Scattered throughout the text are several questions frequently being posed by non-government organisations (NGOs), whether in Ireland, the rest of the EC, or even further afield, together with a discussion of priorities for lobbying. For example, in the chapter on global trends in trade and investment, Matthews addresses the issue of who benefits from outward-oriented industrialisation, and whether alternative strategies are possible. While recognising the risks and uncertainties, he concludes LDCs increasingly find outward-orientation in their interest (p. 30). An objective of the book, therefore, is to examine what changes are needed in EC trade policy in particular, to ensure this is a real option for LDCs.

The author may not go far enough for some NGOs, however, in discussing the extent of changes in LDC trade and other economic policies. While generally favourable towards trade liberalisation, he does not debate how far or how quickly LDCs should liberalise, the associated social and economic costs of restructuring, and the