

# Hated USC cost us 30 seats, FF's Martin claims

Party's last budget 'a killer at the polls'

By **Niamh Lyons**  
Political Correspondent

THE Universal Social Charge cost Fianna Fáil 30 seats in the last election, party leader Micheál Martin has claimed.

In an interview with the Irish Daily Mail, Mr Martin acknowledged that the tax was unpopular and labelled the party's last budget during its period in power an electoral 'killer'.

The USC was intended to bundle income and health levies. When first introduced, it was calculated on all earnings with the lowest threshold set at €4,000.

'Politically it was very damaging,' Mr Martin said. 'It was sold originally as a merger of levies and PRSI but it turned out to be much



Martin: Wouldn't abolish charge

Mr Martin said of the revenue netted by the charge: 'It's €4 billion per year. We're not going to promise to abolish the USC. That would be the kind of promise that parties cannot make if they are being honest but you could lay out a programme over a number of years to reduce its impact.'

'We are conscious that we need to be careful of our services. There is no getting away from it: the last two or three budgets have sacrificed our health budgets at the expense of everything else.'

'We didn't think this last budget (October 2014) was the time to introduce tax cuts. We felt they should have done more in acute hospital services and medical cards for older people.'

'The USC was an emergency measure. Without it, the State could not have managed to fund services, that's the reality.'

He said Fianna Fáil party figures

have not yet devised their tax policies but reforming the USC will be part of their plan.

The party would devise specific tax policies in advance of the next election, he said, by way of reducing the impact on lower paid workers and introducing tax credits.

He said: 'The Government are trying to be too clever by half in saying they haven't raised income tax, they got rid of the PRSI allowance which was a regressive move and they have introduced property tax and water charges. They say they haven't touched pensioners but they got rid of the phone allowance, increased prescription charges and took six weeks off the fuel allowances.'

However Enda Kenny described Fianna Fáil as the 'wreckers' of the country and said he wants 2015 to be the year people feel the benefits of the growing economy.

He said: 'Politically, I want 2015 to be the year of hope and achievement. I want 2015 to be the year that people around the country will be clear in the decision that they're going to have to make in the spring of 2016 and that is, don't return the wreckers and don't give it to those who might destroy the hard-won gains you've had.'

'We'll beat the target of 3 per cent deficit, but where we want to be is not just lost in a maze of statistics here. This is [about] people; men and women in the country where we want to see, if not the happiness, certainly the excitement of getting a job and having the opportunity to follow their careers.'

Mr Kenny said he will lead the party into the next general election as Taoiseach. He said: 'I expect to run a really energetic, vigorous campaign through 2015 and into the spring of 2016.'

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## 'Decisions had to be taken'

higher than people anticipated. It was electorally very damaging. What's done is done but the bottom line is that decisions had to be taken and two thirds of the fiscal correction was undertaken by Fianna Fáil in the last Government.

'The €6 billion budget we introduced was a killer electorally, but it had to be done. The present Government were able to piggy-back on all of that but electorally, yes, the USC did take 30 seats off us.'

But he said the party will not abolish the USC if it forms part of the next Government, and he criticised Enda Kenny for introducing tax deductions too early. October's budget gave relief to those earning up to €70,000 and cut USC rates.

# HSE probes care given to murder-suicide father

By **Kevin Keane**

THE HSE is to investigate whether Michael Greaney - the Corkman suspected of stabbing himself and his wife to death and injuring his daughter - was released from psychiatric care too soon.

The shocking murder-suicide occurred in Cobh just weeks after he was assessed as posing no risk to his family by a psychiatrist.

He had recently been released from the Central Mental Hospital, where he was undergoing treatment after a court found him not guilty of false imprisonment and assault by reason of insanity.

The 53-year-old, who was said to be under financial pressure, tried to smother a woman last year with a cloth covered in shoe polish. Mr Greaney was remanded to the Central Mental Hospital for assessment following the case in



Mentally ill: Michael Greaney

February but by March 20 he was returned to Cork Circuit Criminal Court where Judge Sean Ó Donnabháin discharged him.

He was released upon undertaking that he would live away from his family home and obey the instructions of a psychiatrist. It has emerged, however, that

on October 29, Mr Greaney was granted an application lifting this requirement. This was made by the court on foot of a psychiatric report which assessed that he posed no risk to his family.

Although she was admitted to hospital with life-threatening injuries, his daughter Michelle Greaney is now expected to recover from the injuries.

Her younger sister Sarah, 16, who came across the horrific scene, is being cared for by her extended family. Gardaí will interview both daughters to piece together the exact details of what happened last Sunday.

The HSE has confirmed that an internal review is being carried out into the circumstances of the incident. In a statement, the HSE said it has informed the Mental Health Commission of its internal investigation.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# Aim high, she said, and you will have no regrets in life

WE stood silently in the graveyard. The winter sun could not drive away the cold. As she was lowered into the soil, her 19-year-old grandson kissed a white rose and placed it on her casket.

And so it was that, last Saturday, we buried my dear friend Norma Dagg. That she died over Christmas was nothing out of character.

This woman of supreme elegance was never going to slip quietly into the night.

I first met Norma when I was a young child. Her sons and I competed together on the show jumping circuit. Even then she resembled a movie star. Beautiful in every way, she distinguished herself as a loving mother, caring wife and wonderful hostess. Her house in Wicklow was a hive of hospitality. And there, at the centre of it all, was this graceful lady who made everyone feel as though they were at home.

In her son Trevor, she gave this young boy a lifelong friend. She gave me some of the most memorable summers of my life. She also introduced me to the person who would accompany me to the altar as my best man.

Most of all, she taught me the virtue of courage. I spent the summer of 1985 with the Dagg's. Towards the end, I was riding in her paddock when out she walked with a face of stone.

'Never let anything stand in your way,' she thundered. 'Always aim high and you will have no regrets. For even if you fail, at least you will have tried and you can always try again.'

She then took a pull of her cigarette and simply strolled away.

Norma knew I was facing a big competition and was not confident about my chances. She knew what I needed to hear and heard it I did. It was a lesson in life that I never forgot.

She was the quintessence of beauty, dignity and joy. And yet, when required, she could be as tough as nails. Then again, what mother would not defend her family to the end?

Norma Dagg lost her husband George in 1992 when he was just 58. So began her long descent into the land of shadows. It was as if the joy had evaporated from her life.

When she attended my wedding in 2000, her spirit had returned and she was as radiant as ever. If I cling to that memory now, it is because I would never see her look so happy again. Soon after, she would confront the greatest challenge of her life. That she did so with grace and charm was characteristic of someone who knew

the true meaning of courage. Despite showing obvious symptoms of Alzheimer's, Norma continued to squeeze every droplet out of life. She continued to dress as if she were on show to the world. She continued to host and help in whatever way she could.

Even when her beautiful light could barely pierce the darkness, she persisted in doing odd jobs and assisting fellow patients. Kindly, courageous and caring: that is what she was until the darkness eventually quenched the last glimmer of light and love. And even though she lingered on in that terrible state for some years, her aura never seemed to fade.

My good and beautiful friend died just as we were about to celebrate Christmas. Typical, I thought to myself, for it was a time of the year when she really came into her own. Surrounded by her beloved family, she would switch into overdrive and produce a most fabulous feast.

Her voice had been silent for a long time, but as we stood at her graveside I could hear it plainly. And this is what it seemed to say: 'Live as I have lived and you will have no regrets. Smile as I have smiled and you will have endless joy. Walk as I have walked and you shall go to your eternal rest in peace.'

NORMA Dagg moved through life filling our minds with lasting memories. In time, her mind would be unable to retain those wonderful moments. It doesn't matter, for those of us lucky enough to have known her will never let them die.

We are on the eve of a new year. Tomorrow, we have the chance of a fresh start, a new beginning when life can take a very different turn. My message to you is one she gave me long before the silence stole her beautiful voice. Always aim high and you will have no regrets. For even if you fail, at least you will have tried and you can always try again. In everything, be strong, courageous and dignified. That way, even if things don't turn out as expected, you will walk away with honour.

He kissed the white rose and laid it on her casket. As he did, I placed my own bouquet of love beside it. It was the least I could do for this beautiful person whose life had, in so many ways, shaped my own.

And then we went back to Christmas, back to family, friends and Yuletide joy. The lady we left behind would not have had it any other way.

Instead, she took an inimitable pull of her cigarette, smiled and, having brought us all together, simply strolled away.

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