

# Careerist Catherine

## *The Special Liberal, Unenvironmental, Agile Genius of Catherine Martin*

By Kevin Higgins

Catherine Martin carries herself with the unshakeable confidence of someone who has designated themselves a member of the ruling classes. Even when she is saying absolutely nothing, she says that nothing with the declarative authority of someone who knows her nothing inside out. And Ms Martin's confidence is not without its basis. Paid up member of the Conor Cruise O'Brien wing of the establishment, Colm Tóibín, was recently on RTE radio whining his worries about Sinn Féin, even comparing them to the Nazis.

Pampered posh-lad 'liberals', such as Colm, worry that a government led by a woman such as Mary Lou McDonald might favour the great unrinsed over people such as himself. They have no such worries about Catherine Martin. Every time Catherine Martin goes on television and says her well said nothing, people with way above average incomes, who think the State belongs to them, sigh contentedly.

Minister Martin impresses such people in another fundamental way. Since her ascension to government, and indeed during the

coalition-forming process, which took several months, she has displayed a careerist ruthlessness which people who read Kathy Sheridan's columns in the *Irish Times* admire.

Whereas your average common or conservatory anchovy-eating liberal loathes the likes of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders for their earnestness, and the fact that they appear to mean it when they say they want to change things, they love Catherine Martin for being even more of an obvious political fraud than most of her male colleagues, and for her dedication to maintaining things as they more or less are.

They think a woman behaving in such a way has something to do with feminism and that it means she "knows how government works". Such people admire what they call "realism", and see Catherine Martin as a realist they can get on board with. It must be said that when it comes to fooling those who want to be fooled Martin is a special genius in the tradition of Henry Kissinger.

In terms of the inner hierarchies of the Green Party, she is 24-carat establishment. Her brother is Vincent P. Martin, barrister and former Monaghan Independent Councillor, who joined the Green Party in the mid noughties. In 2009 Vincent took a hiatus from politics to concentrate on his legal work, and Catherine briefly assumed his seat on Monaghan County Council.

She was elected to the Dáil in 2016 for the new Dublin-Rathdown constituency, in which election she was pretty much the only evidence of a Green recovery. Her husband Francis Noel Duffy joined her in the Dáil as TD for Dublin South West in 2020.

Martin was the Green Party's lead negotiator in the process which led to the party, again, absconding from the progressive side of Irish politics to prop up a very battered and jaded Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael. She endorsed the coalition deal which emerged and argued in favour of it in the media.

Such "realism" will no doubt have given people like Colm Tóibín a very warm feeling. But Catherine Martin's genius is such that she at the same time managed to pose as being the voice of those younger, more radical Greens, sceptical about hopping in for an extended threesome with the musty near-corpses of FF/FG.

During the coalition-forming process she challenged Eamon Ryan for the party leadership and almost won, despite apparently agreeing entirely with his strategy for the party. At the time *Village* noted: "Catherine Martin again says nothing - whatsoever - about environmental policy in her ten-minute speech at the hustings. You'd assume she knows nothing about it. [Her speech was] all about understanding rural Ireland, how science isn't enough, about the heart, and getting more TDs".

Her ability to create the impression of being in some way opposed to the party leadership while actually endorsing everything Eamon Ryan was doing is, in part, to do with identity politics. Catherine Martin is a woman, and a refined woman, and so must be progressive or, even in some bizarre sense 'left wing'. The same way Katherine Zappone was 'left wing'. Martin has played the same game of creating impressions in government.

In August she publicly demanded that she be allowed to attend the Covid cabinet-subcommittee to make the case for a quicker opening up of the live-events industry. Again, Martin is a total insider, Minister for Tourism, Arts, Culture, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media – and Deputy Leader of the Green Party – but uses a flagrant breach of normal protocols for a Cabinet member to give the impression that she was in some way opposed to this aspect of the government's Covid-era restrictions.

Such extreme political agility will be seen as flaky by many. But it will have gone down a treat with the upper echelons of arts administration in Ireland, most of whom share a politics, and an agility, similar to Catherine Martin's. She is their perfect Minister. 



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