

## Lynch, Fionán (Finian) by Diarmaid Ferriter

Lynch, Fionán (Finian) (1889–1966), politician and judge, was born 17 March 1889 in Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry, fourth son of Finian Lynch of Kilmakerin, Cahirciveen, national teacher, and Ellen Maria Lynch (née McCarthy). Educated at St Brendan's, Killarney; Rockwell College, Co. Tipperary; and Blackrock College, Dublin, he graduated BA (RUI) from UCD, and then attended St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (1909–11), where he qualified as a teacher. He became a teacher in Swansea, south Wales, where he formed a branch of the Gaelic League and taught Irish. In April 1912 he began working as a national schoolteacher at St Michan's school, Dublin, became an active member of the Keating branch of the Gaelic League, and was recruited into the IRB by Seán Mac Diarmada (qv). He also joined the Irish Volunteers in 1913, and became captain of F Coy, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, Dublin Brigade. With Piaras Beaslaí (qv) he founded Na hAisteoirí, a drama company dedicated to the production of plays in Irish; many of its members fought during the 1916 rising. In the months before the rising Lynch temporarily stood down from the Volunteers after his school manager told him he would be sacked if he did not. Learning that a rising was imminent, he rejoined the Volunteers, and over the Easter weekend commanded the detachment that guarded Bulmer Hobson (qv) to prevent him from interfering with Volunteer mobilisation. During the rising he was involved in heavy fighting in the North King St. area and was subsequently imprisoned.

With Austin Stack (qv) and Thomas Ashe (qv) he led the Mountjoy hunger strike of May 1917, after which he was released under the general amnesty. In August of that year he was reimprisoned for making an inflammatory speech, and was released in November following a further hunger strike. He was imprisoned again in May 1918 on the same charge during the 'German plot' allegations and was released in August 1919, after which he helped to plan the escape of other prisoners. Elected a Sinn Féin TD for Kerry South in December 1918 and for Kerry–Limerick West in May 1921, Lynch served as assistant secretary to the treaty delegation in London (October–December 1921), where he was largely responsible for organising the living arrangements at the two Irish headquarters. A supporter of the treaty, he addressed pro-treaty rallies with Michael Collins (qv), and from January to August 1922 was minister for education with the provisional government, at the same time as Michael Hayes (qv) was minister for education for Dáil Éireann. Possible conflict was avoided by the pragmatic division of duties, under which Hayes took responsibility for intermediate and higher education, and Lynch for primary education. It was also left to Lynch to clarify the relationship between the new provisional government and the board of commissioners of intermediate education, which was not abolished till 1923. These developments, however, were overshadowed by the beginning of the civil war, where military considerations took precedence over civic responsibilities. Required to serve in the army, in July 1922 Lynch was appointed a vice-commandant of the south-western division with the rank of commandant-general,

commanding a unit of Dublin soldiers in Co. Kerry, where on occasion he had to endure being ambushed, leading a fellow commandant to note ironically that his constituents did not seem to think much of him. However, the reluctance of former colleagues to attack him may have ensured his survival during the war – Frank Henderson (qv) of Dublin's No. 1 brigade of the IRA told Ernie O'Malley (qv) of his reluctance to become involved in reprisal shootings after Free State executions, commenting: 'I didn't like that order. I could have shot Eamon Duggan and Fionán Lynch, for they went home every night drunk, but I left them alone.'

After the civil war Lynch was elected a Cumann na nGaedheal TD for Co. Kerry, a seat he held till 1937, after which he represented the constituency of Kerry South (1937–44). He served as minister for fisheries (1922–8) and minister for lands and fisheries (1928–32), and retained his interest in education; he supported the Irish National Teachers Organisation policy on the Irish language during the 1920s, commenting that he was entirely opposed to attempting to teach subjects through Irish where Irish was not the known language. In 1931 he qualified as a barrister. After Fianna Fáil came to power and during the rise of the Blueshirts he spoke at public meetings with Eoin O'Duffy (qv), and they were attacked by a crowd in Tralee in October 1933.

After the fall of O'Duffy and the reorganisation of Fine Gael, W. T. Cosgrave (qv) appointed a front bench designed to represent the various groups in the party, which witnessed former ministers, including Desmond FitzGerald (qv), Patrick Hogan (qv), and Lynch, relegated to the back benches. Lynch served as leas ceann comhairle of the dáil (1938–9). Having built up a legal practice, he retired from politics in October 1944 and was subsequently appointed a circuit court judge in the north-west district, retiring from the bench in 1959. He died suddenly at his home in Dartry, Co. Dublin, on 3 June 1966, survived by his wife Brighid (née Slattery; m. 1919), a native of Tralee, and by their six sons and one daughter.

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Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Lynch, Fionán (Finian)', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), vol 5, pp 623–624.

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