

Ireland's Justice Minister Survives Vote Of No Confidence

Our Special Correspondent **PETER KELLY** spoke with Minister **McEntee** in an Exclusive inside Dail Eireann as No Confidence Vote and Debate unfolded



joined by Social Democrat and Labour TDs in the heated Dáil debate which saw party leaders and senior politicians clash emotively across the aisle.

The Minister for Justice was vigorously and vocally backed by government colleagues including Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and Tánaiste Micháel Martin who flanked her on the front bench. Helen McEntee when questioned by this correspondent displayed her defiance in the face of unprecedented political pressure.

"Dublin is a city of over a million and we have a safe city," she insisted. "As Minister for Justice I am doing a lot of work with those businesses and communities to make sure that people are safe and that they feel safe."

The Meath TD was eager to back Garda Commissioner Drew Harris, and his force in the face of the riots.

"It was obviously a really quickly evolving situation. We've seen these types of things go on into the next day and sometimes multiple days in other jurisdictions," she said.

"In Dublin, Gardai in a very short space of time brought what could have been an even more disastrous situation under control in a number of hours.

"It was the largest ever mobilization of Garda than ever before. We had up to 250 Members out dealing with one single incident."

She continued, "the following morning you had 32 people before the courts and there will be more arrests to make sure those responsible are brought to justice."

But what of the famously strained Garda resources and capacity on the ground? The Fine Gael TD and party confidante of Taoiseach Leo



Ireland's Minister for Justice Helen McEntee (Peter Kelly)

Varadkar was resolute: "We are already building up our Public Order [Riot Squad] Units, increasing training and bringing in extra resources such as water cannon and pepper spray. These are all underway."

But Ms McEntee held back on militarizing Ireland's police force: "It's not about having all these people on standby all the time. I want this to be a single incident, and that it doesn't happen again. But we will now have an even greater ability to mobilize even more."

The parliamentary heave to remove Ireland's youngest Minister for Justice was dismissed as a "stunt" by Ms McEntee's colleagues whose support she described as showing that the Fianna Fáil-

Fine Gael coalition government remains united.

"I'm committed, focused, have moved on, and I'm already bringing important Memos to Cabinet to resolve our issues," she said.

The 37-year old Justice Minister is particularly eager to reassure America's Irish diaspora that the homeland's capital city is safe. She told the *Irish Examiner USA*: "I certainly encourage people, if you haven't been here before, take a trip home, come visit us. And if you have, I reassure you that I am doing everything to make sure people are safe over the Christmas period, into the New Year and far beyond."

Minister McEntee survived the Vote of No Confidence by 83 votes to 63.

Irish teenagers have been ranked second for reading skills in a major global study comparing education standards in 81 countries.

Ireland was also in the top 15 for maths and science in the latest results published by the Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa).

An initiative of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the Pisa study measures the ability of 15-year-olds to use reading, maths and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

First run in 2000, the latest Pisa was conducted in 2022 and involved representative samples across the 81 participating countries of around 690,000 students.

The results were representative of the 29 million 15-year-olds who live in those countries.

In Ireland, 5,569 students in 170 schools participated. They scored above the OECD average in the three areas examined.

In reading, Ireland rose to second in the global table, from eighth in 2018, even though its mean score of 516 was down by two on the previous assessment.

In science, the mean score for Irish teenagers was 504, up by eight points on 2018 – a result which saw Ireland ranked 12th in the overall standings, up from 22nd four years previously.

In maths, the mean score was down by eight points to 492, but Ireland's overall global ranking improved from 21st to 11th.

Ireland outperformed countries like the UK in all three areas tested. In 2018, the UK scored higher than Ireland in science and maths.

Compared with 2018, mean performance across OECD member countries fell by 10 points in reading and almost 15 points in maths. The drop in maths was almost three times the size of any previous change between assessments.

