

Belfast News March 2011 Election Special

The Irish General election took place on February 25th 2011, following the collapse of the Irish coalition of Fianna Fáil and the Green Party. After the economic meltdown from the Celtic Tiger Ireland needed a change of tactic to continue after they were forced to take a bailout from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund for a multi-billion euro offer to help alleviate its debt burden.

Everyone expected that Fianna Fáil, the main opposition party would take over from its failing predecessors. Fianna Fáil under the helm of now Taoiseach Enda Kenny took 36.1% of the first preference votes and a swing from their previous results of +13.6%. However Kenny's party fell short of a majority result and had to rely on the Irish Labour Party (with Eamonn Gilmore as leader) to secure the Dáil. Fianna Fáil whimpered from power in the worst defeat of a sitting government since the formation of the Irish state in 1921, losing more than half of their first-preference votes from 2007 and garnered only 20 seats. They fell to the third-largest party in the 31st Dáil--the first time since the 1927 Dáil election that it will not be the largest party in the chamber.

However the surprise result for the Irish election was the growth of Sinn Féin in the Republic and the rise of the newest TD Gerry Adams. The Sinn Féin President's choice of moving his political career to the South was regarded by many as uncertain future. Many question – how would he represent the people of Louth while residing and maintaining a presence in the North. In many nationalist circles it was seen as the first step toward democratic control in the whole of Ireland. Sinn Féin has become the first party to have representatives in both the North and South's political institutions. Mr Adams secured an overwhelming victory in his Louth constituency with 21.7% of first preference votes totalling 15,072.

Many critics were silenced by the large preference of votes heralding a new platform for the Sinn Féin. Some have even suggested that this is the first step toward a United Ireland gaining public and political support island wide! Other critics are still uncertain of the effect this result will have on Northern politics as our own elections are fast approaching.

Northern Ireland's local and Assembly elections is on May 5th 2011. This will be the first election since the proposed reform of local government. It is expected to be a cat and dog fought race between Sinn Féin and the DUP over control of the Assembly. Many unionist fear if their turnout is not greater than the Catholic vote we may have our first Sinn Féin First Minister in the Assembly.

It is unclear right now of party manifestos and predicted results in the forthcoming elections as the

Northern Parties are still coming to terms with the Tory cuts to services here as well as accepting a new budget for the North.

We will keep you up to date with all election news at your monthly meetings and can I suggest for those who are interested to check out the local press agencies here of BBC and RTE for more information.

Lá Fhéile Pádraig Sona Duit to you all!

(Happy St Patricks Day)

Slan

Orla Adams