

## **THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN IRELAND JUNE 4<sup>TH</sup> 2009**

My last political update was informing you all of the upcoming European elections on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009. As you can imagine we (Sinn Fein Activists) have been extremely busy preparing for the election. We began several months ago making sure all of our supporters were on the Electoral Register therefore enabling them to be able to vote. The electoral office was making it very difficult for Nationalists to get on the register asking people to supply their office with utility bills to verify they lived at that address even though they had previously been registered at that address. I do not know if your process in America is the same that because you were registered at an address does not guarantee that you will remain on the register. In West Belfast our activists by going door to door every evening were successful in having 5,000 people put back on the electoral register. This can be exhausting work, and really not our job to do but it became very apparent early on that the Electoral office was working against us. We have to be aware that they are part of the British Establishment and they will do what they can to thwart any success in Nationalist areas.

One of the reasons for this was that there was a split within the Unionist Political Parties and a very real apathy within unionist's communities. If I were to be honest most people within Ireland would have apathy towards the European Elections, as they cannot see the benefits to them on the ground. It was worse in Unionist areas because there were 3 candidates wanting their vote. They were Diane Dodds who was the Democratic Unionist Party candidate, Jim Nicholson Ulster Unionist Party, and the real problem was Jim Allister who has started a new party called Traditional Unionist Voice.

Jim Allister was a sitting Member of the European parliament but had been elected 4 years ago as a member of the D.U.P. He resigned from the D.U.P and formed his new party T.U.V, as he was opposed to power sharing with Sinn Fein I.R.A. as he constantly refers to us as being. This antiquated rhetoric is insulting and is not helpful to moving the process forward but it appeals to the hard line loyalist who does not want the peace process to work and he knew that it would give them a voice and hurt the D.U.P. He was right!

The election took place on June 4<sup>th</sup> and the votes were placed in a safe place until the counting began on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June in Belfast. The reason for the delay in the count was that in the Republic of Ireland and other parts of Europe, their elections were held on different days.

The bookmakers across the 6 counties were predicting that the Sinn Fein Candidate Bairbre De Brun would top the poll, as were the newspapers and television reporters. Everyone was on edge in the city as it became apparent there was a poor turnout across Ireland in general. In the north there was a 43% turnout, which is poor but it would confirm the apathy I mentioned earlier.

At 1pm today June 8<sup>th</sup> Bairbre De Brun topped the poll and exceeded the quota required and was duly elected once more as an M.E.P to the horror of the Unionists.

The D.U.P had topped the poll every year since 1979 and their expressions showed shock and horror. Jim Allister had succeeded in splitting the Unionist vote as he got 66,000 first preference votes and the damage was done. They were clearly devastated but kept the stiff upper lip as usual. No unionist candidate reached the quota needed and it went back to the count based on transference of votes. When the next count was realised the U.U.P Jim Nicholson was elected and the D.U.P had again to wait until the third count was finished. Eventually at 5 pm this evening Diane Dodds of the D.U.P was elected and she was very angry and her whole body language reflected this. The Electoral Officer took all the candidates to the stage and announced the results to the people at the count and each successful candidate was able to give their speech and as you can imagine there was lots of heckling from the body of the hall. Bairbre began her speech in gaelic thanking all those who had helped her in the election etc and the unionist were shouting her down and turning their backs to her whilst having the union jack flag wrapped around them but she was dignified and continued and when all of them had spoken she went along the line shaking their hands and congratulating the others which was being televised and Diane Dodds refused to shake hands with Bairbre. I think we are still taking baby steps forward we are not there yet but God loves those that try. I am sorry I did not tell you our Dublin candidate Mary Lou Mc Donald was unsuccessful and did not get elected but you cannot win them all.

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