

ON THE DAY OF THE ENGLISH EXAM, POLLING TURNED INTO A SHAKESPEARE DRAMA

Cork
broadcaster
David
Young
continues his weekly
column on the
elections in Cork



Clock ticks for Government

GOOD old Will Shakespeare. His spirit lives. Fearing that Saturday might offer but a dearth of election drama, his posthumous charm coaxed the elements to conspire to steer the Leaving Certificate off course and into Saturday.

English Paper 2 teased not only the beleaguered school-leavers but also many of the tally folk from their count centre teams (to supervise exams instead). Political parties had to look to their benches and re-jig their number crunchers.

Saturday's plot may have been scribed well in advance: Fianna Fáil to be usurped by their tribal nemesis, Fine Gael. And so it transpired. But nationally, it was the Green party that had the meltdown. Despite their best-intentioned environmental efforts, they all but evaporated.

Sunday daybreak revealed the carnage across the state. In Cork County Council, it was not quite the summer blockbuster. Fine Gael still has the bulk of the seats but they did drop from 24 to 22 while Fianna Fáil careened from 16 to 12.

Labour bumped up two to seven; Sinn Féin held their seat; but it was the Independents who walked through the open door beckoning 'change', leaping from two to six.

In Bandon, Fianna Fáil breathed a sigh of relief: Party leader Alan Coleman topped the poll, having run solo.

Fine Gael's Kevin Murphy and Veronica Neville followed but not without the latter having to tussle with Labour's fresh-faced Gearóid Buckley.

Skibbereen heralded Fine Gael's Jim Daly at the top of the poll. But it kept the surprise for second place.

Former Fine Gael-er, Declan Hurley eclipsed all expectations as an Independent, including his own, by also exceeding the quota and landing a seat at FG's expense. Labour's Brendan Leahy was the only change to the old FG-FF party line-up, ousting FF's Joe Carroll.

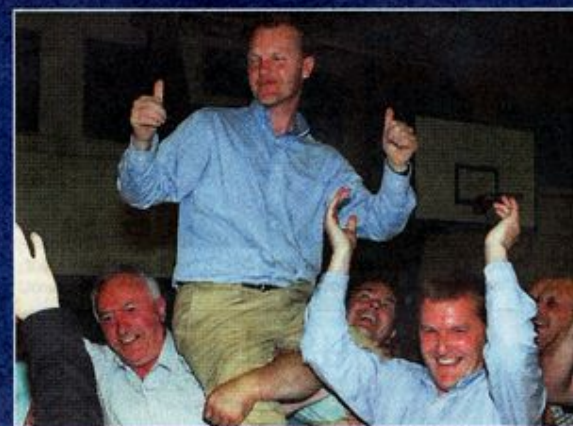
Bantry had promised a few sparks.

But the fuse barely lit. The Fine Gael trio of seats were retained while Fianna Fáil kept their two. Mary Hegarty (FG) replaced John O'Shea (FG) - an inspired party choice with the embattled O'Shea bowing out with half the first preference votes of his candidate colleague.

Macroom resisted the Fianna Fáil incursion - Mark O'Keefe (FF) couldn't quite carry his ballot-box momentum from Carrigaline.

Martin Coughlan of Labour held his seat to join Fine Gael's Derry Canty and Michael Creed in keeping Fianna Fáil to a single berth, taken by Aindrias Moynihan.

Where Fianna Fáil once held three seats in Carrigaline, they've now been reduced to a single one.



Celebrations by Cllr Seamus McGrath and his supporters provide one high point on a dark day for Fianna Fáil.

Picture: Mike English



Timmy Collins, Independent candidate, Kanturk, is hoisted shoulder high after his election.

Picture: Cillian Kelly



Cllr Martin Coughlan, Macroom, celebrates at the Gurrabraher count centre for Cork County Council.

Picture: Darragh Kane

Seamus McGrath topped the poll, but the Micheál Martin vote-getting machine couldn't convince voters his brother Pádraig was worth a punt. Deirdre Forde's defection to Fine Gael worked spectacularly, she came in second - and ushering in four seats for her new party. Paula Desmond kept Labour's foothold and Independent David Boyle snatched a seat at the last.

Labour's John Gilroy took the top of the poll in Blarney. Fine Gael kept their two seats in Gerry Kelly and Pat Burton; the latter had simply taken the baton from Tomás Ryan. Fianna Fáil may have lost ground here (in vote percentage terms) but Dan Fleming kept their slot safe.

Midleton returned with two independents: Noel Collins and Sean O'Connor. Ominously, in name terms, Councillor Ahern lost his seat. Michael Martin and Mary Linehan-Poley couldn't land either for Fianna Fáil whereas Fine Gael, in Michael Hegarty and Barbara Murray, comfortably returned. Labour's John Mulvihill (Snr) eased back into County Hall and Sandra McLellan picked up where Martin Hallinan left off for Sinn Féin.

In Kanturk, Marie 'Shamrock' Murphy (FF) fell but the mooted fall-guy, and party colleague, Michael Donegan held on. Fine Gael's Noel Buckley and Gerard Murphy were both elected but how they

would have loved if Timmy Collins was still in the party.

Now an Independent, he romped home first.

The Gilmore factor couldn't lengthen the Sherlock shadow to cover both Jerry Mullally and Ronan Sheahan.

The ex-intercounty footballer surprised with being the only Labour man left standing. Fine Gael held two seats with victory for Noel O'Connor and Tom Barry but lost Tom Sheahan.

Independent John Paul O'Shea trumped the parties and the pundits by taking a seat as a rank outsider.

Fianna Fáil's Kevin O'Keefe and Frank O'Flynn may have lost the

swashbuckling vote percentages of 2004 but they still held firm in the face of a party meltdown. Fine Gael's ambitions were the ones to buckle - Aileen Pyne's worries about too tight a territory in which to fight for a seat were borne out. Party colleague Patrick O'Driscoll capitalised; as did Labour's Noel McCarthy.

Now the dreamy talk has turned to when all this might precipitate a general election.

Well, the Heavens did liberally sprinkle the weekend with raindrops and ideas (perhaps trying to cool the nation's ardour), so further poetic licence may prevail. With ballot in hand, everyone's a bard these days.