

Straight talking



with 'The Duke'

seamus@roscommonpeople.ie

Bad feeling and bitterness

There is no doubt that anything is possible in politics. Ten years ago Luke Ming Flanagan was looked upon as a maverick, a colourful character that would always be propping up the bottom of the table when it came to elections. Entitled to his view and a bit of an annoyance at election time.

Well that is certainly not the case any more as the Castlereagh-based councillor was elected as the first citizen of county Roscommon on Monday last. For the next twelve months he will chair County Council meetings and will represent Roscommon both here at home and internationally. It is an astounding rise to prominence.

Councillor Flanagan himself will say that he is trying to get to where he is now for over fifteen years. If anyone told me that all the Fine Gael councillors, which includes Cllr Flanagan's arch enemy Cllr Michael McGreal, were to vote for him to become Mayor

of the county I would have laughed heartily and said that it was not possible, but that is what happened.

Monday's annual general meeting saw the alliance between Fianna Fáil and the independents break down after a little over a year and the recriminations will go on for a very long time. I have been covering county council meetings for over twenty years and seldom have I experienced such bad feeling and bitterness.

LABOUR PARTY

Fianna Fáil are blaming the HAC, while Fine Gael saw the gap and went for it for solely political reasons. Remember too that Luke Flanagan will certainly be running as an independent in the next general election. John Kelly's Labour Party have become very strong in national polls.

Whether that would transfer to the Roscommon/Leitrim scene locally in a general election remains to be seen, but it is clear that

a lot of people here, including Fine Gael, are looking over their shoulders at John Kelly and feeling a little nervous.

The Fianna Fáil people along with John Kelly, Tom Crosby, Tony Ward and Jimmy Kenny, supported the HSE stance on the hospital stance and say that the HAC are scaremongering. I believe that there is a threat to the hospital regardless of what the HSE says, however I will point out too that I have never met anyone from any party who supported the downgrading of Roscommon County Hospital.

After last Monday it is clear that there is a massive rift between the Fianna Fáil party and the HAC and that gap has widened even further in the past few days since Monday's AGM.

The HAC are always at pains to point out that they are independent. That may or may not be true but it is clear that in county Roscommon the HAC and Fianna Fáil could not be further apart.

Fragile coalition

The Government scraped through on the vote on stag hunting but the controversy this week is an indication of just how fragile this coalition is.

Albert Reynolds famously said that it was the little things that tripped you up and how right he was. The Government will not fall on anything to do with the economy or the banks, or cutbacks. It will fall on a piece of legislation like the one we are talking about this week.

The Greens are insisting that the legislation agreed in the programme for government will be forced through. It will test the mettle of the Fianna Fáil back benchers. Mattie McGrath is already gone.

Paying the price for food and drink

The news this week that we are the second most expensive country in Europe for food and drink will come as no surprise to anyone here however all the usual suspects have been out this week making excuses for the high prices and a common complaint is that the figures are out of date.

The facts are that we have been paying far too much for food for many years. The problem is that the profits are not going to the farmers but are being creamed off further along the line. It is not a great thing for the people involved in our tourist industry to hear this kind of news in the national and European media. However I have to say that there is much better value to be had in local restaurants and hotels over the past year or so. So maybe the figures are out of date!

JP McManus tournament



Next Monday and Tuesday JP McManus, *left*, will hold his fund raising golf tournament in Limerick. He does it every five years and in 2005 the tournament raised an incredible total of 31 million euro for various charities.

The list of where the money went was in the papers this week and it is astounding the amount of money that was raised. Charities like the homeless, Alzheimer's,

Cancer Care, Hospice and many more will be the huge beneficiaries this time around. 13 of the top 15 players in the world, which includes Tiger Woods and Pádraig Harrington, will play alongside film stars and famous entertainers, singers and sports personalities to raise money.

Only JP McManus would have the name to be able to attract all these people and it promises to be a great success. I hope they get the weather for it.



The new Cathaoirleach of Roscommon County Council Cllr. Luke Ming Flanagan is congratulated by Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr. Ernie Keenan outside Roscommon Courthouse on Monday last.

Why the hullabaloo over a stag hunt?

As I write this column on Wednesday morning I am listening to the huge debate that is going on about the stag hunting bill and the row about the other Green Party legislation. We have had the resignation of Mattie McGrath and several other FF TDs giving out about all this.

Where were these people when Social Welfare was being cut, when public service pay was being cut, when respite care was being cut back, when 22 billion euro was going into the black hole that is Anglo Irish Bank?

I could go on and on. Then we have Mary O'Rourke warning John Gormley "not to take any more rambles into rural Ireland". Please, the hypocrisy of it all. I couldn't care less about stag hunting or whether it goes ahead or not, but it is now becoming evident that The Green Party tail is beginning to wag the FF dog. Anything to stay in power I suppose.

Bulldozing through the planning laws

I watched the story last night about the couple in Meath who broke the planning laws with regard to their house and now the courts have decided that the house will have to be bulldozed.

I have no time for anyone who breaks the law and the people involved in this should be punished, but having seen the house it would be a sin to knock it down. It is a mansion and it would be crazy to destroy it. It is a monument to the greed of the Celtic Tiger years. A massive house built by people when less would have done them. However there must be another way of dealing with the situation. Why not fine the couple say €25,000 or some big figure like that to show others that you cannot flout the law. Knocking

the house down will serve no purpose at all.

I wonder what's the story here in Roscommon, are there people in this county who have flouted the law in this regard and got away with it? I think that there might well be!



Knocking houses down will serve no purpose at all.

Should we help those in negative equity?

There is an interesting argument going on right now about whether people who are in negative equity and who are struggling with their mortgage repayments should be getting help from the Government, or to be more accurate, the taxpayer.

There is an argument that there was money there to bail out the banks so there should be money to bail out the people. But there is also an argument on the other side which would say that these people borrowed far too much money and why should they be helped out when there were others who were cautious and stayed within the limits of what they could pay back?

The cautious person who does everything right, pays their bills on time, and who didn't go mad during the Celtic Tiger years will get nothing while the reckless will be helped out. It is an interesting one.