

GILMORE IN THE HOT SEAT



Gilmore not happy with 'Hanly Report by the back door'



■ Pauline Scott

Over 120 people gathered in the Abbey Hotel, Roscommon on Thursday night, March 4th, to listen to Labour leader Eamonn Gilmore speak on a wide range of subjects.

The evening, entitled 'A Conversation with Eamonn Gilmore' was a question-and-answer format with radio presenter Ken Murray asking the questions. The evening began with some background on the Labour Party leader, before moving on to questions such as flooding and the future of Roscommon County Hospital.

Asked about sport, he recalled following the Galway team that won the three-in-a-row in the 1960s. He also enjoys following Galway hurling, particularly Joe Canning and played rugby while in Garbally College in Ballinasloe. He now represents the constituency of Dun Laoghaire in Dublin, a strong rugby area, and goes to England to the occasional Premiership match. In terms of music, he enjoys the blues, particularly Leadbelly and other

southern music, as well as Irish traditional music.

Although he is a politician, he's no political junkie and never turns on political programme when he reaches home after a day in the Dáil. Instead, he prefers to watch his way through box sets of Morse and Prime Suspect and has been advised to get into 'Mad Men'.

Asked how he first decided to run for the Dáil, he said Proinsias de Rossa talked him into it in 1982. "The first time I ran for the experience. I thought it was a good opportunity, I didn't see that I would end up having a career in politics. I was working for a trade union and saw my career in the trade union movement."

On the issue of employers, he said that most employers treat their employees very well, but sometimes legislation is needed to deal with bullying employers. "Now I would probably say there is too much legislation. There is a tendency towards over-legislation and over-regulation. Often, it would be better to have a commonsense approach to deal with issues at work."

It was put to Mr. Gilmore that towns like Roscommon, Ballaghaderreen and Boyle feel they have been by-passed by the Celtic Tiger and he was asked what he would do. "A big priority is going to be jobs. If you look at the economy and the recession, we have heard a lot about bank-

ers and finance, but there are 436,000 people unemployed, the highest number ever. There are 4,000 people unemployed in Roscommon and 2,500 in south Leitrim. It's a very high level and a very high proportion of those are young people under 25. I think the priority has got to be getting people back to work." He said that this could be done through the creation of a strategic investment bank to get credit flowing to business; a school building project and the upskilling of unemployed people.

On the subject of flooding, he said that one problem is the fact that there are seven different state agencies involved in overseeing the Shannon. A lot of work also needs to be done on flood relief and protection and that work should be done through a public works project.

There is a lot of debate about the future of Roscommon Hospital and it was put to Mr. Gilmore that Mary Harney has indicated that Roscommon, Ballinasloe and Galway hospitals should act as a triangle and he was asked if he was satisfied that she is protecting the future of Roscommon Hospital. "No, I'm not satisfied at all. What is happening to Roscommon and Portlinculla, this is the idea that they should be linked to UCHG, it's the Hanly report by the back door.

"St. Michael's and Loughlinstown are being linked to St. Vincent's in Dublin. What happens is that the major hospital calls the shots and the smaller hospitals become satellites and no matter how much assurances you get, the local hospital declines. I think it's the wrong strategy. Some people say we should have bigger centralised hospitals. We should look at the county hospital as an advantage. I think we should build on that strength. Of course you can't have every speciality in every hospital. I am very committed to ensuring that hospitals like Roscommon and Portlinculla and Nenagh and Ennis are maintained, that the services are retained and we look at ways of using them to deliver a better hospital.

"Mary Harney says small local hospitals are not a good idea when they're public, but the Government is providing incentives to build small private hospitals. We have people on waiting lists ending up in private hospitals in the Treatment Purchase Fund, a lot of that could be done in pub-



Labour leader Eamonn Gilmore and Labour Cllr. John Kelly with Colm Daly in his shop in Ballintubber on Friday. Pic: Mick McCormack.

lic hospitals. We don't get the best value by centralising everything."

He was critical of the "out-

rageous extortion" by big multiples in retailing, citing the example of Tesco taking big sums of money just to have products

put on shelves. "That has got to stop, I'd make that illegal," said Mr. Gilmore. On the issue of farming he said that it is vital that farm numbers do not decline any further and accused the present Government of "taking their eye off the ball" in terms of farming.

Other issues addressed included how to deal with negative equity and public service pay cuts. On the issue of public service pay cuts, he said that the Labour Party accepted that the public service pay bill has to come down but they believe that it is possible to achieve the necessary cuts by negotiation. "If we are elected to Government we would resume discussions with the public service unions. As part of that we would reinstate that money."

Danny McHugh, a union shop steward with Roscommon County Council asked what he could say to his fellow workers to encourage them to vote for Labour. Mr. Gilmore replied saying, "I would say to working people that they should support the party that James Connolly founded to be a party for working people... Vote for John Kelly because the Labour Party is the party for working people."



Stephen Tracey playing the saxophone for Labour leader, Eamonn Gilmore and Labour Cllr. John Kelly in his Sports shop in Castlerea on Friday. Pic: Mick McCormack.



Labour leader Eamonn Gilmore with Kathleen Flannery shopping in Supervalu, Ballaghaderreen, on Friday last. Pic: Mick McCormack.