

Straight talking



with 'The Duke'

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What now for Naughten?



Many people contacted me over the past few days to give their views on what happened last week with regard to the Fine Gael leadership battle. I think it is fair to say that there is a mixed bag of views on the matter locally but most agreed that it was very badly timed.

The column I wrote last week was written well in advance of the parliamentary party meeting on Thursday and I was lucky enough to have been proven correct in

my analysis of the situation. It was a poorly timed and ill thought out heave that will backfire badly on some of those involved.

'Level of steel'

However, I was very wrong in one piece that I wrote, and that was that Enda Kenny's leadership would be fatally wounded by the challenge. I have to say that I was surprised at the level of steel that he showed last week and he has definitely emerged as a

much stronger leader as a result. He has gone up in a lot of people's eyes after that week. I would still have my reservations about him as a possible Taoiseach but last week's events mean that it is almost certain now that he will become Taoiseach in the event of a Fine Gael and Labour government taking shape.

All eyes will be on him to see who he appoints to his new front bench now. Given the level of expertise of the

people that defected to the Bruton side last week, there is no way that the Fine Gael Party could function correctly without at least some of them coming back into the fold.

Where that leaves Denis Naughten, *left*, is anyone's guess but the signs are not good in that regard as far as I can make out. However, it may well be the case that Frank Feighan will be promoted as a reward for his loyalty to Kenny. As I said here

last week, politics is a very dirty game and one certainly does not know from one week to the next what is going to happen. One certainty is that last week's Fine Gael hulla-baloo took all the pressure off the government and you could see Brian Cowen's mood was noticeably better all last week and this week too.

Hopefully the infighting has ceased for the moment. It is the last thing we need at this moment in time.

Will British budget spell end of cross-border shopping?

It has been fascinating listening to the coverage of the British budget in recent days. It's a double-edged sword as they have taken 880,000 people out of the tax net, but they have put VAT up from 17 to 20 percent from January, which will mean a rise in the cost of living there.

There is also a public sector pay freeze for two years and a huge raft of savings in

public expenditure. However, the biggest news is that the VAT rate will go from 17 to 20 percent. Coupled with the dramatic fall in the value of the euro against sterling, it could well mean that there will be an end to cross border shopping from here to the north, which would mean a big boost to our economy, especially in border areas and reaching as far as Ros-

common. However there is very bad news again this week for our own economy. A report on Morning Ireland today (Wednesday) says that as many as 25 percent of Irish people are now affected by poverty, which is a shocking figure. Then when you read that a property tax which will amount to about €1,000 euro per house is coming in for 2011, it leaves

many people facing the prospect of not being able to pay their debts and try to stay afloat. One possible fall-out from a property tax will be that people will not carry out repairs and renovations to their homes because they will have to pay this property tax instead. Anyone who thinks that the recession is over here is not living in the real world.

Huge drop in road deaths

There was good news this week for the country when Minister Dempsey received an award to record the highest drop in road deaths in the EU in the last ten years, 41 per-

cent. I know that this news is of little consolation to those who have lost loved ones on the roads since then, but at least there are a lot of people alive today that would not be heretofore because of the legislation and strict enforcement of the road traffic laws.

Drinking and driving is now a thing of the past (hopefully) and hundreds of thousands of speeding fines have been handed out in recent years. One law that needs to be enforced more is the one with regard to driving while using a mobile phone. I am no saint myself in that regard but it is very clear that it is dangerous and leads to accidents. The roll out of the speed cameras is the next thing that we will see in this regard but as I said here before, I hope that they put these cameras where it is dangerous and not where they will collect the maximum amount of fines for the state. But a 41 percent reduction in ten years is a great achievement and needs to be recognised.

Well-organised sting

It always good to hear when a good old-fashioned (and legal) sting takes place. This week's operation by the owners of a horse that won in Kilbeggan was a brilliant piece of thinking by those involved and it took huge organisation and know how.

To have organised over 100 people to go out and place the bets was a task in itself. According to reports they won almost 200,000 euro, which was a great result. They were lucky of course that the Horse, 'D Four Dave', won the race because there were a number of fallers and the horse had to jump around safely to win, but he did that and the coup was landed. There are people thinking all the time!



David Keogh and Cecilia Ahern.

Shop local Ms. Ahern!

Another example of the disconnect between the golden circle in this country and the rest of us was evident with the news that Bertie Ahern's daughter Cecilia, who lives in this country tax free because she is a writer, went to another country to pay €22,000 for her wedding dress. These people couldn't care less about the ordinary people of the country. Ms Ahern's father presided over the ruination of the economy and now he claims all sorts of allowances and pensions to keep him in the style that he has become accustomed to. Was there no one to tell Ms Ahern that to buy her dress outside Ireland might be a bad idea?



Young Rossie fans pictured enjoying the sun and Roscommon's win in the Hyde Park on Sunday last. Picture: Mick McCormack.

Spirits lifted by sunshine

There is no doubt that the good weather lifts everyone's spirits and we have had a great summer so far. Driving around the country it is uplifting to see people out working hard in the fields at hay and silage and in the bog getting the turf ready to bring home. The three terrible summers that we have had in recent

years are a distant memory and I know that there have been loads of barbecues in people's houses over the last few weeks.

There is no doubt about it, if we had the weather in this country there is no where like it in the whole world.