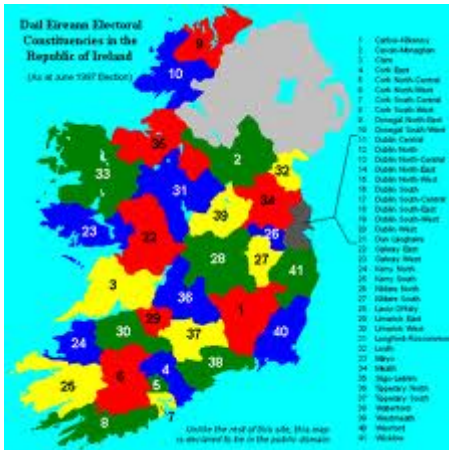


# Letter from Ireland: Zoom, Zoom The Irish General Election 2011



*Zoom zoom zoom zoom / The world is in a mess  
With politics and taxes / And people grinding axes  
There's no happiness.*

– So sang Ella Fitzgerald all those years ago

"IT IS NOT THE COUNTLESS CUPS of coffee I drink that keep me up all night, it's the thought of this country going down the drain." One night while standing at a bus stop in town in the usual summer weather of rain and cold wind, that is what one man roughly somewhere in his fifties said to me in conversation and to be brutally honest it was something which took me aback. On the bus I sat and thought and asked myself why would someone like him be so upset about the state of the country because he sure won't be around when we are still paying for the greed-filled sins of those whom we trusted to govern us, sure I more than likely won't be around; I will be long gone in the ground and Ireland will still be paying for the sins of her offspring.

February 25th marks the day Irish people will go to the polls. It may mark the day when a great change will come to

the Irish political landscape, or it will mark the day of a change of hands but not a change in policy. In 1897 the Easter rising patriot James Connolly wrote: "If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin castle, unless you set about the organization of a socialist republic your efforts would be in vain." Connolly's words were ultimately prophetic: in 1922 we did indeed hoist the green flag over Dublin castle and remove the English army from at least one part of the island but as the years traded themselves in for decades, they showed that we as a nation were prepared to fumble in our greasy tills and while our master's accents changed, nothing else did. The setting up of a semi-independent state proved that the nationality of the oppressor had changed into a native one; it proved that society did not change – it remained oppressed and Connolly's words prove timeless.

But onwards now we go into the thirty-first general election this state will witness, ninety years after the founding of this state, ninety years and we have come through everything a little country such as this could have succumbed to. Ireland has always been a country in the grip of woes, political, economic, and social, but we have not succumbed to defeat. November, 2010 saw the introduction of the international monetary fund to sort out our affairs; our sovereignty has been rattled, but our sense of identity remains stalwart and true; we Irish are after all, a stubborn bunch!

The mighty mess that Ireland has been dragged into by the few who hold power has shone the international spotlight on the emerald isle, and it causes one to question how such a small country of little over three million people could not sort out its own socioeconomic affairs. On the day the IMF men walked the streets of Dublin, the domestic media howled as if it were the black and tans back on the streets to kick the living Christmas out of us. That very day I walked through the

streets of my own town where I bumped into an old college friend who couldn't hold her tongue regarding how she will be on a plane to Australia in a few months to, as she said, "get out of this dump." I felt sick to the gut: this dump is her country; this dump is my country; this dump is the country that so much blood was shed for, this dump.

With negative attitudes and feelings of despondency and without the ideals of brilliant minds and social values in place, Ireland as a country has proven to be impotent; it has proved so by asking for help off the dreaded IMF. Ireland has experienced ninety years of some sort of independence, it was a good run I suppose; that is what my drunken friend spat out after one too many beers at a house party one night when the talk turned political. I agreed, yes it was a good run, ninety years: it took long enough to shit in one's nest, I said in response.

But that was 2010; this is now 2011 and the people of Ireland can take their anger out on the ballot box, vote out the corruption which has brought *Roisin Dubh* to her knees. Sometimes when I try to talk of the confidence and expectations this country can have I find myself being more pessimistic instead of being more optimistic, and I have every right to be. I was born into a society where Celtic tiger notions gave way to an absurd guarantee that one would enjoy social protection, a job for life, a big house and a bigger car, and even a social standing that our ancestors could only have dreamed of, but all of these notions were nothing more than false notions built on unstable capitalist ideals. Now they have left us feeling dumb and desperate.

As a country what have we come to and where the hell are we going? I asked myself as I recently read in a newspaper how a young mother died of hypothermia in her flat when the communal heating in the derelict and nearly empty block of flats where she was living with her children was turned off by the council during one of the coldest winters Ireland has seen

in years. Amid all of the hype of a general election, we must not forget the reality of modern Ireland, such as that tragic story. The grit and rawness of modern living in a broken society must be addressed and the razzmatazz of a general election must not become just that, all glitz and glory. It must be about the people because that is what democracy is supposed to be, for the people by the people.

Unlike the people's revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, no great revolt occurred here in recent times; the only rumblings were the likes of Pearse and Emmet rolling in their graves. Yes, we could have built a socialist republic; we could have built a democratic republic; instead we made do with a priest-ridden capitalist regime, which is still struggling to come out of the big economic crash of 2008. It got me thinking about a utopian society that could have been and, due to the fall of capitalism, is still a reality and can be built on the foundations of the crumbled capitalist system. From the pub talk of barstool socialists and from my utter disgust at the road which this country has taken, I went away and familiarized myself with one Robert Owen, of course no longer living because he died in the 19th century, but Owen's vision of a utopian society gave birth to New Lanark, a physical example of how a just and equal society can actually happen. From a dream can spring nations.

As this election brings about the usual sound bites and mud flinging politics, it must be stressed that this will be the one and only opportunity for Ireland to go forward, but in order to go forward we must first look back, look back at the mistakes that have been made and vow never to make them again, look back at the ideals that could have been built on and vow to finally implement them. General election 2011 will give way to the opportunity to inherit the ideals of Connolly, the vision of Collins and the aspirations of Wolfe Tone, but can the outcome of a general election be applied as the solutions of a broken society? We can only wait and see and wait in

great hope.

So the 30th Irish parliament has been dissolved; people will be pestered for their vote off desperate politicians; electricity poles will be attacked with posters of pearly toothed smiles of honest do-gooders; the air waves will become the vuvuzelas of political promises; the TV news programs will report on nothing but canvassing cahoots; the Irish general election 2011, Zoom zoom zoom zoom, let the show begin....

## **Footnotes**