

Is The Undercarriage Going to Deploy?

The words that I wrote here just a few weeks ago on the fact that the Coalition parties holding two thirds of the seats after the last General Election now have the support of one third of voters have been amply underscored by the Ipsos- MRBI poll published last Friday.

The new twist is that Fine Gael is now sharing the pain of the implosion with Labour.

This is not a mid-term political phenomenon. We are well past mid-term. Those who travel by air to Heathrow will know well that the plane's descent usually starts over the Midlands. We are already well into the descent into the next election. Pretty soon the political undercarriage will be deployed. At least, Labour is hoping it will deploy. In all probability the next election will be in late 2015 after the budget is passed.

With FG losing support and drawing neck- and- neck with FF, the electoral arithmetic points to a very badly hung Dail after the next election. Unless a miracle takes place, FG and Labour will fall far short of a majority, with Labour losing two thirds of its seats and FG losing one third of its strength. The battle between SF and FF will see both of them gaining a lot of seats; they have a combined poll support now of 46%, a figure that could deliver them collectively close to a majority.

Micheal Martin has been strengthened somewhat by the current Garda crisis which he has handled well. Rumours of a mutiny against him will now evaporate. But he will still face the problem of relevance in the next election; unless he can hold out the possibility that FF can coalesce with FG or SF, a vote for FF will look as futile as a vote for FG looked in the 2002 election. Labour just don't look like holding the balance of power in the next Dail.

The rise of the Don't Knows and Independent vote is striking. The space for something new is growing. And when the completely inconsequential local and European parliament elections are out of the way, the political horizon of the next general election will suddenly seem very, very close.

Abortion will not be an issue in the next election. Nor will "Burn the Bondholders" policies attract support. These issues cannot sustain a credible new political initiative. That explains why the Reform Alliance is disappearing like the Cheshire Cat.

What is viable and is needed is a political movement or grouping which can save us from a coalition in which the hard-left high tax agenda of Sinn Fein with Gerry Adams as Tainiste.

That is what Middle Ireland wants. And if, as seems clear, both FG and FF will rule out coalescing with each other, Middle Ireland will somehow have to find its voice and its champions elsewhere.

The Garda Crisis is mystifying. The Government itself actually used the term "explosive" to describe the Sophie Toscan Du Plantier material that will be revealed. Some Government sources even indicated that the Government feared that this material was in danger of being destroyed. This has been denied. No even remotely plausible explanation has been made by Government for the "retirement" of the Garda Commissioner or the motives or concerns of those who contacted him prior to his departure.

Everyone seems to have forgotten that Phil Hogan and, apparently, government officials were advising him to “stand his ground” in the days before the Taoiseach arranged for him to be visited. Even Michael Noonan, a safe pair of hands if ever there was one, had a “Dick Spring high ball on his own line” moment on Prime Time defending the indefensible and obfuscating the inexplicable.

This is the first time I have seen a political crisis erupting about an issue that is too serious to be revealed, There are echoes of the Reynolds Government’s handling of the plane hi-jacking intended to force disclosure of the Third Secret of Fatima

If there really is an “explosive” political landmine awaiting detonation in the near future, two things will happen.

First, a perimeter will be established outside of which all Ministers will be safely evacuated. That is called setting up a Commission of Inquiry.

But even then, someone has to go back in do the political “bomb disposal” on the scandal. I don’t see any “see of hands” among Ministers volunteering to defuse the crisis.

Indeed, there are no safe pairs of hands available for as far as the public is concerned, if the opinion poll evidence is to be believed.