

Re-Tweeting Election #ge11

Aodhán O Ríordáin TD

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Introduction

The 2011 General Election was the first Twitter Election in Ireland.

The appetite for increased engagement, accountability and interaction via the social media platform followed the resignation of Defence Minister Willie O’Dea in February 2010, in part because of a carefully composed tweet.

By January 2011, Twitter was part of the daily political discourse, as candidates posted their thoughts, policies, pictures and links in the competitive war to raise profiles and attract eyeballs.

The beauty of Twitter is that it allows your ‘followers’ to view you in a different lens from the normal political script, and to engage with you on a variety of topics political, personal, trivial and even philosophical. It also allows politicians break some news at appropriate times, and share views on national events without the constraints of a formal press release.

This ebook is based on all the tweets published over the course of the General Election campaign, from the announcement of Labour’s motion of no confidence in the government to the day of the election result. It is important to consider that the commentary on the tweets was completed in the months immediately after the election in February 2011, when my memory of events and emotions was still raw and fresh, and not two years later. Therefore, the commentary provided is frozen in 2011 and has not been altered to take account of two years in government and developments in 2013. The tweets and reflections are frozen in time.

The archive of tweets are a reminder of an incredible period, and an attempt to illustrate the twists and turns of the most remarkable and historic General Election since the Civil War.

I hope you enjoy the journey!

Aodhán O Ríordáin TD

Dublin February 2013

Friday 14th January

On the way to join Eamon Gilmore for announcement at 3pm

Feck. Feck. Feck. Feck.

A missed call on my mobile at lunchtime from Labour Head Office. The message was from National Organiser David Leach, telling me to come into the Dáil at 2.30pm for an important announcement.

‘What’s the announcement?’ I had the naivety to ask.

‘I’ll tell you when you get here’ was the curt response.

Feck.

A race from school at home-time on the trusted bike had me in Leinster House for 2.45pm. As I manoeuvred through traffic a reality worm manoeuvred its way through my brain reminding me that I was now playing ‘senior hurling’ as Seamus Brennan once described it.

Walking down the Leinster House corridor I was pointed into a room with some of the most senior politicians in the party. I sat by the window while they talked about the issue at hand – a motion of no confidence in the government.

As the idea was tossed around the leader's office, my apparent job was to stand in the back of the photograph as we walked as a group towards the various microphones that would be amassed at the end of the Dáil plinth whenever the press conference took place.

One authoritative voice asked if Enda Kenny had been informed.

No, was the answer.

And so we left Eamon Gilmore's office, got the lift downstairs and we assembled on the plinth of Leinster House. The intention for lowly candidates like me is to appear in as many media publications as possible looking ponderous and concerned behind the most popular politician in the land. I took my position up over Eamon's right shoulder and nodded at all the appropriate times.

The sliothar had now been thrown in.

That was fun

Looking as serious as possible when you clearly feel that you might be out of your depth isn't actually that easy!

We did the business.

Eamon was cool, collected and passionate when asked the tough questions. We really need to move on and we need to bring this Fianna Fáil charade to a conclusion.

Was it really fun? Not sure. I was far too nervous to enjoy it.

My brother Colm first financed my membership of the Labour Party. It was November 2002 and it cost £10, and the receipt which landed in my hand felt heavy as it came with what felt like a massive sense of responsibility.

At that time, at the height of the economic boom of the mid 2000s, to shift the conversation about societal values to take account of the children that I was teaching every day in an acutely disadvantaged school in Dublin's North Inner City. I wanted to share the experiences of these children, their families and their community, good and bad, to influence change to national educational policy.

I had been teaching there since March 2000 and the plan was to join the party in order to run in the local elections in the North Inner City in 2004.

My name was drastically misspelt on the receipt for Colm's £10, (Aodhán O'Reilly) which was a sign of things to come where Labour members, constituents and journalists would all grapple unsuccessfully with the Irish language version of my name.

It was my own fault really and not my parents - a hangover from my time studying Irish in UCD. It was there that the 'Aidan O'Reardon' my family knew demanded to be called Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, much to their amusement, and bewilderment at times.

But I never really expected this strange pronunciation to be presented at countless doorsteps as the name of the guy that you should consider voting for.

'What's that your name is?....Crayon is it?'

'What? Spray-on?'

A parent in school once called me Cling-on.

So anyway...(an hour and a half later)....we're tabling a motion of no confidence in the government

It was quite clear that the days of the government were coming to an end, and fast. The day that the Green Party announced that they were intending to leave government, a toxic mixture of nauseous emotions fizzled through my nerves, and my digestive system. It took me a long time to get my head around the fact that my candidacy was no longer an abstract long-term endeavour but was coming into sharp focus.

Looking around my principal's office that November day as the word came in, I felt an overwhelming unease about the immediacy and enormity of the task that lay ahead. The text message said:

'Greens pulling out - get ready to put your posters up'

At that very moment a knock arrived on my door from two junior infants girls presenting some of their much-prized handwriting which their teacher was so proud of. The sense of guilt that arose within me was so grotesque that I could taste it. It invaded my head, my stomach and my fast beating heart. I was confused as to whether the impending election campaign was to be a thinly veiled ego massage or whether my real mission in life was to oversee the educational progress of the children that I care about so much. I felt dizzy. Unwell.

The school secretary Angela, who was the rock that I depended on every single school day, brought me for a cup of coffee in the IFSC to calm me down and to let me offload. I spilled it all out - dreams, fears, guilt, terror.

It didn't take long for me to realise that I was talking a lot about myself.

I had made my decision a long time ago. I was a candidate and there was now an election in the offing. Time to get over yourself.

The election wasn't called that day but was to take place early in the New Year, supposedly in the second half of January.

We had now tabled a motion of no confidence in the government to help bring that day even closer.

Want a warm tale? Handed out Santa presents to infants today & the excitement when they got their books was just pure magic. Hope lives.

The early part of the day was spent presenting books as Christmas presents to the infant classes which was delayed because of the bad weather in December. The genuine delight in their eyes was a joy to behold. Their unquestioning hope was in clear contrast to the despair that I was meeting at every door.

So why did I turn to politics? Why didn't I stay where I was in the first job I seemed to be any good at? Why did I muddle everything up by running for election in the first place?

Honestly because no-one seemed to give a toss about the kids I taught or the area that they lived in.

Why politics?

Because I wanted to change the way that we talked about education and I wanted to change the way that these children viewed themselves.

Because I believed that politics could work, but it wasn't working. In my time in the North Wall it worked for the rich and for the property developer but not for the child with the learning disability, or the drug addict, or the parent with literacy problems or the mother on the endless housing list.

Because I wanted them to be proud of where they came from and I couldn't achieve all of that from behind a teacher's desk.

But my first election was boom-time 2004. This was IMF-time 2011.

So why was I terrified?

Maybe it was the thought of the half-marathon I'd signed up for the next day.

Saturday 15 January

Thanks to @ciaramconway for pic of me with half-mile to go in Waterford today (that's delirium right there folks!!)

While I had been effectively electioneering in Dublin North Central continuously for almost three years, it was enlightening to bump into one of our Councillors in Waterford who still didn't know if she was to be on the ticket or not.

Cllr Ciara Conway was there to cheer on her mother (!) in the Waterford half-marathon which I was convinced was about at least nine miles above my capability. We had decided to try and compete in a half-marathon to up our energy levels and to tackle the ever expanding gut that I had acquired over the course of my 30s. The weather was brutal and not helped when my beloved wife left me and my pal Dermot for dead after a mile and pursued her own particular type of glory. The course and the inclement weather were bad enough - the sight of dozens of middle-aged lycra-bums waddling past you is the real soul destroyer. I struggled over the line after two hours. Legs were very sore. And blue. Had a great night though.

Sunday 16th January

Legs are so sore from half-marathon that I have decided to stand for election rather than running.

I thought that was a funny tweet but it didn't get much response.

A half marathon in Waterford on the day after a motion of no confidence showed a measure of over-confidence in my athletic ability, never mind my comic timing.

My gang of four survived the ordeal and spent the night discussing the impending election.

Nights like this come around too seldom when you're involved in politics. Friends go by the wayside, text messages go unanswered, constituents take priority over family members and social events are regularly turned down in favour of fundraisers and party meetings.

That's the first price of politics.

You momentarily forget that for most ordinary human beings the idea of delivering leaflets at any time of any day is the most mundane of menial tasks that could be undertaken by anybody.

You may be completely determined and focused on what you want to achieve, but friends can easily feel taken advantage of when you're never available for social occasions but always free to text them about a leaflet drop or political fundraiser that you need a hand with.

It's part of the balance that so many aspiring politicians get completely wrong.

You can get self-obsessed and paranoid if you're not careful. Maybe it's the inevitable consequence of putting your name, photograph and phone number into as many doors as possible as often as possible.

Maybe it's just madness.

I clearly needed to work on my twitter humour.

Gilmore now the only credible choice as Taoiseach – the only leader with the total confidence of his own party and the people.

The Fianna Fáil leadership internal rumblings continued.

To observe the absolute distain that they had for the Irish people was quite remarkable.

I had always suspected that Fianna Fáil instinctively felt they owned the country, but the contempt they displayed for the democratic process and for the disastrous economic situation that we found ourselves in was quite incredible.

I have always tried not to get sucked into tribal party politics. I have always tried to see the good in the politician regardless of party political persuasion, and for me the most impressive of politicians are those who transcend the political label.

One of the most attractive elements of the political culture in Dublin Central, where I cut my campaigning teeth, was that public representatives would always play the ball, not the man. Whenever a public meeting was held, local politicians would directly address the issue involved and would never revert to party political mud-slinging.

That fateful day last November when it became clear that the IMF were in town was the most depressing of my time in politics. Even though I was selected to compete in a national election with a Labour jersey on, my party label disintegrated as I watched the television screen utterly demoralised at the state of our nation.

Anger with the Fianna Fáil / Green Party government dissipated as I genuinely considered why I would even bother running for election. We were effectively handing over our cheque book and had lost our economic sovereignty.

But in true Fianna Fáil style, it was everyone else's fault.

Here's the Fianna Fáil guide to diverting attention from their disastrous governance:

- It was an international problem.
 - No-one ever told us about the banking situation.
 - The opposition has no solutions.
 - Labour has no policies.
 - The media are a disgrace
 - We all partied
 - We need to talk about Labour and abortion
 - and immigrants
 - and abortion
 - and the fact that it was an international problem in the first place
- Etc. Etc.

The latest controversy about a golf game that Brian Cowen enjoyed with Seánie Fitzpatrick at the height of the impending bank crisis in 2008 brought into sharp focus the nature of the toxic relationship between Fianna Fáil, high level bankers and property developers.

When Eamon Gilmore accused Brian Cowen of committing economic treason on the night of the Bank Guarantee, the charge was angrily rebuffed but these most recent revelations had made even the most ardent Fianna Fáiler shift uncomfortably in their seats.

And I know a few of those.

My granny was one.

Never voted for anyone else when she lived in Donnycarney.

I doubt if she would vote for me if she was still alive.

I'd be doing well to get a number 3.

Not personal. Just politics.

450,000 Irish people unemployed. Cowen only cares about one job.

Yet Brian Cowen was determined to carry on despite the fact that his government had fallen asunder. The ground was shifting beneath him as Conor Lenihan and Mary Hanafin started sharpening their knives.

He'd put down a motion of confidence in himself which would be taken the next Tuesday by the members of the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party. Meanwhile, in the middle of the greatest crisis this country has ever known, we had a bloody leadership battle in the main party of government. This was absolutely crazy stuff.

This is going to drag on until Tuesday. Meanwhile who is running the country?

Micheál Martin announced he wouldn't support Cowen on Tuesday. It's not the state of the country that bothered him, it was the potential wipe-out that Fianna Fáil would suffer in the upcoming election.

Would he resign as Minister for Foreign Affairs?

Eh,

no.

It was an international problem don't you know.

Monday 17th January

Telling sentence from Miriam Lord's piece on Martin's press conference: 'The Minister arrived in a ministerial car, and he left in one'

With all of Michael Martin's protestations of caring about country over party, it was remarkable that he had the naked nerve to arrive at his resignation press conference in a state car and then afterwards to leave in one.

It was totally hypocritical and pathetic to publicly come out against the Taoiseach but yet still be quite prepared to continue to remain on as a cabinet minister. Would he have to be surgically removed from the leather seats? Was he that attached to trappings of privilege that he couldn't resign from his post as Minister for Foreign Affairs?

Surgically removing myself from my bed that morning wasn't easy either.

At Dcc Dublin North Central area committee

Ordinary political service continues as the Dublin North Central Area Committee continues.

It's strange to sit and look around a room full of General Election candidates who are pretending to look interested in the documentation in front of them but whose heads, like mine, are full of thoughts of leaflets drops and canvassing schedules.

Larry O'Toole, Seán Kenny, Naoise Ó Muirí, Gerry Breen and myself are all General Election candidates and are all at the meeting.

And we are all doubtlessly out for more canvassing and leafleting tonight.

Leaflet dropping is a particular art form. It takes more artistry than the average punter would appreciate.

Here follows the newcomers guide to leaflet dropping....

1. Have enough leaflets in a bag. Simple enough you would imagine until your campaign worker insists he's an 'under the arm' man and they all end up falling from the top balcony of Ballybough House Flats and almost decapitating the elderly couple on their daily stroll back from mass below.
2. Fold the leaflet so that it will actually fit in the letter box. Twisting and scrunching it to a manageable size may technically do the trick but no-one's going to read it....
3. Place the leaflet all the way in the letterbox so that the family away on their Spanish holiday don't blame you when their house gets burgled and your leaflet is happily hanging out of the letterbox acting as a de facto 'Please rob me' sign
4. Keep your fingers on your side of the letterbox lest an overly zealous and loyal dog (in Dublin 3) grab your index finger and not....let....go.....for....ages.... It is also important in this unlikely event not to scream profanities so loudly as to visibly upset elderly passers-by or to try unsuccessfully to take off a sock in a vain attempt to bandage your hand in order to stop the bleeding. Also when the kind nurse in the A&E department petitions you for support in the forthcoming proposed strike action before injecting you with the tetanus injection, just smile.

And also when you receive a phone complaint about the fact that you obviously were 'annoyin' me bleedin' dog' from a constituent who got your number from a blood-stained leaflet on his doormat, again just laugh it off....honestly....LAUGH IT OFF!!!!

5. Put literature into a letterbox with a 'No Junk Mail' sign at your own risk.
6. Try and make sure you have no spelling mistakes on your literature - especially ones like 'communtitties'
7. Handing leaflets out in the open street is a potentially devastating occupation, particularly when someone who is 'only buzzin' grabs your leaflet and asks 'What's tha' bud?'

You reply that it's about the Labour Party and he replies 'The Labour Party? When is it?' You know you're on a one-way ticket to the PR-Abyss when your average punter thinks your political movement is an upcoming music event.

Tuesday 18th January

Lodged my appeal today with An Bord Pleanala against high rise residential and Hotel plan on Butterly 'Stardust' site

I once described the Stardust tragedy to an American relation as 'Dublin's 9/11'. 48 young people perished in a fire that engulfed the Stardust nightclub in Artane on Valentine's Night 1981. Many claims and counter claims have been made about the events that surrounded the carnage that night, but it is undeniable that some exits were locked, other exits appeared locked while others were recklessly obstructed.

Growing up on the Northside, the very term 'Stardust' was a byword for an almost unspeakable horror, an enduring injustice and a tragedy that was still very raw for many many families.

The site itself was the feature of many planning applications over the years and the latest one proposed the construction of a 500 bedroom hotel and 178 apartments amongst other buildings. Planning appeals and representations are an expensive but necessary part of the local representative's bread and butter, and this one was no different.

Often residents and communities are not fully versed in the detail of planning legislation and depend heavily on public representatives to defend their interests. The cost of a planning appeal to An Bord Pleanála of over €200 is often beyond the reach of many who are going toe-to-toe with a developer. In the height of the building boom in the North Inner City, I was inundated with public meetings, large-scale planning applications, objections and appeals.

I once paid for a planning appeal in the name of some residents in Sean McDermott Street, who later re-reimbursed me, but one of the residents was visited at home and at work by the developer in person who demanded that she withdraw her appeal.

One swift public meeting later softening that gentleman's cough considerably. He was lucky to get out of the meeting alive.

What a speech from Michael D Higgins @ election mtg tonight. Delighted for packed mtg in Graingers. Building a new Republic starts here.

Election meetings are always tense affairs. It reminds you of your 21st birthday party where you told everyone to turn up at 8pm and the place is deserted when that time arrives.

Strange flashbacks of being surrounded by close family and ham sandwiches.

Mammy looking at her watch.

Me getting as touchy as a skinned cat in a bucket of salt.

The idea of the meeting was to get everyone that might consider getting involved in the campaign together in the one room at the one time to get their heads around what is necessary to get someone elected to the Dáil.

Thankfully the meeting was packed (eventually) and filled out the upstairs watering hole of Graingers Pub on the Malahide Road.

The gathering was a mixture of election veterans, younger members, long-term friends and family. Jane Horgan-Jones chaired proceedings and the proposed timetable was outlined, the stats and figures of previous elections poured over and the scale of the task yawned in front of all there. The previous election in Dublin North Central had provided the Labour Party with a miserable 7.27% which would require a tripling of our vote in order to win a seat.

Michael D Higgins travelled from Galway to attend the meeting and gave a magnificent address. The proposed workload had dampened the mood somewhat, but Michael D lifted the entire gathering inspiring us again to believe in what is good, what is decent, and what can change the lives of so many.

We later learned that Cowen had won his confidence vote. When this was announced to the meeting there was a loud cheer.

It suited us down to the ground if he was to lead Fianna Fáil into the election.

Wednesday 19th January

Government falling apart while people's lives falls apart. Meanwhile scores points in the Dáil. #harney

What on earth was going on with this government?

Dempsey, Ahern, Killeen and Harney all resigned from cabinet?

Cowen wanted to replace them with others who could boost their profile before the general election?

Was he serious?

This guy had complete contempt for the Irish people.

The Dáil and cabinet were being used as a party political tool again.

He had pulled a stroke and he knew it.

Can any of our celebrity economists explain why they refuse to run on Dublin's Northside or in communities who are most hurt by this mess?

It is deeply frustrating for those of us on the left, who rejected the vulgarity of the Celtic Tiger excesses absolutely, to see the political vacuum created by the failings of the right to be filled by right-wing commentators.

What was even more frustrating was the dismissive attitude they displayed for those who had been battling for balance in the Irish economy for years and then feel that running for election in leafy Southside suburbs is a brave statement for political purity.

Yes that tweet was aimed at you guys....So there!

Thursday 20th January

So my 5.45pm interview with Q102 is re-scheduled again because of momentous events on a Thursday!

I was due to appear on Scott Williams show on Dublin's Q102 to discuss the limitations of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) the previous Thursday, which was re-scheduled.

It was rescheduled again and. I doubted if I'd ever get to talk to them about it!
The issue concerned the fact that only children from six to sixteen years of age come under the remit of the NEWB, which acts as the effective school attendance agency in Ireland. The Board intervenes through Educational Welfare Officers when a child misses over twenty school days. However this means that any infant under the age of six can miss as many days as they like without any intervention from the state. So in the most important and formative years of a child's education, the neglect of a parent could go unchecked by the resources of the NEWB because of the remit of the act.
This crazy scenario meant that too many four and five year olds across the country were missing hundreds of school days through no fault of their own, but there was nothing the state was doing, or was willing to do about it.
It was difficult to get this sort of nuanced necessary change any sort of air-time in a General Election campaign.

50 DAYS TO CHANGE IRELAND: IT'S TIME TO TAKE OUR COUNTRY BACK. Join my campaign in Dublin North Central: aodhan.oriordain@gmail.com

Brian Cowen finally named the day.

A more honest tweet would have read: #AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

The General Election is called for March 11th. I didn't think I'd be able to take a campaign that long. However to think that I could be a TD in fifty days' time was a scarier thought.

It was Tony Gregory who first told me that I was going to be a TD at a function in the Sheriff YC soccer club shortly after my election to the City Council in 2004..

'Keep plugging away and you'll be a TD. I've no doubt about it', he told me as I sipped on my pint and got all-star struck again.

Tony Gregory was more of an institution than a politician and he was a hero in our house during my childhood. Even in the extremely interesting political times of the late '70s and early '80s, Gregory stood out among the throng. He was young, good-looking, articulate, angry and he had something to say – in fact he had a lot to say. And he looked different as his refusal to wear a tie, a reputation that was earned apparently completely by accident, marked him out as something quite unique.

His political activism was born out of the disadvantage of the North Inner City which was almost completely disregarded by the two main political parties in the land. Nobody spoke about issues such as housing, unemployment, poorly resourced schools and drugs like Gregory did, and he took no prisoners.

Much is made of the 'Gregory Deal' of February 1982 that exploded his name onto the national stage, but it is easy to forget how much work and activism was necessary for him to be elected to the national parliament in the first place. His local activism, with the help of diligent colleagues like Fergus McCabe and Mick Rafferty, always focused on the needs of the people in one of the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

I first met Tony Gregory seven years previously, when we both sat on an after-schools committee at Sheriff Street, and he remarked to me that he had a lot of teachers out canvassing for him in the recent election. Tony was difficult to get to know, and I can't pretend that I knew him well, but he was certainly one of the most direct and honest people I've come across. A genuine straightness can make many people uncomfortable, especially when they hear things said that they don't want to hear.

For the last number of years in his eventful life, Tony was as always demanding services for his constituents and battling, battling, battling. He had a remarkable capacity to show respect for fellow politicians who he respected, be they a lowly councillor or a TD. I think he genuinely didn't appreciate how much of a hero he was for some people, some people like me.

I never met him during his sickness. The odd e-mail sent from our school inviting him to various events was always replied to but he was unavailable for obvious reasons. I didn't share all of his political philosophies or indeed some of his methods, and I wouldn't dare – as Bertie Ahern attempted – describe him as a friend. But to me he was a hero, and I am very glad to have met and to have known one of mine.

And now I was 50 days away from sitting where he sat and to say some of the very same things that he had said.

Very very scary.

About to go on @98FMdotcom to chat about the election campaign.

98FM filled the void then with a chat about social media in the modern election campaign.

Delighted to meet my old Inner-City sparring partner Christy Burke in Donnycarney tonight.

I forgot that Cllr. Christy Burke lived just off the Malahide Road when we went knocking and that meant that I lost 45 minutes bantering with him on his doorstep.

Christy was a very fair politician who always conducted his affairs honourably. He was also an incredibly witty man who would have you in knots outside of public meetings with his tales of previous encounters with famous public representatives and constituents.

He once stood behind me at a public meeting when the organiser announced he was willing to go on hunger strike over the issue at hand. Christy exploded into muffled laughter which set me off too, and then whispered to me during another highly charged contribution "I'm taking names for the hunger strike Aodhán - are you in?"

Christy was overlooked firstly in favour of Nicky Kehoe in Dublin Central, and then ultimately in favour of Mary-Lou McDonald.

I didn't go as far as to ask him for his first preference, but I had a feeling he'd do his best for me.

Bailing out Anglo, cutting pay & welfare, trebling unemployment & putting 100,000 on road to emigration didn't upset ConorLenihan #vinb

The Vincent Browne show is terribly addictive stuff and starts at 11pm which means that I never got anywhere near my bed until midnight every night during the campaign.

There were nights where the debate could be incredibly dull, but there were other nights which explode into life and can make or break a reputation. Conor Lenihan did his best to burst a blood vessel on the show this night when irritated by another one of Vincent Browne innocent questions about how him and his cowboy buddies had fecked up the country.

You can't take your eyes off the screen but you find yourself shouting louder and louder. That's when you know it's time for bed.

Friday 21st January

I would seriously fear for the safety of a FF canvasser at the moment. Incredible hostility towards FF at the doors.

What incredible hurt.

This was my fifth election campaign, and third personal campaign, and I had never ever heard anything like what I was hearing now about any political party.

It was blind rage, naked venom and genuine loathing. I could not over emphasise the danger that some Fianna Fáilers would be in if they called at some of the doors I was at

that afternoon. Politicians are rarely overly welcome at any door, but the people were genuinely lying in wait for FFers.

The largess of previous Fianna Fáil campaigns, including all the bombastic razzmatazz that normally takes place in Dublin North Central, was certainly a thing of the past .

So no more Ivor Callely jazz bands at Nolan's supermarket.

Yes. Jazz bands.

Honestly.

Is Ivor Callely running in Dublin North Central? Residents say he's been in touch very recently!

So Ivor had written a letter to constituents asking for advice as to whether he should run or not. I was shown the letter at a doorstep in Donnycarney.

It's fair to say I was lost for words.

Maybe he's getting some of the anti-FF sentiment. Callely is one of those politicians who becomes a symbol of all you reject in politics, but then you meet him and he's remarkably softly spoken, charming and good company. But obviously suffering from some type of Napoleonic ego-mania.

He was recently embroiled in a controversy about claiming expenses from his holiday home in Cork when he was generally assumed to be still living in Clontarf.

He certainly did his best to appear to be from Clontarf when we were battling to close a Head Shop that was opened on the Clontarf Road the previous March.

If he did run he'd have to run as an Independent. However if he couldn't get elected when Fianna Fáil were on 41% nationally in 2007, I couldn't imagine he'd get elected this time..

But I wouldn't put anything past him.

I doubt my granny ever voted for him, but I couldn't put anything past her either.

That's the nature of show-biz.

#JazzHands

Saturday 22nd January

Hello Edenmore!

Seán Kenny had asked me to help out with his Saturday morning clinic in Edenmore as many of his local cases were now in my area since the boundary revision. Seán is an electoral institution having been elected to Dublin City Council in every local election since 1979 and he had previously served in the Dáil from 1992-1997.

His personal allegiance in the Raheny area is quite remarkable, to such a degree that one of his poster team living in my constituency wasn't sure if he was going to vote Labour when I asked for his vote!

Great reaction in Kincora Road today. On my way to Labour Press statement on Cowen circus.

Truly remarkable to be having a canvass in Clontarf with a radio on to hear the updates on the Brian Cowen saga in case the election is called that day and we have to put all the posters up!

The word came through that he had resigned as leader of Fianna Fáil but remaining on as Taoiseach. Hilarious to think that he was not fit to lead his party but his secondary responsibility of running the country is no problem.

Another call arrived to stand behind the leader at another press conference at the Labour HQ in Golden Lane. Canvass continues as I headed in. Strong advice ensued to change into a suit and tie so we stopped off at my place to change.

There is an easing of campaign tension you meet up with other candidates and have a de facto counselling service before you all jostle for position behind Eamon Gilmore in an effort to get your mug on the telly. Kevin Humphreys from Dublin South East is a master craftsman at doughnutting - he would gladly do without a free lunch in order to position himself before everyone else directly to the right of where Gilmore is likely to speak from.

My big ears always end up in a photograph somewhere though.

FG motion of no-confidence ill-judged, ill-timed.....and late! #ge11

Enda Kenny described our motion of no-confidence as being ill-judged and ill-timed, purely because we got there first.

Now they were tabling a motion of their own in order to get a slice of the goodwill of the nation. Either way it was pretty clear that the 'cuts' were mounting and would soon come close to the thousand that normally spell death.

Sunday 23rd January

Proud to take part in Labour's Literacy strategy launch today. Literacy is the ticket to freedom, empowerment and equality #ge11

Sunday morning in the Merrion Hotel and we were launching the Literacy document which I helped to assemble and was one of the reasons why I joined the Labour Party in the first place. The school that I had served in for now 11 years had taught me that something had to change.

Literacy was the key to empowerment, the key to freedom, the key to equality. It was our job to make literacy a national cause and ask the people to buy it. I had made a start on Dublin City Council by launching my 'Right to Read' campaign which succeeded in opening up every library in Dublin at weekends for the first time.

But that was only a start.

A state strategy making literacy a national cause was the only approach that might make a real difference.

Time would tell.

My campaign manager put down a whopping €3 bet on me winning a seat yesterday #ge11

My good friend Rónán managed my campaign in 2004 with another pal Barry. He then followed up with the next local election campaign in 2009 and was inspiring me onto further 'glory' in a general election campaign.

His fate in my ability was undented - as could be seen so clearly when he presented me with a €3 betting slip dependent on my election!

Himself, Owen and Morgan were the threesome running the campaign and keeping me as far away as possible from any decisions.

It would kill me if my very public political failure would cost Rónán €3.

This is a bizarre leadership battle, based around seat-saving publicity and not much else. When can we move from FF? #ge11

More posturing from Fianna Fáil.

We were in the teeth of the biggest economic catastrophe this country has ever seen and yet Fianna Fáilers are tripping over each other to distance themselves from the last

fourteen years.
I was now just so tired of Fianna Fáil.

This is a constitutional mess. This has to stop. Give us our democracy back. Give us our country back. #ge11

That one was a little emotional. Sounded like a line from the Michael Collins movie. The Green Party had now pulled their support for government. With that their two cabinet ministers were also gone. That meant the cabinet had only the constitutional minimum of seven members. The Greens would support the Finance Bill from opposition but then are demanding an election. The election would have to take place much sooner than March 11th. Many were speculating February 25th. In many ways it's easy to feel sorry for the Greens. Their politics didn't cause this mess - the damage was done from 2002 to 2007. We wanted an earlier election. In fairness the result was probably not in doubt. Our seat here was odds on, or so they were telling me.

Just finished press briefing. Going ahead with motion unless govt give guarantee of finance bill being passed by Friday.

We were dragged in again for a press briefing on our plans for the motion of no-confidence.

The government now say the Finance Bill can take a number of weeks to work through. A clear delaying tactic to give themselves more time to overcome their own problems. Gilmore lays down the law again to put a gun to the government's head. We of course were more interested in getting our own heads in the camera shot. Kevin Humphries triumphed again.

Paperwork almost done. What a crazy weekend. I'll be glad to get back to my Sheriffer girls tomorrow.

Finally get to send letters to the constituents I had met that weekend. No Oireachtas envelopes means a lot of stamps. And handwriting a lot of envelopes. And making a lot of mistakes, requiring a lot of ripped up envelopes and swearing a lot. My pen keeps smudging.

Feck. Feck. Feckin' feck.

Eyes were sore and itchy.

Not a great way to feel before the week even started.

Monday 24th January

Just did vox-pop on the state of the country. I tried to refuse saying 'I'm running for election' but she cut me off at 'running' & 'insisted!'

On the way to school after an early morning coffee in the IFSC a reporter with a large red microphone approached me as I unlock the bike and asked me my view on the state of the country.

I honestly tried to tell her that I was running for election, but she thought I was about to say 'I running late for work..' and she interrupted and demanded an answer!

Therefore she got more than she bargained for - a five minute no-holds-barred party political blast!

She seemed happy enough if a bit bemused that the bleary-eyed punter on the bike seemed so well up on current affairs.

Election Date of Friday February 25th?

Labour and Fine Gael agreed to drop their no-confidence motions in exchange for an agreement that the finance bill would be finalised in the Dáil by Friday January 28th. Will the election then take place on Friday February 25th? Sounds much better than March 25th. It's the week before the school mid-term break so those who have the means may head away but a month earlier is what we want. We were not going to be able to last this pace forever. I was running out of clean socks too. Wearing Christmas socks in late January is the name of the game.

Tuesday 25th January

Vincent 'How has Enda improved?' Simon Coveney: 'Oh....ah...um'. Direct quotes! #vinb

Late night canvassing went well. I settled down with a cup of coffee and an ill-advised sticky bun to watch the Vincent Browne show. And then Simon Coveney makes my night by being completely stumped by the seemingly bland question 'How has Enda improved?'. In American politics they say that a presidential candidate's response to 'The Question' can make or break a campaign. 'The Question' is 'Why do you want to be President?' or at least that was what 'The West Wing' series taught me. An answer like Simon's would result in a large bonfire of proposed presidential campaign literature in minutes.

Incredibly positive reaction tonight. Head Shop protest came up a lot. Everyone waiting for election day.

A lot of good reaction again about the Head Shop protest that we organised the previous March against the opening of a Head Shop on the Clontarf Road. Even though the election is a national one, local issues are important and they always come up. The protest was successful. Having served as a councillor in the North Inner City for five years before being elected in the Clontarf ward, it's good to bring some inner-city tactics to Dublin 3.

Wednesday 26th January

Anti-racism pledge from candidates or information campaign re: welfare entitlements from immigrant council may be needed. Gd morning #ge11

When times are tough, the need to blame can be overwhelming and immigrants unfortunately tend to be used as easy targets. It is difficult to have these arguments in an emotionally charged atmosphere, but these situations are not helped by the poisonous activities of some political parties, and political candidates. I once shared a Dublin City Council photocopier with a Fianna Fáil representative who informed me that whenever he gets racist remarks at a doorstep, he just agrees with them. One supposedly lovable rogue of a County Councillor in Kerry had described the majority of refugees as 'freeloaders, blackguards and hoodlums'.

The worst example of political emotion stirring was the citizenship referendum of 2004 which coincided with my first local election campaign and was deliberately designed to limit the electoral damage of the FF/PD government in that election. The most incredible things were said to me at that time, many of which ended with heated arguments. The

favourite retort at some doorsteps was that 'Mary Robinson brought the blacks to Ireland'

I heard that half a dozen times.

I will never forgive Michael McDowell for that referendum.

This is the most important election in the history of the state – don't miss your chance for change: www.checktheregister.ie

You vote, you get representation. You don't vote, you won't be listened to. It is so maddening to represent areas that need politics to work for them so much, but don't use their political franchise as much as others.

Many politicians know where the votes are and follow them.

You start off determined to be different, and then you fall into the same behaviours before you know it.

If only ten-year-old girls from Sheriff Street were the key voting demographic.

Although they're pretty hard to please at times.

They only ever want to go to McDonalds.

Moving into election office tonight. @susanokeeffe did a tea-count for the euros in '09. Maybe a biscuit count for #ge11

The election office was open now in Killester. It was great to have a campaigning base over the course of the election. It was also important to have an office upstairs in case anyone fancied having a stunt protest over the course of the campaign.

Very positive reaction again tonight. My local work on bus services raised regularly. Reputation of our country a source of major concern.

Having red leaflets was a big plus. One Sinn Féin candidate already confided in me that they have been run off doors because their literature is being confused for Fianna Fáil bumf!

Thursday 27th January

Will be on @Q102 later to chat about NEWB. (Girls asked me yesterday 'why are you so cross behind that man on the telly?') #ge11

Finally get to do my Q102 interview on NEWB.

Girls in school think it's hilarious that their 'sir' is on telly now and again.

One asked me why I looked so cross behind Eamon Gilmore..

I suppose I'd better work on my serious face if it looks that grumpy!

When trying to look serious I scrunch my eyes up too much and look like I should be locked up.

Maybe I should have been locked up.

Agallamh ar RnaG ag 5.30pm. Iarrathoirí nua. #ge11

Interviews in Irish are very dangerous as you are more likely to say what you really feel 'as Gaeilge'!

This was a piece about new candidates...often debates in Irish allow you to be more direct as the audience is smaller so I didn't pass up the opportunity to throw a few digs.

The beauty of running as an independent party in a General Election is that you can say what you like about all other parties...especially Fine Gael.

The previous election was difficult enough to convince people why they should vote for us rather than Fine Gael, particularly seeing as we had stitched together a pre-election pact.

Now it was much easier, especially as Fine Gael had proposed a programme of social welfare cuts, huge reductions in public sector numbers and cuts in public services across the board. And they couldn't be trusted on the Croke Park agreement.

Two interviews straight after each other jumping from English to Irish.....well something approaching Irish anyway..#ge11

What is the Irish for 'Blanket Bank Guarantee', 'Economic Illiteracy' or 'Celtic Tory Consensus'?

What's the Irish for 'I'm cranky as feck, how are you?'

Cruelty of USC major issue tonight. Public servants v wary of FG – feel totally betrayed by FF. #ge11

The Universal Social Charge is hurting.

Our taxation message is hurting us on the doors.

Public servants may be wary of Fine Gael but the average punter was getting pretty wary of Labour the 'high-tax' party.

Wore Big Bird suit to school to Halloween few years back. Hats off to @labouryouth chicken guy...tough talking turkey through the feathers...

Labour Youth decided it'd be a good idea to dress up a student in a chicken outfit in order to accuse Enda Kenny of being a 'chicken' over failure to show up for leader's debates.

Once when preparing for a school Halloween party I rented a Big Bird suit from the Dublin Costume Company and tried it on at home.

My sister Mary, who was living with me at the time, helped me with the zipper at the back and then raced out the door to catch a bus. This left me effectively trapped in the Big Bird suit struggling to grab hold of the zip at the back of the costume so that I could release myself from the sweat-box.

And then of course, the doorbell rang and my next-door neighbour called to present me with registered documentation for the next City Council meeting mistakenly delivered to his house.

So I had to open the door in my Big Bird outfit, and my neighbour didn't blink an eyelid.

Friday 28th January

Staff meeting finished, mystery of missing bell solved. @paulryan79 says it was planted in his room.

How do you hold your voice together when effectively telling your colleagues in school that you may not be back again to the school you love for many years to come?

Easy really, by telling a few jokes.

It can be a common ploy to try to put people at their ease to make light of serious situations, but it can also belie an inability to deal maturely and professionally with matters of acute importance

The school bell which had been missing for quite a considerable amount of time was finally located in Mr Ryan's room leading to speculation that he was actually holding it hostage.

These people are quite simply the most incredible collection of individuals that I've ever had the good fortune to meet.

They teach some of the most vulnerable children in the state, yet their good humour never fails. Our school is a place of laughter, yet if I'm to be honest, I felt that I had been

distracted for too long and had possibly not given the job as much as I possibly could have. Politics had progressively colonised my mind and I was sure it was beginning to show.

The staff never mentioned it, never complained, never showed any indication that they were unhappy in any way with the way the school was being run. In my gut I knew I may have let them down. That was why that day had such a tinge of regret, but it was also a relief not to have that sense of guilt weighing me down for the next couple of weeks. I could easily be back in a months' time.

Mammy inspects the new office. 'Have you no kettle????!!!' she asks...in horror and disgust #ge11

No we had no kettle, and the office had certainly seen better days, but it was our's.

If there was one thing that the mammy wanted was tea, and soup.

We obviously needed a kettle.

And more sleep.

And tea-bags.

And coffee.

Lots of coffee.

Friday 29th January

Rally against 42B, 20B, 27B changes and cuts to 123/130 at Dublin Bus Public Consultation, Northside Shopping Centre, Fri Feb 4th @ 4pm

The consultation day that Dublin Bus had planned at Northside Shopping Centre was a great opportunity for a protest against their plans to re-route some popular bus routes. Conveniently it was taking place in the middle of an election campaign but I had been working on this issue for months at that stage.

Saturday 30th January

SBP – Red C- FG 33, Lab 21, FF 16, SF 13, GP 2, Ind 15

Wasn't mad about those figures but we were holding steady enough.

We weren't at the heights we were at last summer but our Dublin figure should have been better. I always trust the Sunday Business Post figures because they are always closer to our actual electoral figure most of the time.

It is remarkable that Fianna Fáil are still the top choice for 16% of the public.

Although I feel like I've already met most of them.

Twice.

Sunday 30th January

Sunday Tribune Pg 25. My comments on NEWB failure to record school absenteeism of 5/6 year old.

Nice to get a mention.

Just finished NEAR FM show with Malachy Steenson (WP), Averil Power (FF) and Keith Redmond (former PD) #ge11

NEAR FM is a fantastic local radio station and I really enjoy doing their weekly 'Between the Lines' programme on a Sunday morning.

Jousting with Malachy Steenson is always fun ever since he attacked me on Liveline for suggesting the €100million subvention for private schools should be investigated. He feels the need to disagree with everything I say and he made a tactical error that day, especially for a Workers Party representative. He was nice to me this morning though - obviously Fianna Fáil are upsetting him more these days.

Just finished the Raheny 5 mile road race. Easily the best organised race I've entered. Congrats to all involved.

Bumped into Naoise Ó Muirí who had a pal of his participating in the race with a Naoise campaign t-shirt. Bit cheesy. Although the sight of my puffed cheeks and knobby knees could put a lot of people off.

Did the race in under 42 minutes I think

More lycra-bums racing past me but my mind was on other things.

Just as well.

Pic from Raheny Road Race '11

Just left Craobh Chiarán's juvenile awards. What a great community club – hats off to the u11 girls esp!

The clubhouse was packed for the club medal presentation and Mark Murray the juvenile secretary was very welcoming. I always feel a little embarrassed when I come across Craobh Chiarán club members as they have a strong link with Our Lady of Consolation NS who my school have beaten twice in the last two years in Croke Park Gaelic football finals.

The first final in 2008 was a comfortable win for us, but the second final in 2009 was a completely different scenario when they played us off the pitch.

Embarrassingly we managed a goal and a point in the last minute but it felt absolutely wonderful.

I think I lost about a hundred votes that day.

I often wondered would I achieve more on a side-line than I ever would in politics.

That particular period of time inched me ever closer to a mental cliff - I was preparing for a fast-approaching wedding day, campaigning for a selection convention, trying to run a school, and training a team in a Croke Park final.

Things would surely never be as busy again.

Surely.

Monday 31st January

Over zealous chat with ref at u12 girls game a number of years ago came back to haunt me on #ge11 canvass today!!

Out and about in Harmonstown and a Labour supporter asked one of the canvass team if we have another candidate as they can't vote for me. Why? I insulted his daughter a few years ago when she was refereeing an underage GAA match.

To be honest that didn't sound like something I would do but I couldn't absolutely deny it. I do get passionate when my girls are playing and I'm very protective of them.

My school won 5 Dublin Gaelic Football titles in the past ten years. This is no mean achievement for a disadvantaged school with limited sports facilities, no GAA history, who could only train once a week in the local community hall. I had started the team up when I joined the school and after only one year of competition we won our first championship final in Parnell Park. It was truly the most exciting and satisfying day of my life and a year later we were back to defend the title, this time in Croke Park. We cake-

walked the final, hammering an Irish-speaking school South County Dublin and it felt good. A strange bit of justice I felt at the time.

Three titles since then had given me some of the best days of my life.

Late Debate Tonight: On with Averil Power (FF) Michelle Mulhern (FG) Mary Minihan (IT) Ken Murray (BBC)

Averil Power again! Second time debating with her in two days and this time on RTE radio's late night politics programme.

Was cranky and so felt that I did well. Not in the humour for taking prisoners.

I got a few encouraging text messages afterwards but there is always pressure in the lead up to an election that you might say something that would damage one of our candidates somewhere around the country.

Claire Byrne was sufficiently benign on us all though. She may have spotted some of the 'crazy' in our eyes.

At that time of the evening you need to be a little more mellow, but elections are a blood sport after all.

At the end of the debate a regular columnist is asked about our individual prospects and I'm told that I have my work cut out to win a seat.

These comments have to be taken in good humour, even if you feel your eyeball twitching throughout his contribution.

FG posters up in Dublin South East

Tut tut. The party of law and order? Breaking the littering laws by postering early.

Interesting to travel through the city on the way home from RTE to see what other constituencies look like! My posters had been lodged in Labour veteran's Joe

Redmond's house for the last few weeks ready for the off. Lucinda Creighton appears to

be a big transgressor.

No posters on Northside. Very law abiding.

We'd be ready to go when the day is announced.

If your posters are up too early you're liable to be fined for littering to the tune of €160 per poster. There is a tactic used by some candidates to organise a public meeting around the election and to advertise the meeting using election posters with detachable labels stuck on.

This means they can take up all the best postering locations in the constituency in the days before an election quite legitimately. During the most recent local election campaign we were stung by a candidate who did exactly that, but in the long run if your campaign is based solely around posters, then you're not going to get very far.

The best posters erected in the most recent past were by Ivor Callely's son Ronan, which were showed a large cut-out image of him with the tag-line 'We Need Change Now'.

Hilarious.

He didn't get elected but a lot of teeny-boppers were reputed to have stolen his poster for their bedroom walls.

Tuesday 1st February

Met my first FF voter today. Then elderly Wexford lady who rooted in her purse to offer me €5. Didn't accept but gesture was lovely.

The atmosphere has been so hostile to Fianna Fáil in the last number of days that when I met my first Fianna Fáil supporter I was genuinely taken aback. They still had their

support and it was becoming increasingly apparent that it was between myself and Seán Haughey for the last seat.

The Independent Finian McGrath and Fine Gael's Richard Bruton were safe judging by the reaction on the doorsteps, so the main line of argument with voters was if you wanted Fianna Fáil out, vote Labour. That line seemed to be having an effect with those who harboured serious resentment against the main government party and was helping us at many doors. However the prospect of having a constituency like Dublin North Central, the former home of Ivor Callely and the Haughey Dynasty, not returning even one Fianna Fáil TD was almost unthinkable. Especially as they were only running one candidate.

Fianna Fáil has one factor that is very difficult to overcome - the unwaivering traditional support of a certain generation of Irish voters who cherish and exercise their votes.

However Labour do have similar traditional support, one of whom I had the pleasure of meeting that day. Calling to a door in Coolock, an elderly lady nodded at my opening few words and then disappeared back into her house, potted around for a good five minutes before reappearing with a five euro note in her hand. 'My father was a Labour man', she told me, 'and he brought us all up to be good people even when we had absolutely nothing'.

The fiver was an election contribution, which wasn't appropriate to accept, but which caused my eyes to moisten none the less.

Very sad news about Tribune. The first paper I pick up on a Sunday with an excellent journalistic team. #tribune

Got news that afternoon that the Sunday Tribune newspaper was no more, and would not reappear. The Tribune had been good to me and fair to those of the political left in stark contrast to some other publications. The fact that it wouldn't be around for the course of the election campaign concerned me because the media coverage needs balance, and it worried me that that balance wouldn't be in much evidence in the most crucial period in the five year political cycle.

My dad's 30 year career in St Aidan's CBS Whitehall got me a few votes tonight in Coolock! #ge11

Another door in Coolock and the last one of the afternoon before tea. It was a tough sell. The chap had been through the mill and wasn't in the mood for any 'hopey changey stuff' as Sarah Palin might call it. I rarely shy away from a reasoned debate - I don't hang around for cranks - and it took about 20 minutes to move him from unbridled anger to less heated exchanges. In the end he admitted to having some regard for Labour as he went to St. Aidan's CBS and Tommy Broughan taught him there. When I asked him if he ever had a teacher called Mr O'Reardon (the da) his face lifted and was amazed to think his former maths teacher had a son on his doorstep asking for a vote. 'I was only thinking about him today' he said 'when I brought the kids to McDonalds and I remembered a lecture he gave us about the evils of multi-national corporations thirty years ago'

Sounds like my dad alright.

'Isn't he dead?'

'Nope. He's around on the next road'

'Look-it, you can't be that bad so. I'll support you but you have to earn it.

Fair enough.

The election date had been officially named during the conversation - February 25th as everyone had suspected. The Dáil had been dissolved and the postering had begun in earnest. Eleven teams were on the ready for four weeks now. Each team had a car, a

ladder, a heap of posters, the all-important cable-ties, and a map of lampposts that require to be adorned by my face.

I'm not mad about my election poster - I went with a tie against by own instinct, and I didn't like the tie in particular. I was also advised to smile in the picture, but I have hated my crooked teeth since my teenage years, and there are an awful lot of people with very little to be smiling about.

You can have fun with posters though. If you're standing at a bus stop with your poster hanging overhead, you can really freak out some passers-by.

Wednesday 2nd February

Great atmosphere at Labour Election launch this morning. Long day ahead!

Strange atmosphere at the election launch to be honest. It took place at the Guinness Gravity Bar which wasn't the most appropriate place in my opinion but it was a great view of the city.

Inevitably I was late and arrived sweating like a pig on the back of a bike.

One of my twitter followers @anniewestdotcom waved and shouted at me as I cycled past but I had no time to stop.

There seems to be a sense that we should be doing better, and there was a slight tension in the air in the room. I got a great seat just behind the leader's podium which means you might get your mug in a photograph somewhere.

Pat Rabbitte had made some comments the previous day about Fianna Fáil candidate photo-shoots which were described as sexist in some partisan quarters so he was rewarded by being photographed surrounded by women for the morning.

Candidates came from all over the country and it's great to have a chat with the only other people on the universe who know what you're going through. Most seem to suggest that I was home and dry and I hated that sort of talk.

Just did college radio interview. Newstalk tonight and Raidio na Gaeltachta ar maidin.

It was game time now. My diet has gone to hell and I'm not exercising properly. I was as irritable a cat in a bag and there was three and a half weeks to go.

We were back in our tribal trenches and would stay there for the foreseeable future. But in all media interviews it's important to be as reasonable as possible, and to be a considered voice. Not always easy.

Posters take a fair battering! #ge11.On the way to Harmonstown. Newstalk after.

Posters were getting blown all over the place and I wasn't impressed. The posters were crumpled, slipping down the poles, and were blowing off completely onto roads and in front of moving traffic.

Phone calls were beginning to come in complaining about hazardous postering around the constituency.

I rang Labour's National Organiser to ask if other candidates were having a similar problem with their posters and he retorted with the following statement in his unmistakable Corkonian tones....

'Would ya f**k off...half of them are in f**king Scotland'

End of conversation.

Quote of the day: 'Better the devil you know'. Oh Lord. #ge11

Another Fianna Fáiler. You can't argue with that. No point. Thank you and goodnight. Overall more people couldn't wait for election day to give Fianna Fáil the hammering they deserved.

Most Fianna Fáilers are more cunning and try to put you off your game. The following statements are dead give-aways that you're talking to a die-hard FFER.

- I was Labour all my life but not now. (Translated: I never voted Labour but they're really annoying me now)

- I'm not voting. (Translated: I can't vote Fianna Fáil cos they're hopeless but I'm not voting for you)

- I don't even know who are. (I know who you are and you're not Fianna Fáil)

- You're all the same. (You're not the same as Fianna Fáil)

- Why are you letting them away with it? (Fianna Fáil just need direction and you're not helping!)

- I voted Labour until Mary Robinson brought the blacks into Ireland. (No translation necessary)

- All you lot want is abortion. (Why bother?)

@davidcochrane I wish I wasn't here.

Appeared on 'Coleman at Large' on Newstalk which I wouldn't be doing again in a hurry. There were four other panellists in studio and two others on the phone line but none of us got to contribute more than the opinionated host Marc Coleman.

The excited Mr Coleman believed he had gotten the scoop of the century when on a recorded interview, Eamon Ó Cuiv seemed to prevaricate on the matter of Fianna Fáil's support for a united Ireland. So on the day after the most important election in the history of the state was called, we were talking about.....a united Ireland.....really on the edge stuff.

There ensued two hours of nonsense radio which was so bad that I eventually openly tweeted my displeasure to another panellist David Cochrane. I don't mind right-wing radio hosts, I do mind when you can't get three words out of your mouth before getting interrupted or cut off.

Wasn't this the guy who wrote the book 'The best is yet to come' about the Irish economy in 2007?

I just wanted my bed.

Thursday 3rd February

DART station first thing. Looking forward to a grilling from Holy Faith Clontarf girls at 12noon! #Ge11

Another early morning DART station handing out leaflets and saying hello. This time it was Killester. This is an exercise in what is often called 'The Big V' - visibility. The majority of houses have been polluted with literature at this stage and so they rarely welcome the opportunity to read more, unless they have very long and boring train journeys ahead of them.

Naoise Ó Muirí arrived again just as we had gotten settled.

Neither of us benefitted as commuters were now just facing a forest of politicians offering literature which was pretty irritating first thing in the morning.

Trying to be civil to each other is a bit forced. The stakes were high and we're in serious competition with each other.

As another of comrade Joe's leaflets are rejected, he announced 'Ah sure, they'll miss us when we're gone!'

That broke the tension. It's important not to take yourself too seriously.

Direach theis agallamh a dheanamh ar R na G #ge11

Both myself and Naoise break off from the Killester DART station canvass to debate on Raidio na Gaeltachta early morning radio programme. My hand was frozen stiff as the joust continued and I just wanted my breakfast.

Breakfast is generally French toast and coffee in the Nuthouse in Killester where we bumped into Naoise and his team again. We can't talk too loud. Didn't want to give anything away. He left much earlier than us. Made me wonder where he was off to....

Mammy and @NoreenKehoe sorting out the office. We have stamps...and milk!!! #ge11

Tea and letters are the fuel of any political campaign. Can't drink tea without milk, well most people can't, and you can't send letters without stamps, well most candidates can't!

My diet is gone to hell. Biscuits for breakfast. Skin beginning to show the effects.

Mammy and Noreen sort both out the essentials in the office.

Heat will be a problem.

In Holy Faith Clontarf ready for a candidates debate. Ready for some hard hitting questions. #ge11

The trap that most politicians fall into when faced with a young teenage audience is to pretend to be young, hip, cool and in tune with the younger generation. This debate in the school sports hall was opened with one candidate challenging the rest of us to throw a successful basket shot. That nonsense over we got down to the issues and I got the chance to tell the youngest of the potential voters why I want to be their local representative and why I want Labour to be in the next government. The hope and lack of cynicism in their questioning was inspiring. They just want to belong to a country they can be proud of. I stayed behind longer than the others just to chat more. It's always good to be around people who haven't been beaten up by life and who are still idealistic enough to want to change the world.

They are worried about their parents though. Finian McGrath told them he considered only those earning over €130,000 as high earners. One girl got upset when talking to me afterwards when describing the pressure her mother is under.

SF poster on lamp-post outside my school door. Christy Burke would never have done that. Little wonder he left them. #ge11

Made a quick trip back into school to say hello and the children had already moved on. One girl met me in the corridor and innocently asked 'Why are you back sir?'

Well thanks very much young lady! The happy-go-lucky atmosphere in the school is in stark contrast to the faint nervous throbbing that is continually in my head.

I wasn't impressed with the Mary Lou McDonald poster erected on the lamp-post literally a foot outside the school door. Someone trying to send me a message perhaps? Gesture not appreciated. Christy Burke would never have done that if he was Sinn Féin's candidate.

Texted @talktojoe1850 to inform him that I proposed a DCC motion to limit election postering last year but it was rejected by all others.

I got a text to tell me that there were complaints on RTE's Liveline programme about my posters being blown all over the place and almost decapitating people. My text that I sent to the Liveline radio programme wasn't read out which I was disappointed about but

then again there are probably strict rules regarding coverage for candidates during election campaigns.

I did propose a motion to control postering at a Dublin City Council meeting after the '09 election which has heavily defeated, and didn't get a whole heap of support from my Labour colleagues either. The idea was that there would be a limited amount of posters per candidate and that all cable ties would be issued by the council and that they would be individually coded so as to be clearly identifiable in the aftermath of an election.

The Lord Mayor laughed at my proposal. It would make all of our lives easier if there were no election posters at all but in the absence of new legislation, it's unlikely to change anytime soon.

Poster problems being rectified. Evidence of foul-play. Apologies to all affected.

Bizarrely some areas are more bereft of posters than others. The weather certainly is bad but there are some parts of the constituency that have certainly been 'cleaned up'. Terry has spent every night for hours on end wrapped around a pole sticking posters up including one in the front garden of his ma's house on Elm Mount Road. The only problem was that he left it to Owen and Joe to actually erect it in the garden and Terry's ma ran out of the house to ask what in heaven's name they thought they were doing. Terry forgot to tell his ma about the poster.

There is of course an art to putting a poster up:

1. Remember that most members of the public hate posters, so never look like you're having fun
2. Select a pole with a few notches or else it'll slide down the pole and schoolchildren will draw an array of items on your poster which will get noticed.....and get you endless phone calls
3. Never climb up a pole without enough cable ties
4. Never climb up a pole with your poster upside down
5. Never climb up a pole using your da's 1974 step ladder in the wind
6. Be sure that anyone you entrust to put up your posters is tall enough to prevent you getting the "Coulda had me bleedin' eye out" phone calls

Taking them down is a whole other cautionary tale. A pal of mine Peter was removing a poster from an ESB pole in East Wall after the 2004 Local elections when he clipped the wrong wire. I heard a dull snapping sound and we were both showered with electrical sparks. Remarkably I turned to him and all I could think of saying was: 'How are you not dead?'

I wasn't allowed to forget that incident for a long time.

Wet and Wild tonight but well worth it. Everyone heard poster complaint on @talktojoe1850!

We got soaked in the February wind and rain.

In fairness it is so heartening to have so many to come out to help to canvass. While I sometimes have my doubts, I think they can smell victory. They have been through too many local and national election defeats to let this one slip away.

The local Labour machine lost the 2002 despite the Labour vote going up. They lost the Local Election Clontarf Ward in 2004 by two votes. They were thumped in 2007. But they kept coming back for more.

Not easy running from door to door though, but there is normally a little more sympathy for you when you're soaked to the skin.

I have a new found respect for Marc Coleman – at least he has a political philosophy – FF rep on RTE has openly admitted to not having one.

Got home to watch 'RTÉ Prime Time Late Debate' where all of Fianna Fáil problems were laid bare. Their representative on the panel Mary Fitzpatrick appeared confused when asked about her political philosophy.

You know that thing we're all supposed to have thought about - the very reason we joined political parties in the first place.....

'Political ideology won't get anyone a job in Cabra' she announced.

If they have no political philosophy then their problems are deeper than I thought they were.

I got approval from a local Fine Gael councillor for that tweet.

Felt like tweeting back to ask him what the difference between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is....but I left it.

Ivana Bacik did very well on the same show.

She's a star.

Friday 4th February

Another DART station and people stopping to chat. Hearty handshakes always welcome! #ge11

Harmonstown station and Friday commuters are always cheerier. A good few handshakes were given and waves etc. It doesn't take long to start remembering faces and to know who to smile at and who to stay away from. I always seem to be unaccompanied at Harmonstown. Except for the Metro guys who cheerfully offer me a newspaper in return for one of my leaflets. A nice gesture, particularly as they genuinely tend to read my litter!

Breakfast in Moloughney's, Clontarf. Numnumnumnumnum. #ge11

Its Friday and I feel I need some alone time.

I'll have a fry please thank you very much. The hairier the better! Large Americano also. Thanks. Three weeks to go and I'm a walking cholesterol sample.

Got a few responses on twitter from candidates who are amazed that I have time for breakfast - that puts a downer on my sizeable and utterly delicious rasher.

It's good to read the paper and appear to be a proper human being for at least 45 minutes. I'm off out again at 11am for another two hours of door knocking.

Getting ready for protest against bus cuts. Northside Shopping Centre at 4pm. Interviewed by Newstalk and Q102 already.

My campaign against the changes to various Northside bus routes is gathering pace and attracting a lot of local support. My initial survey on the changes to the 20B and 27B bus routes go over 250 responses and a follow up public meeting I organised on the issue packed out the St John Vianney Hall on the Ardlea Road.

One woman raised a laugh at the meeting when she complained the bus always moves off before 'me arse has hit the seat'. Otherwise it was agreed that a petition should be organised and sure enough we got over 2000 signatures opposing the route changes.

A number of meetings were then held with senior bus management and smaller groups of local residents which seemed to go quite well. It is my experience that those in

authority are always willing to listen to reasoned argument, but they don't respond well to overly emotive campaigns with dubious intent or motivation.

Either way, we arranged for a number of protests to proceed to coincide with the Dublin Bus consultation days, the first of which was to be at 4pm where we hoped to get a reasonable turnout.

The real objective was to empower the local people to realise the importance of their participation in these consultation days - that their voices do matter and are taken seriously.

Just re-enacted Rocky chasing the chicken scene – by chasing a dancing poster down Collins Ave. Poster put up a good fight...#ge11

More poster chaos as it seems that every poster we put up in Collins Avenue has ended up on the street or in someone's garden. On the way back from a canvass in the Whitehall end of Collins Avenue I spotted one cartwheeling down the road and took chase. I only realised a few strides in that the poster was unlikely to have consumed a large Irish breakfast only a few hours previously and therefore had an unfair advantage.

Either way passers-by and a few motorists copped on to the fact that a lanky lunatic was chasing a large photo of himself down the street and began to point and laugh.

I prevailed in the end and wrestled the fecker to the ground. Of course the Irish breakfast was now at the back of my throat, and the shirt was stuck to my back with perspiration. I couldn't take my jacket off then as the wet patches would be too obvious - and I had a bus protest in an hours' time?

Feckin' posters.

Feckin' February Elections.

Feckin' Full Irish Breakfasts.

Protest at Dublin Bus Plans:



Dublin Bus Consultation; 42B user asks Dublin Bus rep if the new elongated service will serve soup and sandwiches!

Classic Dublin Humour. Another lady asks why Dublin buses always 'hunt in packs'. Most are thankful that I informed them of the consultation day as they were unaware of it taking place. Two other candidates showed up but I was in possession of the petition which I duly handed over.

A good day's work in all and I think we may get a real result.

Poster Carnage being blamed on 'Gilmore Gale'...#ge11

Posters are a disaster. They are falling everywhere and are in a much worse state than anyone else's. It is so dispiriting to travel around the constituency and see so many areas where we have no posters at all. It's as if we don't have a bloody candidate. I ring Rónán because he is used to my crankiness and he explains that poster teams almost killed themselves putting up posters over the last number of days and they're more pissed off than anyone.

He tells me to bite my lip, it'll be sorted.

We have loads more in stock and there are a full three weeks to go.

He's right of course.

Three weeks to go.

Brave face it is.

Plan is now to use fallen posters as over-sized canvass cards. #ge11

It would be fun to arrive at a door and to hand someone a poster instead of a leaflet.

My humour is getting darker.

No-one responded to that tweet.

Saturday 5th February

Edenmore for clinic at 10.30am. Then we're off for a packed day of meeting people. Good morning all!

My driving is crap and my parking is even worse. I'm quite likely to take the side off someone's car at any stage. If I do there'll be major consequences - the least of which will be loss of votes. I've already gotten some 'hugs' on the side of the car from when my wife Áine was away earlier in the year and I gave the driving lark a bit of a bash, literally, for a few days. Either way I made it to Edenmore safely enough!

Quiet enough in the clinic but it is therapeutic to chat to Seán about his campaign. His battle is with Larry O'Toole of Sinn Féin for the last seat. He says I'm home and dry.

No Fianna Fáiler in Dublin North Central or Dublin North East? Unthinkable.

In Harry Byrne's for the second half. We need to win this. Badly. #ge11

We finished the canvass early in Clontarf.

We're all wrecked and sick of looking at each other.

Ireland are playing Italy so a trip to Harry Byrnes is the plan for a pint and a gander at the rugby. The game is closer than it needs to be. We did need to win this badly, but I'm not sure whether I'm talking about the election or the match. We dig it out in the end. The country needs something to cheer about and a close win over Italy in rugby will just about do for the moment.

SB Red C FG 35 -2 Lab 22 + 3 FF 17-1 SF 13 +1 GP 2 – 1 Ind 11 nc. #ge11

Another poll and the news is a little better but the 3% increase is from the last Red C poll and not from the last Sunday Business Post Poll.

Fianna Fáil is in big trouble and in bigger trouble in Dublin . The Dublin stats are what are most interesting were Labour were at one stage more popular than FG and FF combined, we are now struggling to be out on top. If this continues then we can take the Fianna Fáil seat.

Sunday 6th February

On door today in Marino. Kind permission for photo given by resident. #ge11



We rarely door knock on a Sunday but I got chatting to this lady on her doorstep as a result of the interesting sign on her door.

'That could be us in five years' time' I am reminded.

Monday 7th February

Diospoireacht deas agam ansin ó thaobh cursaí Gaeilge

Back to Clontarf DART station. This is where most of the prolonged debates take place. The same guy mutters something about abortion to me every time I arrive here. This morning I have a nice debate on the election as Gaeilge with a pleasant chap. I don't think I convinced him of any of my arguments but it was surprisingly enjoyable. There are more Irish speakers than ever willing to chat to me as Gaeilge which is very encouraging. Often, It is easier to be cordial with someone in Irish than in English as there is a mutual appreciation on the importance of the language. And we are winning over many Irish speakers support because of Fine Gael's policy of ending compulsory Irish for leaving certificate. A strange stance to take as they are leaking votes needlessly. We'll happily take them though.

In Sheriff's office with nomination papers in hand. One of those 'I could just bolt it' moments..hmmmm....

Nomination papers day.

No nomination papers - no nomination.

No nomination - no spot on the ballot paper.

It is by far and away the most important task any candidate has to undertake. You present yourself at the County Sheriff's office with the relevant documentation and then you're in the race. Where is the Sheriff's office? No idea.

I bumped into Averil Power galloping down Dame Street and she pointed me in the direction of the office and I spotted Joe Costello on his way inside.

The atmosphere inside is as tension-filled as dentist's waiting room. Bill Tormley tells me I'm a racing certainty. He's quietly confident also.

Did I really need this in my life? Wouldn't it have been simpler to walk away and have my life back? To be able to go anywhere with my new wife, anywhere in the world whenever we felt like it? If I got elected it'd be five years of crappy decisions followed by more crappy decisions all in the bleak hope that we get the country back to some semblance of economic solvency so that we might get re-elected in five year's time to rebuild a Republic.

In the meantime you would be public enemy number one at every public meeting. At every political talk show. At every social event.

Mam told me a few months after my first local election win that while she was delighted I won, she wouldn't wish the life of a TD on anyone. It's no life, she said.

At that point it was closer than ever and I should have been merrily tossing the nomination papers over the desk to the Sheriff and relishing the next few weeks.

But it didn't feel that way.

The stories on the doorsteps were beginning to take their toll.

It would have been easier just to bolt it.

No going back now. Nomination papers are in. Time to stand up. #ge11

I didn't bolt it. It was indeed time to stand up.

The day the election was called I sent a text to Ivana Bacik who was still unsure about running. It said 'Time to stand up. Time for a new Republic.'

You do have to reaffirm your core belief system in the loneliest moments. You can get all the advice in the world but if your gut doesn't agree, then you are wasting your time.

I was back out that night in Kilmore.

There has to be hope. Families are hurting. Bleeding. Tough night listening. V tough. Feeling helpless. There has to be hope. #ge11

It was horrible. Every single door was pain. Rónán complains that I spent too much time at each door but it was impossible to walk away. There was naked desperation at every house. Tears in almost every eye. Couples who were at breaking point because the very

walls that surround them were eating them alive. Parents who have sent their children overseas, children who were filled with resentment and who never want to come back. Pay cuts crippling homes, piling guilt on top of desperation for families who can barely look their kids in the eye anymore. And then there was the unemployment.

And unemployment is the worst, because none of the answers I have sound convincing even to me when faced with such raw grief.

So you don't say anything but you listen. And you listen hard. And you make sure that no-one, no-one ever is allowed to do this to our people again.

Are they queuing up to vote for me? Not sure. Not sure if I care.

But they are queuing up to vote. And they are angry. And they are waiting.

I just needed a hug when I came home and to allowed get it out of my system.

I drank far too much in my first local election campaign in 2004 and I don't ever want to live my life that way again. But I needed a drink tonight. And a hug.

Get over yourself. Get your act together. Three weeks to go.

Tuesday 8th February

Seen last night draped around neck of ornamental duck. (photo)



One moment of light relief from Kilmore the last night.

Morn spent meeting parents in Clontarf, giving support for Mental Health Campaign at 10.30 then RTE interview. No debate/footie for me #ge11

Other candidates tell me that meeting parents on the way to school is a great way to canvass but I've never tried it until this morning. Local Clontarf member John Suttle came to give me a hand but it felt weird and a bit of an invasion to be honest, so I doubted I'd be doing that again.

The one canvass that was really working out was the so called 'Dad's Army' canvass which consisted of a few older members of the party who met up in the afternoon and knocked on doors with me.

Enda, the two Johns, Bill, Joe, James and my Dad make up the core of the 'Dad's Army' team who seemed to be really enjoying themselves! The positive impact that an older person has when canvassing a more elderly person at their door in the afternoon is quite considerable. They are non-threatening and invariably respectful and, it must be said, quite charming. I had a feeling that Dad's Army might miss the election when it was over!

It was a big night tonight as Gilmore was going head to head with Micheál Martin in the TV3 debate. No Enda Kenny was a great opportunity for Labour to be seen as the real opposition.

Just like the Irish fans who went to Italia '90 and 'missed the World Cup'...I am totally missing this election. #ge11

When you're 'on the road' the whole time you miss the major televisual events that shape and mould every election campaign. With this election taking place during the effective Irish winter month of February, the campaign on the television is more important than ever. Almost every door was wondering why I wasn't at home watching the debate. Everyone seemed to be willing Eamon to win which was positive. Everyone else was watching the football as Ireland were playing Wales in Lansdowne Road

I had no idea how either contest was going so I sent two texts out - one to a friend at the match and another to a Labour Party member at home watching TV3.

I just arrived home and had settled myself to watch the debate I had recorded earlier when the text replies came in.

One to say that Ireland won 3-0.

Nice one.

The other to say that Gilmore lost the debate.

F**k.

I didn't watch it.

Wednesday 9th February

So proud to have helped launch our literacy document today. #ge11

This morning was spent helping to launch the literacy document and it's clear that the gloves are off with Fine Gael.

Myself and Tom Kelleher, a candidate in Dublin North are drafted in to do the needful with Roisín Shortall and Ruairí Quinn at the election headquarters in Golden Lane.

A poster truck arrives with the slogan: 'Under Fine Gael, Some Children Won't Be Able to Read This'. The idea being that Fine Gael's plan to axe 30,000 public service jobs would not be possible without hurting front line services.

A thin line to walk really - attacking a party that we have no difficulty going into government with. But they are doing too well and we are stalling.

So I get to hop on top of the truck with the poster behind me and then Ruairí, Roisín and Tom use the ladder, which makes me feel like a total plank. The first time I met Ruairí Quinn I also felt like a total plank. I met him when in Colm's company when he made a charming remark about our respective height and what we must have been fed as children. I responded by laughing like a stallion being machine-gunned while simultaneously being boiled alive for glue production. I'm sure Ruairí noticed that I was clearly a complete plank dressed up as a human being, but if he did, he didn't let on. I tend to get star struck around people I've seen on the telly.

Rumours abound that Scottish fans in Dublin are here to give back the Labour posters that were blown there last week. #ge11

Some extremely colourful Scottish football fans are in Dublin for another soccer international and they give us some quizzical looks as we clamber down from the back of the truck. Remembering David Leech's earlier comment about the final destination of my election posters makes me smile. For about half a second. Nobody seemed to get the joke.

Great to have Proinsias de Rossa on the doors in Clontarf today. #ge11

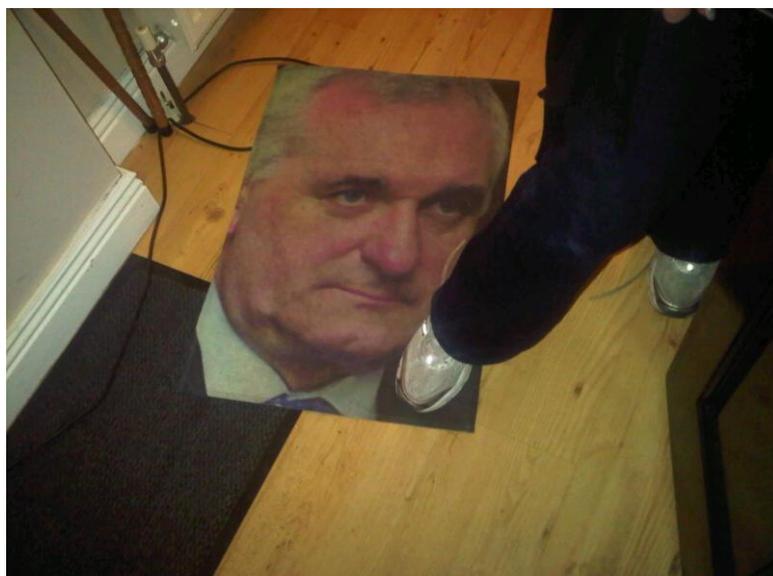
Proinsias has always been very positive towards me and he offers me two days of canvassing whenever and wherever it suits us. It adds a huge amount to a campaign and gives the election team a bit of a lift to have someone of his experience on the trail.

Soup in the Beachcomber in Killester numnumnumnumnum....#ge11

And he's great company to share a bowl of soup with. He regales us all with the tales of his relationship with John Bruton in the mid-1990s rainbow coalition which was surprisingly warm. For a man in his early seventies, Proinsias is truly an inspiration and one of my genuine political heroes. For someone to travel the political journey he has travelled and to still remain so positive and idealistic is remarkable.

Thursday 10th February

Bertie doormat in Artane. This could catch on....



I'm not one to kick a guy when he's down but this one did make me laugh. It certainly is changed times since the 2002 and 2007 elections when the good people of Ireland couldn't get enough of Bertie and his charms.

Photo in today's Examiner of yesterday's literacy launch.



Good photo. I'm sure the lads in Cork will appreciate that one!

Another great canvass with Proinsias de Rossa in Clontarf. #ge11

One lady in Clontarf remarked to Proinsias that her mother always voted for Dev and Fianna Fáil. Proinsias replied that his mother voted Fianna Fáil too, until Dev put him in jail!

Man fell apart in front of me on the canvass last night. Elderly man today asked me 'Honestly, is there hope?' #ge11

The campaign was getting tougher and tougher and the cases were harder and harder. Normally when you are out for a canvass you arrive back to the office with endless scraps of paper in your back pocket filled with names, addresses and local queries, but not this time.

This was a national election. And all anyone wants to talk about is their country, their hurt, and their future.

There are two weeks left and the strain was beginning to show. The campaigning positivity that was so obvious and genuine two weeks ago was slipping slightly. There

was a feeling that we're plodding along through this campaign and not in anyway hitting the heights as we did only a few months ago.

And Fine Gael's famous 'Five Point Plan' was working.

Our 'Jobs, Reform, Fairness' slogan just wasn't as direct or convincing.

I was beginning to wonder if Fianna Fáil were the threat anymore. Could Fine Gael possibly sneak two seats in Dublin North Central and squeeze me out?

Friday 11th February

Too much of my morning is spent trying to match socks together. Serves me right for buying so many 'days of the week' socks. #ge11

Every morning it's the same bloody story.

Have to iron a shirt, eat breakfast and spend twenty minutes trying to find matching bloody socks. Of course it would be a massive scandal if I wore 'Thursday' socks on a Friday. The kids in school used to love it when I wore the wrong socks to school.

Although they called them 'stockings'.

It can be difficult to be taken seriously as an educational leader when you are wearing odd socks.

That's why I spend so much time getting it right.

I'm a mess and I'm sick of eating Rice Krispies all of the time. Morning, noon and bloody night-time.

And I've a huge pimple on my nose.

Two weeks to go.

I once wore odd shoes out leafleting but that's another story.

Friday 11th February

Friday DART users much happier than the Monday ones! Off to manifesto launch at LANSLOWNE ROAD (as it will always be) in an hour. #ge11

The DART commuters were getting used to me.

We had a plan to hand them roses the next Monday for Valentine's Day which would be worthwhile. They'd be expensive but having a red rose as your party symbol has to be used as an advantage at least once!

I arrived at the manifesto launch an hour early so I got to have a good chat with Brendan Howlin who is in great form.

Not in great form are the Labour backroom boys who were snarling over a newspaper report showing that Fine Gael are dismissing Labour as a 'high-tax' party.

'This is our fault' says one senior advisor in an unmistakably concerned, or desperate, tone.

The high tax charge was hurting us, just as the Universal Social Charge is hurting families.

The Irish rugby team are training on the pitch behind where we are launching our manifesto which is a kind of an 'Ireland's Call' idea.

So we take our seats, chat amongst ourselves and then from nowhere Eamon explodes onto stage announcing all the elements of the manifesto including a referendum on gay marriage.

'Can we not just legislate for that? Why do we need a bloody referendum?' comments a voice behind me.

The press conference goes very well with Brendan Howlin doing most of the talking and Eamon and Joan appearing to be in good spirits.

However wrecked I feel, I'm sure they are floored. And there are two weeks to go.

Eamon was to be out with me on Saturday so I was glad he was still smiling.

Just got a lovely call from college friend wishing me all the best. Lovely chat. #ge11

I hopped on a DART to bring me home and I'm alone with my troubled thoughts when my phone rings and it's a chap who knew me in college and just wanted to wish me all the best.

He can't vote for me as he lives outside the constituency but he remembers my Dad as a teacher in St Aidan's and he hopes it all works out.

That cheers me up.

Just did TG4 interview. If the bad grammar doesn't upset you...the large pimple on the end of my nose will. #ge11

My nose is big enough without needing a pimple on the end of it.

Got a text that David Quinn has written an article in the Irish Independent attacking our canvassing outside of his local church in Clontarf, considering that we are a 'pro-abortion' party. It is a classic right-wing attempt to poison an election campaign with a deliberately misleading article about our stance on this most delicate of issues.

His article was an insult to every Catholic member of the Labour Party and was particularly upsetting to me as I know how devout my parents are.

Elections are dirty.

They are difficult enough when people criticise what you actually believe in, but when deliberate and malicious mistruths are written about what you believe in for another hidden right-wing conservative political agenda its bang out of order.

Congrats to all involved in the Donnycarney Senior Citizen Valentine's Party today. Met some inspiring Labour men & women. #ge11

A brilliant event, wonderfully organised and an atmosphere you could cut with a knife. I went around all the tables to say hello and there were many people who knew my Granny from Belton Park Ave, my Dad from St Aidan's and me from the 20B bus campaign. One table of women began chanting 'Fianna Fáil, Fianna Fáil' and banging their fists on the table so I didn't spend too much time with them.

'Only for Fianna Fáil we'd have nothing' one of them called after me.

It's because of Fianna Fáil that we have nothing, I said, to myself.

And then at the very last table, I met an elderly lady who remembered putting up posters for the Labour Party in the 1940s when she was 16 years of age and how she always voted Labour and would always vote Labour.

I wanted to employ her as a spiritual advisor on the spot.

She energised me so much that I leapt to my feet, cut into a dancing couple and swung an unsuspecting lady around the floor before offering her a red rose and kissing her on the cheek.

She seemed to enjoy it and I left with the inspiration of a woman in her late 80s who always kept the faith.

This is bizarre. Waiting to go on q102 but no-one is answering my knocking! Cleaner let me into building but I'm not getting v far! #ge11

A half hour interview on the Labour Party manifesto and I can't get into the Q102 studio. The cleaner lets me in but it takes five minutes banging on the studio door for anyone to notice that I'm there. After that the interview goes well with callers reasonably happy with my responses.

It was only after the show I was told that the other political parties put forward their most senior spokespeople for that slot: Eamon Ryan and James Reilly being two examples!!

Again with only a few weeks left you don't want to put your foot in it for other candidates across Dublin.
I need a pint.

Saturday 12th February

Out and about with Eamon in the red Stables farmers market at St Anne's Pk Clontarf

Today's proceedings are split between myself and Rónán meeting Eamon Gilmore and Owen and Morgan organising two other canvassing crews in other parts of the constituency.

The convoy is delayed in traffic as it contains another billboard truck advertisement. When it does arrive it conveys a more positive message:

'Government is not about ruling the people, it's about serving the people'

I hate these staged walkabouts and I know that Eamon hates them too. A few months ago, on the back of a very encouraging opinion poll, I was asked to accompany him on a walkabout around the south city when he did some television interviews. He hated the idea of pretending to buy bits and bobs in city stalls for media purposes so we just walked side by side up to the cameras.

We did the needful again. Buying bits and pieces but once again you do feel like you are hijacking the one bit of peace and quiet hard-pressed families get to enjoy these days. We bought vegetables.

The former Labour Councillor for Clontarf Orla Farrell made sure I got a bunch of flowers for Áine as it's the anniversary of our first meeting the next day. Back then we were both teachers, her a hopeful journalist and me a budding politician.

That initial time wasn't easy and we've never really had much time and space for ourselves.

Even two weeks before our wedding I had to contend with a selection convention for the General Election, and that Croke Park final with the school team, so she had a completely distracted fiancé on the lead up to the happiest day of our lives.

But for a selection convention you have to convince each and every member that you're worthy of being the standard bearer for the party in the General Election. Cllr Paddy Bourke made it a contest which was right and proper because no-one should get selected for a general election by default in my view. The convention was packed out and I came out on top with a comfortable win..

And we won the final in Croker too, which if we'd lost I wouldn't have forgiven myself. Children need to know that you are on their side, so if they get to a final it's not fair to be distracted. Thankfully Hannah Billings, a new member of staff and a big GAA fan, gave me a huge helping hand and was primarily responsible for getting the girls right that year.

I sometimes wonder if I would achieve more by staying in school and cheering children on from the side-lines. It's the one thing that I know I do well. And no-one ever questions your motives.

Sunday Business Post/Red C poll: FG: 38% (+3), Labour: 20% (-2), FF: 15% (-2), SF: 10% (-3), Greens: 3% (+1), Independents: 14% (+3)

Disaster.

We're leaking support and Fine Gael is flying. With two weeks to go they're heading for an overall majority. The trend is not good and we're in trouble. No-one is taking Fianna Fáil and Seán Haughey seriously anymore. He has a very low profile campaign and we only ever see him out with one other person. The hostility to Fianna Fáil is so great that he is apparently going through his database and only calling on doors of those he has

dealt with personally over the last number of years. In fairness to Seán he's a well-liked and respected local representative who no-one has any ill-feeling towards. But it's not about him anymore. It's about Fine Gael, Naoise Ó Muirí and the second seat they can steal from us.

Owen tells me he is certain we will win a seat.

And he is never certain about anything political.

I feel like we're hanging onto a win but the referee is not willing to blow the whistle. The National campaign peaked too soon. Had our's as well?

Johnny Giles was out with us the next day.

That would take our minds off the tension headaches that we were all suffering from.

Sunday 13th February

At Marino AFC with John Giles and Eamon Gilmore where we launched our Sports policy

It was my idea to launch our Sports Policy Document with me and John Giles in Marino. I had known John Giles since I first petitioned Dublin City Council to place a plaque in his honour where he was raised at 7 Ormonde Square beside the Four Courts on the North Quays.

That square was part of my electoral area at the time and I was determined to promote the idea of local heroes who would inspire young people to be whatever they wished, regardless of where they came from. When I discovered that John Giles hailed from Ormonde Square I contacted him to see if he would be willing to be honoured with a plaque and he was delighted with the idea. I have always been fascinated with the thought that such brilliance on the football pitch could have been learnt on the cobbled streets of such a compact area.

Having secured the funding from the council, and agreed the date of the unveiling, I met John a few times to nail down the finer details of the day and who should be invited.

He was so charming to deal with, it was clear why he was such a star, and why people are still so respectful of him today.

The day the plaque was unveiled, the day before the 2006 World Cup Final, was probably my proudest day in politics. John's family were all there, including his brother-in-law Nobby Stiles, who was a World Cup winner in 1966. A huge crowd assembled and it was incredible to see so many old football men queuing up to shake his hand. I got to make a speech as Deputy Lord Mayor and I have never practised any speech as much as I practiced that one.

At the reception that his family had organised later I was again asked to say a few words, in front of a packed room full of ex-international footballers and friends and family of John. Whatever I said I can't really remember but I got such a great round of applause I remember blushing very hard.

And now he was back to help me out. In my hour of greatest political need to help launch Labour's Sports Policy. Marino Boys FC had agreed to help out as well with some of the teams playing in the background as we launched the policy with Eamon Gilmore, John Gilroy, myself and John Giles.

I asked Rónán should I risk putting a campaign sticker on Giles' lapel and he wasn't sure. But I chanced it and he agreed!

For a man who has spent over fifty years being asked to stop for photographs and to sign autographs he is still an incredible gentleman to everyone who asks for his time.

Eamon Gilmore arrived with the various people from HQ and seemed genuinely relieved to be involved in a gig that was a lot more fun than walking around an outdoor market.

The day was a great success. We got loads of press coverage including a piece on TV3 news when Giles is asked if he is a long-time supporter of the Labour Party and he replied deadpan: 'No.'

We all laughed.

Honest to the last.

His vote is in Birmingham anyway!

Monday 14th February

Handing out Labour roses at Killester DART station this morning



Now this was a bright idea! Morgan organised it and Bronwen Maher helped me to hand them out.

Bronwen's support in this campaign has been very important since she joined the Labour Party after the local elections in 2009 when she ran as an independent. She had left the Green Party over their record in government and was always a very highly respected local public representative of the highest integrity. Her decision to join Labour added a lot of credibility to our local organisation.

Her willingness to stand with me at DART stations handing out roses was also greatly appreciated!

The idea was so successful that 100 roses were gone by 8am.

Described as 'bright & articulate' in SBP; 'pious' in Sindo and 'a terrific lad' by

John Giles (Examiner). Take your pick! #ge11
Thank you very much Mr Giles. Happy Valentine's Day!

Tuesday 15th February

Herald Dublin Poll: LAB 31 FG 29 FF 10 Ind 16 SF 11 #ge11

At last a poll that cheered us all up a bit. However we used to have more support in Dublin than Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil combined. Anyway, we'd take that. With Fianna Fáil at 10% in Dublin they were facing an absolute meltdown. Not only was their core support deserting them but they would not be able to buy a transfer. They are not the problem anymore. The problem was Fine Gael. When Fine Gael had their meltdown in 2002, they still managed a seat in Dublin North Central. With this sort of mounting support we were in for a tight squeeze.

Tuesday 15th February

Off to Artane Resource Centre for meeting at 12noon. #ge11

Got a chance to meet some of the new candidates at the Artane Resource Centre at their coffee morning which doubled as a 'question the candidates' event. I also meet some of the excellent staff, volunteers and users of the centre and to see the fantastic work that goes on there. The art lesson was particularly impressive but I felt I was in the way so I grabbed another scone, signed the pledge to support the centre and left.

Signing pledge to support Artane Family Resource Centre. #ge11



Local legend Joe Redmond does the walk of pride for Labour in Abbeyfield today! Heading down to NEAR fm shortly for candidates' debate. #ge11

Joe is an absolute legend. Everyone knows him. Everyone loves him and if he ever ran for election in Dublin North Central he would top the poll absolutely. He is the best humoured man I have ever met and has been a campaigner in so many elections I think he has lost count. His family are all members as well and that was very useful to me on one occasion when I faced a tricky selection convention for the Clontarf Ward in 2008.

I had decided to move from the North Inner City Ward in Dublin Central because I had just been appointed principal and I was keenly aware of the inevitable conflict of interest that had to be addressed. It was time to move on or to give up. In some quarters such conflicts were highlighted, even snatching negativity from the jaws of good news.

An RTE radio documentary was once recorded about the sporting achievements in our school. It was entitled 'Playing with Pride' and was designed to tell an uplifting tale of triumph over adversity, of inspiration, dedication and achievement despite the odds etc. etc. It was an engaging piece, focusing a lot on what I had to say about the children, their community and how we had tapped into their sense of local pride to fuel their sporting endeavours. I mentioned in the piece the children suffer from a low sense of esteem and that football helps them understand how much they can really achieve.

While the programme was celebrated in the national press, the reaction from one community activist friend was a little different. A local community newsletter was produced and circulated, attacking the programme and attacking my professionalism as a teacher. It was a pretty scurrilous piece, but one which I had no right of reply to. You just had to take it on the chin when you weren't in the club.

When I applied for the job of principal in my own school, I made the decision it would be impossible for me to represent this area and also work as a principal. I had to be able to deal with parents as parents only and not as potential voters. The school was too important for me to politicise it, or to be accused for using my position for local political advantage. I had decided to move on.

Anyway, if I was to be principal it would be impossible to be a local representative because the needs are such in a community like Sheriff Street that the roles can't be confused. Also I needed the staff members to know absolutely and at all times that any decision I would make was to benefit the school and the children, and not my political career. You will have disagreements with parents, but no-one should feel that their vote is in the back of my mind when dealing with them

So the opportunity came to put my name forward for the Clontarf ward of the neighbouring Dublin North Central constituency.

But nothing in politics is ever handed to you on a plate and a highly respected young member of the constituency Neil Ward also put his name forward for the one available place on the ticket. The voting was very tight and on the night of the election, myself Owen and Morgan were still unsure as to how it might turnout. The key to the selection was the arrival of Joe Redmond with as many members of his family that he could round up.

Sure enough and true to form, Joe arrives with three extra votes in tow and the day was won 17-11. Without his support and that of his family, I would have been out of politics.

Walking around Abbeyfield in Killester with Joe was an absolute joy. Everyone knows him, trusts him, and will vote for you purely on his recommendation.

I also met a Twitter follower. It's weird when that happens.

Indo Poll FG 38 Lab 23 FF 12 SF 10 GP 1 Ind 16 #ge11

I hate that FG number.

Ten days out and their poll rating is still on the way up. We may have just about stopped the bleeding but the 'high tax' charge is hurting and hurting bad. There are only so many times you can say to people: 'no income rises for anyone earning under €100,000'. It's a traditional charge made against parties of the left and it works. It's certainly working this time.

The abortion issue is having an effect too.

I thought the citizenship referendum was tough in 2004. This was really difficult stuff.

Wednesday 16th February

Ah yes, my daily 'what an incredible response from the doors' tweet....#ge11

Response was good but not fantastic.

Important to put the positive vibes out there in case any other campaign team is following us on twitter. More abortion stuff today and the odd 'high tax' comment.

We're still confident about winning the seat even though Fine Gael are riding high. Naoise Ó Muirí's name was not coming up that much and he needs to get a strong first preference vote to stay in the game.

Fine Gael was pulling a trick up and down the country of putting out leaflets asking for first preferences for their weaker candidates all across the constituency as they are worried their sitting TDs will romp home and the vote won't be shared around.

Richard Bruton gets enough of a personal vote to elect himself so if can convince the loyal FGers to vote Ó Muirí number one in sufficient numbers they could pull it off. All politicians are selfish though. I was hoping that Bruton was too.

In Beachcomber – little sister going for the #soup – my recommendation. It's a toastie for @somethingbanal. #ge11glamour

Sharon Gibbons (@somethingbanal) had offered to help out on Twitter and has been an incredible help throughout the campaign. Little sister Mary is home from England which gave me a huge lift. The day she arrived to meet me while canvassing in Fairview was the happiest of the campaign so far.

Having your family around on these occasions is so crucial.

I like having her around.

And she likes her soup she does.

#soggy

Rain is pants. The debate is on tonight as Gaeilge on TG4. Have it recorded. I thought we'd do well this time. Rónán had been helping Eamon with some debate preparation.

Eimear Ní Chonaola once directed a play of mine in the Taibhdhearc in Galway! #tg4deb #stuffiusedtodo

Debate goes very well and everyone seemed to agree that Eamon was the clear winner. The host Eimear Ní Chonaola did direct a play that I wrote in February of 2001 called Cleite Faoileain in the National Irish Language Theatre in Galway. That was a period of my life when I was diversifying , trying different things out, teaching, football coaching and playwriting! I wrote another play which An Taibhdhearc also staged in November of that same year called Lidice after the Czechoslovakian town levelled by the Nazis in 1942. I wrote in Irish as a self-preservation mechanism really. So that anyone who saw it might be reasonably impressed because it happened to be in Irish in the first place. Also because, as I have stated before, you can be much more honest in Irish than in English.

It is a really strange feeling to see the words that you have written late at night in your bedroom articulated on stage by recognised actors in a real play. Almost as strange as seeing your face on a poster hung from a lamp-post in an election. Almost.

Thursday 17th February

Off to RTE for the 12noon broadcast

RTE had a daily election broadcast in which they have a few candidates from various parties discussing the topics of the day. I arrived in fuelled by cans of coke and instant coffee raring to go. I was on with Michael Mulcahy of Fianna Fáil and Peadar Toibín of Sinn Féin. I wasn't in the humour for pulling any punches.

Everyone in RTE studio woke up this morning and chose purple as their colour for the day. #ge11

My tie was purple. Peadar's tie was purple. Richard Crowley's tie was purple. I thought I did ok. You never can be sure. Michael Mulcahy read out all his lines from a prepared script and was quoting statistics on the fall in unemployment in the Fianna Fáil years of government from 1997 onwards. It's a pity that there's 450,000 unemployed now, Michael.

Gerry Adam's denial of involvement in the IRA is also a topic of conversation - I made the comment that Sinn Féin's support for the bank guarantee was of more relevance now.

Friday 18th February

Delighted to visit Edenmore Day Care Centre and National Schools this morning. #ge11

Jean Hughes taught with me for years in Sheriff Street and has recently become principal of St Monica's Junior Girls School in Edenmore. A quick cup of tea is all she can spare as she dashes around the place, as principals do. I was really beginning to miss it. She didn't believe me.

Labour posters going missing in Kilmore...again. Others don't seem to have same problem. #ge11

We bump into Seán Haughey again doing the houses with one other canvasser. There are about 25 of us. I say to Joe Redmond that we'll let him finish off his side of the street before we start on it.

Joe said: 'F**k them'

'I remember when there was fifty of those f**kers and only two of us and they'd plough right through ya. We're not stopping for them now'

I think Joe had been waiting forty years for this election.

About to join @cooper_m to chat about our Sports policy.

Maeve who had been working with us as part of her transition year work practice said her goodbyes. Such a brilliant girl who probably was exposed to too much of the hard-core internal engine-room of an election campaign team. She took it all in her stride and would easily have been the candidate herself.

I didn't get a chance to thank her properly as I had to run into town to Today FM studio to debate our sports policy document with Darragh O'Brien of Fianna Fáil.

I had actually shared a boxing ring with Darragh's younger brother Cllr Eoghan O'Brien last November in a charity match which the very thought of terrified me for months previously.

I didn't do sufficient training and was totally freaked by the very idea of it. So in classic Aodhán fashion I put the whole thing to the back of my mind hoping that it might just go away.

The boxing matches were the idea of the Trinity Boys boxing club as a fundraiser for their club which does fantastic work in the North East of Dublin City.

Three rounds of one minute were set for the Santry Plaza hotel and they decked us all out in proper boxing gear with our party logos on the shorts and vests. For some bizarre unknown reason I managed to win the fight by unanimous decision. It is without doubt the most strenuous activity I have ever engaged in, ever.

As soon as I met Darragh I told him I wasn't in the humour for a party political scrap on air. He agreed and we took it very easy on each other. I think Matt Cooper was disappointed we weren't taking the heads off each other.

Saturday 19th February

Rachel in Clontarf says she'll vote for me if I bring her to her debs! #ge11

A huge team out. The buzz had returned and I was feeling a bit more confident about things. It was the last Saturday of the campaign and we had a good feeling about the day. There was an end of term feel about the canvass, the knowledge that the hard work was done and we just now had to 'bring it home'.

It's off to Monaghan for my sister-in-laws 21st. A welcome relief from the Dublin campaign. The text arrives on the way down the motorway:

Sunday Business Post opinion poll has us down 3% to 17% and Fine Gael up 1% to 39%.

We've lost 10% since November. TEN BLOODY PERCENT!

And Fine Gael are up 6% in the same period. It's as if the Irish people only like us when there is no chance of an election, but as soon as one is in the offering, they retreat into the Civil War trenches and revert to what they are used to. We were bleeding, bleeding, bleeding and this was serious because this is the Sunday Business Post and they were, in my opinion, the most accurate at assessing our support.

Our only chance is to use this to our advantage and ask people if they really want a one-party Fine Gael government? If they want a Fine Gael overall majority then vote Fine Gael, if you want a Fine Gael / Labour government then vote Labour.

Fianna Fáil are over.

At @grakerr 21st in Monaghan. All hail the sister-in-law!!!

Grainne has a great party. Áine's uncle Pdraig McNally is a Fianna Fáil councillor but not running in the election. In Cavan/Monaghan, where the Labour tradition is not strong, Fianna Fáil has attracted the support of those who in other countries would automatically support the Labour Party. He came in from mass and presented me with a leaflet that he was given on his way into the church.

It was a leaflet from some pro-life crowd calling on people not to vote for the Labour Party as it's a 'pro-abortion' party. Very similar to the David Quinn article, it's well-produced and printed on glossy paper.

This was all I needed. I felt like cracking up.

I texted Morgan and Owen immediately.

We needed a team at every church to counteract these bastards.

Families are being ripped apart at the seams and they wanted to poison the last weekend of the election with lies. They would only get away with it if we let them. I think I owe it to my parents.

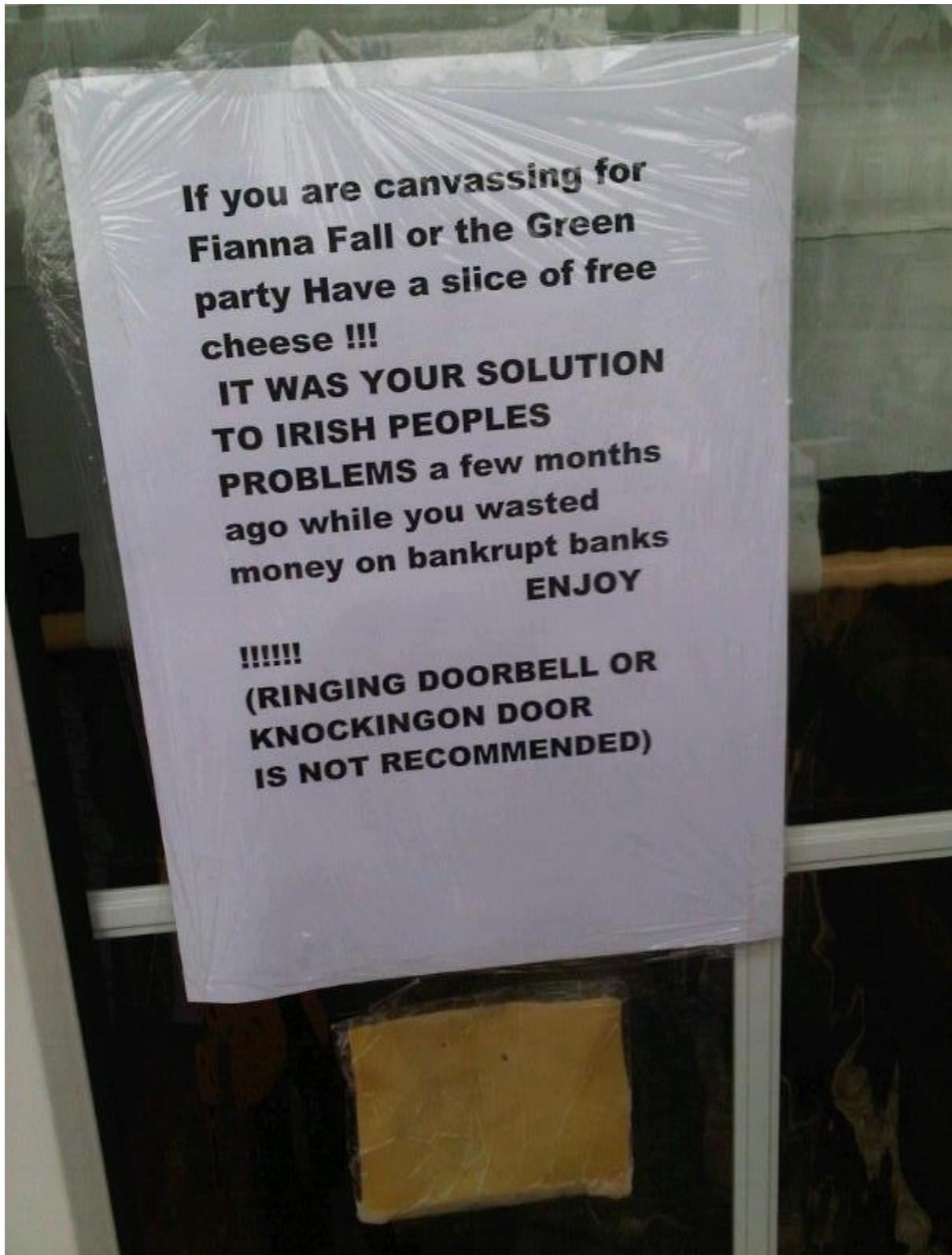
Owen and Morgan say they'll have it sorted.

We hit the road early morning to get home in time for my Sunday activity.

We shouldn't have to win this election all over again. We should be bringing it home but now the last week would be a battle.

Sunday 20th February

Piece of cheese with msg for FF/Green canvassers in Edenmore today. #ge11



We got to every church and marked each and every 'lifer' man for man. At one stage they were behaving so poorly that mass goers were challenging them and the basis of their campaign literature. Mary rang me to say that little old ladies were approaching her asking if they were bothering her, and then assuring her that they were definitely voting Labour now because of our dignified behaviour.

Then Mam rang to say she heard about the protesters and if she'd known about it sooner she would have come to the churches to protect me.

I then got upset and had to hang up.

In the height of the campaign my mother's protective instincts were as strong as ever.

I couldn't wait till Friday.

Win or lose.

Monday 21st February

Campaign soup update. 5/6 of morning canvassers choose #soup.

@somethingbanal holding out.

My so-called battalion of canvassers nicknamed 'Dad's Army' were in good form and were keeping me in good spirits. This week was about concentrating on our core areas. Sticking to the key messages, and fighting for every last single vote. The message was clear - if you want a Fine Gael / Labour government then you must vote Labour. Otherwise it was two seats for Fine Gael and an overall majority.

The canvass goes well again but my crankiness is beginning to show. The patience of the canvassing teams is pretty remarkable considering that I'm finding it difficult to hold it together. I'm still pretty energised. At this stage during the local elections in 2009 I was going through the motions.

We take afternoon refuge in the Beachcomber again.

Today's Anti-Bus Cuts Protest at Dublin Bus Consultation Day. Artane Castle.

#ge11



The latest protest was a great success. A much bigger turnout of local people and a more organised protest outside Artane Castle shopping centre. I felt much more comfortable in my skin with the loudspeaker in my hand and the reaction from local people is much more positive. This was good stuff. No Fine Gael nonsense. No abortion. No high tax nonsense. Just a classic campaign of the left to preserve a vital local bus service, supported by those who rely on it so much.

Campaign update: coffee and hobnobs. Numnumnum num. #hobnobs #ge11

Back in the campaign headquarters and for once the atmosphere is happy and calm. All reports from canvass teams are positive and they mirror the various text messages and emails I'd been getting. Afternoons are spent ringing constituents back, clarifying Labour's position on some issues, reassuring others on other matters and generally doing my best to make the personal contact with those who are thinking of voting for me to help to encourage them over the line.

Tuesday 22nd February

Another woman breaks down in front of me talking about emigration in her family. Friday can't come soon enough. #ge11

This campaign sank nails into every nerve, every emotion and every vein in my body. It is beginning to take its toll on all the canvassers. Some complained again that I was spending too much time at each door but what do you do when a grown woman bursts into tears in front of you because her sister has emigrated this week?

I wanted to hug her to calm her down and comfort her I felt so damn useless. I just wanted Fianna Fáil gone.

Gone gone gone.

Great reception in Elm Mount today. #ge11

Lousy reception in Elm Mount. The area had obviously been canvassed earlier in the day by someone who whipped up the abortion scare, because it came up at every second bloody door. It might have been the time of day, or the particular area, but I found myself having the same debate over and over and over and bloody over again.

It was utterly depressing and at one stage I got so worked up that I actually began shouting at one woman. She had to ask me to stop shouting at her before I realised that I actually was shouting.

I wanted to go home and go to bed.

No-one can pretend that the canvass has gone well. It was pretty much a disaster. And I could smell the seat slipping away from me.

Fine Gael would love this stuff. They can play these people to keep them onside.

Mock anger from Martin is a bit pathetic. #rtedeb

A better reception on the doors tonight in Harmonstown.

The long-johns that Mary bought me for the campaign were a winner. Seriously snug against the cold.

It was a no score draw in the leaders debate. Impossible for anyone to really land a punch. The pressure is really on to stop the bleeding and Eamon does well. Micheal Martin conveniently forgets he was a cabinet member for 14 years. He has absolutely no comprehension of the damage that he and his pals had done.

It doesn't matter now because Fianna Fáil are finished. Friday would see to that.

Wednesday 23rd February

Wanted: new pair of feet. Trade-in possible but not advised. Size 11. One right & one left. #ge11 #feetbunched

Another huge turnout from the local Labour members, friends and family. Really comforting to see so many friendly faces. The feeling is that voters don't want an overall Fine Gael majority and are minded to vote Labour to ensure a coalition government. The weather was much milder so wearing the long-johns again was a bad move. I was sweating a lot and wiping perspiration off my brow for the entire canvass. I really wanted to climb into a bush to take them off but the chance never came.

My legs hurt. My feet hurt. My fingers hurt. My head hurts. One more day. One more day.

Thursday 24th February

Last day of campaigning. Hope to meet more 'twitterers' in the flesh today. #ge11

The DART stations go well. The 'Dad's Army' canvass goes well and Cllr Paddy Bourke has been out with us for the last two nights in his core base of support in the Ardmore / Montrose area which is absolutely fantastic. He's an extremely popular local representative and having his help is invaluable.

I can only assume that someone is collecting my posters to sell them on e-bay. #ge11 #foulplay

There are posters missing from poles where they were this morning. We can all do without this sort of crap.

Thanks to everyone for your courtesy over the course of the campaign. God bless democracy. #ge11

The final canvass is always a celebration of sorts. It is much calmer, more pedestrian and everyone enjoys it. I give a final rousing speech asking people to give two more hours to save Ireland from five more years of conservative government of the worse kind imaginable. They thought they could smell victory and we knew we were so close. Morgan didn't do emotion and he wanted teams out in cars as soon as possible.

At the end of the canvass I always tell the very last person at the very last house that they have to vote for me because I can't finish the campaign on a downer.

Friday 25th February

Thanks to all the Metro lads for putting up with us over the campaign. Today's ad is great! #ge11



Waking up on the last day was a great relief. It is the hardest day in many respects as you are not expected to do any major canvassing, but you feel there must be something that you could be doing to convince the final few voters to consider you. The day is spent taking high profile cups of coffee in areas of high footfall, and then doing a tour of the polling stations to check the turnout and to thank the polling clerks for all their good work.

Also its important to investigate for any suspicious activity around the polling stations.

Great turnout across Dublin North Central. Your vote is so important. Make sure to use it. #ge11

Travelling around the polling stations it's clear that something dramatic is happening. The turnout is huge across the constituency. A big turnout is a bad sign for a sitting government. Every polling station is swarming with people. Its emotional to see so many voters of different backgrounds and different ages all making sure to have their say. We try to get a bite to eat in Moloughney's but it's packed out. Through the window I can see Richard Bruton having his dinner with one of his election workers. I need food. If I drink another cup of coffee I think I'll explode.

Comment of the campaign 'is that your daughter?' asks polling clerk pointing to 28 year old @somethingbanal. #ge11 has been obviously!

The last polling station and the exhaustion shows. My shirt is stuck to my back, my hair gave up being tidy a long time ago, and everyone I talked to has an instinctive look of pity in their eyes. Its 9.50pm and at that time the rigidity of the polling station procedure loosens only slightly, polling clerks are up for limited banter and even the Gardaí are willing to shoot the breeze.

As we asked for the percentages and the numbers, one polling clerk turned to Sharon and asked was she my daughter. It was clear that I needed to go to bed. For a long long time. As we turned to leave, two lovely ladies approached me to say hello and told me they had rushed down here especially to vote for me. 'We know you're going to do it. You deserve it.'

That sort of comment is liable to be greeted with a hug and whimpering tears from an emotionally drained candidate at the best of times, but with five minutes to go until polling closed, I gave a tired smile and a whispered 'Thank you'.

Sunday 27th February

So delighted and humbled to have received the trust of so many. Honeymoon is over already. Time for work. Time for a new Republic. #ge11