

Brian Crowley's change of scene

Ireland South MEP Brian Crowley's move to the centre-right ALDE political grouping in the European Parliament has caused ripples in Irish politics, and an unwelcome headache for Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin.

While the commentariat couldn't resist a trolley-load of supermarket-themed puns in assessing the fall-out from that decision and Mr Crowley's subsequent expulsion from Fianna Fáil, there's a serious discussion emerging from this particular episode.

As the sole FF representative in Brussels and Strasbourg, Mr Crowley was Deputy Martin's sole parliamentary link to the continent, even if one could argue that Mr Crowley has generally operated with some level of autonomy within the party.

That being said, Mr Crowley had the full financial and structural support of the Fianna Fáil party in not only establishing his initial platform since entering politics, but during his latest and highly successful re-election campaign.

Yet one would have to question the fairness of expelling Brian Crowley from the party at a meeting which he himself could not attend or attempt to defend himself given that he was in hospital when that meeting took place.

Either way, this isn't good news for Fianna Fáil, and has taken some of the gloss off the party's gains at local authority level in the wake of the May 23rd elections.

This is, after all, the most high-profile candidate the party stood on election day, and now he's no longer in the fold.

Crowley's vote-pulling power is extraordinary, taking in 180,000 full first preferences in the newly expanded Ireland South constituency, which now contains the entire south east.

However, Fianna Fáil has consistently failed to manage Brian Crowley's vote, which perhaps suggests that the Crowley vote has generally been more of a personal vote for the Corkman than a sign of public trust in the 'Soldiers of Destiny'.

Be that as it may, the failure to vote manage clearly cost his FF running mate, and Waterford native Kieran Hartley a European seat, as a managed vote would certainly have propelled Hartley (at the very least) above Fine Gael's Deirdre Clune in the contest for the full final seat.

The south east could have benefited from having a local voice within the parliament, and our ability to full fight for region-specific funding may well be somewhat inhibited without having 'one of our own' out there, making a stand for the region.

As things stand, Fianna Fáil is now voiceless in the European Parliament, which must be a source of private disgust and acute embarrassment to Deputy Martin, all the more so given that Mr Crowley is a fellow Corkman. In print elsewhere last week, Brian Crowley was described as "a lone ranger" and when one recalls the minimum use of the Fianna Fáil logo on his election literature and an election poster colour scheme which bore now comparison to his fellow FF candidates, such an assertion isn't without credence.

He didn't conceal his dissatisfaction with the party's failure to run a candidate in the last presidential election, for which he

was the obvious choice, and talk persist that he may throw his hat in the ring in a future race for the Áras.

Of course, his health setbacks have been as well documented as his disquiet over the party's failure to contest the presidential election and given that uncertainty is the only certainty in politics, predicting what lies ahead on that front remains nothing more than speculation.