

Two Elections



he eighth day of November, 1934, saw the passing into oblivion of the 1898 Local Government Act, and no one - especially the elec-

torate of Limerick's ancient county borough - mourned its demise. With it marked the dissolution of the Limerick City Council, which consisted of forty members: mayor, aldermen and burgesses, euphemistically styled, "Ali Baba And The Forty Thieves!"

But all was not gloom and tragedy. A new type of corporate body, namely The City and County Management Act, took over with a reduced number of fifteen public representatives, later increased to seventeen as time wore on. (Might I add that municipal elections in those days were fought on the same principle as the parliamentary system - a single constituency).

In the initial stages, when the date of the election was announced, speculation was rife as to who would be the first to constitute the new assembly ("chamber of horrors!"), under the new dispensation. Good-humoured conversation, wise-cracks, in the workshop, at street corner, and in pubs, clubs and homes were the order of the day. In short, it was obvious that people who, normally, would not be interested, would have a go just for the fun of it!

The first nomination papers to be handed in came from the three political parties - bane of all society - namely, Fianna Fail, Cumann na nGaedheal (now Fine Gael), Labour, followed by what seemed an endless list of Independents, of which your scribe was a hopeful one.

When it became known in the Gleeson homestead that I was contesting the election, under the label of Independent Trade Unionist, my good mother remarked: "I'm glad; you have a good Labour background. Your grand-father, FitzGerald, was a member of Limerick's only Labour City Council - 23 against all others, during the mayoralty of John Daly, Fenian (1898-1900). Also, your father, was a founding father of the Irish Labour Party, at Clonmel, in 1912, whilst your brother Tom, who worked in the munition factory, owned by Cleeve's, during the Great War, was among the first to join the Irish Transport Workers Union", the first branch in Limerick, started in the factory already referred to across the Shannon.

Encouraged by what had been said, I

by Willie W. Gleeson

casually asked: "How many cousins have we in the 'Parish'?" (forgetting to include those in the rest of the city). Believe it or not. In Athlunkard Street, Sir Harry's Mall and Keyes' Row, which adjoin each other, we clocked up 128; all over 21, and capable of exercising their franchise. Added to this, I counted many friends (so I thought) in the parish rugby and rowing clubs to which

I belonged for the greater part of my life.

Finally, having served in the National Army (1922-'23), and, on my return to civvy street, joined the first political party to be set up after the cessation of hostilities, later in 1926 to become known as Cumann na nGaedheal, which I served at electioneering, canvassing, and personation officer on polling day, I counted on a goodly number of No.1, if not, No.2 votes; but again, as will be observed hereunder, facts speak louder than words.

From a live register, numbering almost 20,000 voters, I polled 68. On the transfer of the No. 2s I received: 6. C na nG., Nil; Fianna Fail, Nil; Labour 6. This was a further sad commentary on my vote-getting ability, and should have been a salutary lesson for me. But, to my regrets, it was not. I was to make another bid for municipal glory.

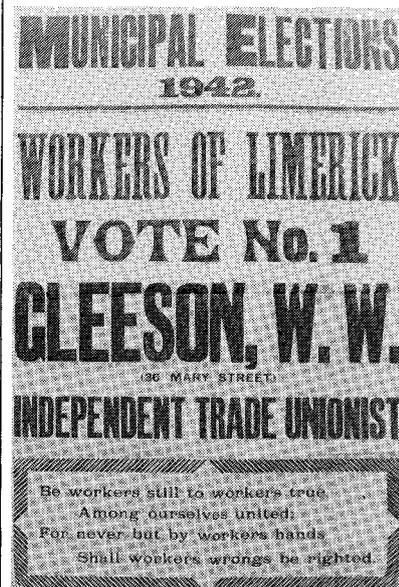
Eight years later (1942), when serving in the L.D.E., I was prevailed on by comrades to have another go at civic honours (!). I did. The result was the same as heretofore, except one extra vote from Labour. (Perhaps he or she had a guilty conscience about that No. 2 the first time round!)

What happened to the 'lost' votes of my Parish relatives? It would take a political scientist, such as Brian Farrell, to solve this impenetrable mystery. As more than one other Council "hopeful" has found out to his cost, Parish politics have laws of their own and even Brian Farrell might have some difficulty in explaining their intricacies!

Anyway, I survived to tell the tale. Looking back more than 40 years, I can say that I saw some of the humour and fun of the affair. I write now, not to complain about any of my 128 relatives for not having exercised the franchise on my behalf, but to tell the full story of my electoral misadventures.

I should mention, by way of post-script, that I served my connection with Cumann na nGaedheal, in 1931, as the direct result of Mr. Ernest Blythe, then Minister for Finance, in the Cosgrave Government, reducing the Old Age Pension by one shilling (10/- to 9/-).

The same gentleman would seem to have overlooked the occasion of his visit to Limerick, in 1917, when he set about re-organising the Sinn Fein party, when the members of "D" Coy. contributed enough cash to buy him a pair of boots at Tyler's and two pairs of trousers at Ryan's Tailors, Shannon Street!



W.W. Gleeson's 1942 local elections' poster.

The verse at the bottom of the poster was taken from the "Bottom Dog" of 1917.