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THE HISTORIC VICTORY OF SINN FÉIN IN THE 2020 IRISH ELECTIONS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Sinn Féin, once – IRA – affiliated political party dedicated to uniting Ireland and Northern Ireland under one flag, won a historic victory in Ireland’s national election on the 8th of February, 2020, taking a larger share of the total national vote than any other party. But despite winning the popular vote, the party did not get the most seats in the Irish Parliament (Dáil Éireann), the lower house, because it only contested 42 out of 160 constituencies.

The country uses a single transferable vote system of proportional representation with ranked-choice voting.

The surprising results of this election are illustrative of three broader trends: the growth of nationalist and separatist movements in Europe; the erosion of centrist, two-party consensus democracies; and the destabilizing impact of Brexit on the British Isles.

Sinn Féin, which operates in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, is a left-wing, nationalist, populist party, republican (in the sense that it favours uniting the Irish people under one republic) party. Its success is particularly stunning as it was once an outsider in Irish politics due to its historical role as the political wing of the Provincial Irish Republican army, which was responsible for a great deal of violence during the Northern Ireland conflict in the late 20th century. While the party remains associated with suspicion and scandal surrounding its connections with the IRA, its victory in the February 2020 elections shows that Sinn Féin is mainstream enough to govern the country.

In recent years, especially since Mary Lou McDonald succeeded the long-serving and controversial party leader Gerry Adams in 2018, the party has reformed itself by downgrading its historical militancy and focusing on social and economic issues like homelessness, rising rents, health-care costs, and hospital waiting lists. Sinn Féin won by focusing on the anger of the electorate with the “duopoly” of the two mainstream centrist parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

Fine Gael leader Leo Varadkar, the incumbent taoiseach (prime minister), led a minority government propped up by a confidence and supply agreement with Fianna Fáil since 2016 and hoped to win the elections due to solid economic growth and his careful handling of Brexit. However, economic growth doesn’t pay dividends when it is unevenly distributed, and voters see that they and their neighbours are struggling to find good jobs or pay affordable housing. McDonald was set to form a governing coalition with one of the other major parties: most likely Fianna Fáil – the largest party in the New Dáil.

Varadkar repeatedly ruled out joining a coalition with Sinn Féin. Fianna Fáil members are reportedly divided over whether to partner with Sinn Féin, Fine Gael, or nobody at all.

If no bargain is struck between any two of the three leading parties, another election must be held.

A similar situation occurred in the UK in 2017 when Conservative prime minister Theresa May had to form a minority government with backing from the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland – a move that went on to prove fatal to her Brexit plans. Just as resistance to Brexit underpinned the success of the Scottish National Party making a second vote on Scottish independence more likely in the next five years. It's no surprise that it could be having the same effect in Ireland. The change Irish voters cast their ballots for at the elections could turn out to be much bigger than even they themselves imagined.

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НАРКОМАНИЯ КАК СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ПРОБЛЕМА В ШОТЛАНДИИ

В июле 2019 г. британские СМИ сообщили о том, что в 2018 г. количество смертей среди шотландцев, злоупотребляющих наркотическими веществами, возросло на треть по сравнению с 2017 г. и составило 1 197 человек. Это самый высокий показатель за весь период ведения подобной статистики (начиная с 1996 г.). Шотландия лидирует среди стран Европейского союза и США по количеству смертей на душу населения, вызванных наркотиками, – более 200 случаев на миллион жителей.

Проблема наркомании в Шотландии, о которой заговорили в начале 1990-х годов после публикации романа Ирвина Уэлша «На игле» и его последующей экранизации, остается нерешенной. Она усугубляется тем, что шотландцы употребляют полинаркотические вещества – героин с метадоном, рецептурные лекарства (диазепам и этизолам), а также уличные наркотики, которые изготавливаются криминальными группировками на подпольных фабриках. Подобных фабрик насчитывается в Шотландии около миллиона. Следует отметить, что наибольший процент смертей среди наркоманов, как и 30 лет назад, регистрируется в Глазго. Сорока- и пятидесятилетние ровесники фильма «На игле» сегодня продолжают принимать наркотики и массово умирают от их передозировки.

Почему же подобная проблема наиболее остро стоит именно в Шотландии? Причин этому несколько.

Первая из них заключается в том, что промышленный переворот, превративший Англию в «мастерскую мира», привел также к созданию тяжелой промышленности в Шотландии. Судостроение, угледобыча и металлургия сформировали современное шотландское общество, став его цементирующим фактором. К началу XX ст. Шотландия являлась одним из экономически процветающих регионов Великобритании. Однако в течение