

Politics at its worst - the '1st Independent Mayo' Political Project

A parting statement by Stephen Manning, prospective independent candidate for Co. Mayo

The idea was good, innovative even: To pool the resources of genuinely independent and capable candidates so as to give them a chance in the upcoming election against the might and money of the established political parties.

The problem with the *1st Independent Mayo* project however, was not the declared *ideology* behind this promising political initiative but the questionable mindset and motives of the organisers who have, from day one it seems, set out to systematically deceive and mislead the electorate. It is quite frankly, politics at its very worst, masquerading as a potential solution to those very same political problems.

Whenever there is a hidden agenda or when 'vested interests' are pulling the strings, deception invariably plays its part. In this case, organisers Eddie Farrell and Martin Daly have displayed all of the ignoble characteristics of veteran politicians - and no, this is not meant to be a compliment. Contradictions, media spin, hidden agendas, manipulation of social media and brass-necked hypocrisy are all there in spades – discretely framed of course behind the usual persuasive rhetoric, the polished delivery, and the requisite suit and tie.

In parts misleading and disingenuous, and at other times capricious and inconsistent, the launching of the *1st Independent Mayo* campaign has either been a master-class in double-speak and sleight-of-hand, designed to accommodate vested interests and hidden agendas – or, it is crass foolishness defined; a mere exercise in political futility driven by unrealistic ambitions, petty prejudices and personal insecurities. Given that Martin Daly is himself an unsuccessful political candidate and Mr Farrell is likewise no stranger to the public-political arena, the notion that this long-advertised project is pure political foolishness is hard to believe. The question then remains: what on earth is going on here – when the most promising candidate in the run-up to the first public meeting is dropped unceremoniously without any apparent 'good' reason? Indeed, not only has there been no proper explanation given for this otherwise inexplicably-counterproductive decision, but Messrs Farrell and Daly—when questioned on the subject—remain stupefyingly mute or, offer meaningless platitudes in a vain effort to deflect public attention from what appears at best, to be a cheap and venal political stroke; a tawdry and cynical act designed to engineer one specific outcome; and a stroke that our much-ridiculed political incumbents will no doubt take much pleasure in as they watch the *1st Independent* project self-destruct from the inside.

The public were promised an '*open, collaborative competition*' whereby the local electorate would decide who THEY wanted to vote for. Mr Farrell and Mr Daly publicly promised to '*support the prospective candidates 100%*' by facilitating a series of town-hall style meetings where the candidates would present their positions and respond to questions from the audience. They were seeking '*capable, courageous candidates*' (they said) who could muster sufficient support to run an election campaign. The whole project was publicised as '*a new*

and innovative approach to politics' – and an approach that would supposedly '*level the playing field*' so that Co. Mayo could get '*better quality TDs*' who would help counteract the chronic problem of mainstream political parties indulging in rampant nepotism, cronyism and pandering to special interests. '*Grass-roots democracy was being brought back to the people*' they said – and the hopes of the Mayo electorate stirred – possibly in equal measure to Mr Kenny's discomfiture at the prospect of yet another viable political threat to his much-polished constituency seat.

Unfortunately, it is now highly unlikely that the project 'as-is' will succeed in its declared aim to get one, two or even three independent candidates elected – which is a great shame, because undoubtedly some of the prospects are decent men with sincerely-held beliefs. But faith alone – especially when dealing with the Machiavellian political world – does NOT move mountains. *That* requires sheer hard work and honest endeavour by persons of purpose and principle. Ideas come cheap, they always have. But *real* results require a little more effort than simply talking something to death. The fundamental question remains; do we (the electorate) really want something different to 'politics-as-usual' in this sad and sorry country of ours – or, are we willing to engage yet again with a political process steered by persons with dubious motives, misstated intentions and apparently questionable ethics?

The overriding tragedy here is not so much the exposure of just 'more of the same' when it comes to anything political in this country, but rather, the betrayal of the hope and expectations of the Mayo electorate. This is not to detract from the credibility or sincerity of the remaining candidates who may yet wake up to the reality now facing them; that of public embarrassment or worse in remaining joined to a process which has lost all credibility in the minds of objective observers. In not moving swiftly to distance themselves from the underhanded activities of the organisers, the remaining prospects may have missed the most obvious opportunity to inspire the public with the concept of 'something new' in local politics; likewise in failing to seize the initiative to lead this process on *their own* terms – which arguably, was the very reason why the lead candidate was unilaterally excluded in a manner described by one objective observer as, "*absolutely reprehensible!*"

In the face of recent events, the supporting 'media campaign' comprising a faltering facebook page (currently with 269 'likes') and a series of contrived promotions and press releases authored by local newspaper columnist Martin Daly struggle to shore up the project's credibility. The *1st Independent Mayo* facebook page for example is heavily monitored and censored, with only a fraction of the original posts being left online, together with a smattering of anonymous posters commenting (mostly abusively) about the excluded candidate in an all-too-obvious attempt to create some smoke and suspicion without any real fire. As the PRO of the project, Mr Daly either ignores legitimate media questions or deftly bats them aside with circuitous and implausible responses which do nothing to quell the public's curiosity. Meanwhile, the recent disclosure that the source funding came from another community group who, by an amazing co-incidence not only share their Chairperson and PRO with the *1st Independent* project (Messrs Farrell and Daly respectively)

but who also had one of their committee members listed on the ticket at the outset of the campaign – raises further questions of legitimacy, openness and transparency. For this *not* to be openly and publicly declared at the outset of the 1st *Independent* campaign raises the obvious issue of a possible hidden agenda. It is not that there is anything untoward about another community group funding or supporting the 1st *Independent* project – or even running one of their own committee members as a prospective candidate. What is unsettling is the deliberate suppression of these facts, and of the mindset and motives of those who would do so. For the organisers to remain mute on the topic after all that has transpired these past few weeks – and for the respective websites to be hurriedly altered and amended to erase evidence of these facts – raises even more questions about the credibility and trustworthiness of those engaged in these clandestine activities. And we haven't even approached yet the disgraceful attempts to smear a legitimate prospect's good name using internet trolls and other 'unidentified sources' who clearly, are in consultation at the very least, with insiders within the 1st *Independent* project. Inasmuch as the organisers have played any active part in these vile slanders (and they most definitely have – if only in their failure to act responsibly in removing them) then the whole 1st *Independent* process has been irreversibly tainted – and will remain so – as long as these individuals remain at the helm. The use of public sources (such as the internet and local news media) to impugn another's good name when they themselves have failed or refused to engage with the subject in private, is the height of moral cowardice. Such behaviour is offensive and repulsive to any decent person. And yet, the electorate, the prospective candidates and the world-at-large are supposed to 'have faith' in this utterly compromised political enterprise – and in those who would so audaciously presume to facilitate it?

The inevitable allegations of 'sour grapes' on my part needs to be tackled at root, because the great irony here is that even if I were invited back on the 1st *Independent Mayo* panel I could not and would not participate – at least, not under the same organisers. My position and standing as the administrator of the *Integrity Ireland* association and as a person of principle would be utterly compromised if I were to partner with a project which was *not* truly open and transparent or with persons who are willing and able to shed their principles at will. Had this injustice been visited upon one of the other candidates instead of myself, I would have taken a similar position and would have spoken up loudly and clearly in opposition to any such move, because as Dr Martin Luther King Jr said; "*an injustice to one is an injustice to all!*" All the more pertinent perhaps when read in context of this 'promising political initiative' that brazenly sold itself to the Mayo electorate on this very basis.

The critical observations in this statement are not the mere product of 'sour grapes' – nor of my own personal irritation at all of the wasted time, money and effort already invested in this project by myself and my supporters – who were recently described somewhat derisively by Mr Daly as '*Mr Manning and his merry men*'. No. These legitimate critiques come from a profound sense of personal betrayal at the brass-necked hypocrisy, duplicity and moral cowardice on display. From being '*absolutely delighted*' that I had applied to the

process in the first place – to applauding our efforts (the local *Integrity Ireland* and *National Land League* membership) in tackling corrupt authority figures and bringing much-needed public attention to the *1st Independent* campaign – the organisers have now suddenly and inexplicably reversed track; have excluded me from the process without proper explanation; and have likewise reneged on all of their ‘sincere’ promises and undertakings. To then learn that secret discussions were held behind my back at a time when I was actively promoting this ‘collaborative competitive campaign’ and was furnishing the organisers and other candidates freely with valuable contact lists, media sources and political contacts only adds further insult to injury. Mr Daly in particular has proven a great personal disappointment to me. Only a week previously, Martin Daly had warned me ‘in confidence’ of the possible repercussions from mischief-makers in ‘the corrupt status quo’ who might view my burgeoning political popularity (such as it may have been) as a threat to be crushed – by any means, and at any cost. Mention was even made of the need to be ‘a virtuous person’ so as not to afford unscrupulous authorities ammunition through which to attack me. I reassured Mr Daly that he need not have any concerns in that regard. How ironic then that it would be Martin Daly and Eddie Farrell who would rummage into the archives in search of something ignominious or discreditable that would justify – however implausibly – my immediate and permanent exclusion from the project. Unhappily for them (because they are now facing High Court proceedings for defamation and misrepresentation) the best they could come up with were false allegations and some shabby innuendo – and in doing so, they have disgraced themselves, and the *1st Independent* project even further.

One of the more notable quotes from Mr Farrell in promoting this ‘new political initiative’ was, “..that the wrong type of people are making the wrong decisions in Irish politics..” and of course, he was absolutely right. Irish politics is riddled with chancers, opportunists and exploiters; with plausible deceivers and with smooth-talkers. All the more reason then for any ‘new political initiative’ which seeks to address this fundamental problem to be absolutely above reproach or suspicion, and to be led by the ‘right’ type of person.

Both Eddie Farrell and Martin Daly have been advised several times that a highly provocative and derogatory statement they put online which has been circulated far and wide this past month is both erroneous and slanderous of myself and of the general *Integrity Ireland* membership. They are clearly having no problem removing, editing and blocking legitimate posts and visitors to their *1st Independent Mayo* website. What then, other than bloody-minded arrogance and contempt for the truth prevents them from doing the right thing, right now?

Is this really the best that Co. Mayo has to offer to the electorate?

I do sincerely hope not.

Stephen Manning, a member of Integrity Ireland
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