

A BIG DAY FOR BIFFO?



One of the first things people asked me when I arrived in Ireland on Sunday was whether I had seen Bertie Ahern's address to Congress last Wednesday. It was the swan song of his time as Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister-pronounced Tea Shack), a celebrated address in America that had gotten very big play on Irish telly. After a drawn out influence scandal had finally sunk his credibility, Bertie had announced about six weeks ago that he would turn in his resignation on May 6.

Bertie's resignation was actually a bit of big news in Offaly, mr. emptywheel's county, since Bertie's presumed replacement (it'll become official while I'm on the flight home) is Brian Cowen, the TD from Offaly. In just about every town in the county (particularly Tullamore, the county seat and the home of mr. emptywheel's parents), there's a picture of Cowen, congratulating him on ascending to Taoiseach. He'll be back in Offaly on Saturday for a big celebration.

People call Cowen "BIFFO," the slur one uses for Offaly men—Big Ignorant Fucker from Offaly—presumably invoking the day when Offaly was mostly sheep farms and peat bogs.


That was before Ireland joined the EU, though, and certainly before the time when Cowen took on a leadership role in Fianna Fail, Ireland's equivalent to the Republican Party. Tullamore has become a bedroom community for Dublin and has attracted a bit of corporate investment itself, so there's a brand new giant Tesco and new housing developments going up everywhere.

Also, Ireland has started decentralizing the government outside of Dublin. So, as the Finance Minister, Cowen had gotten Ireland's finance ministry moved to Tullamore, into a building almost across the street from mr. emptywheel's

boyhood home, in what had been a big empty field. (It seems like the decentralization has resulted in national offices springing up in the county seats of all the TDs who have served as ministers in Bertie's government, but after Cowen shuffles the cabinet, it'll result in the TD from Cork having to commute from Cork to both Tullamore and Dublin to fulfill all his roles.) And now that Cowen will be Taoiseach, my father-in-law figures, it'll hasten the completion of the motorway connecting Tullamore to Dublin, and ensure the main streets will be improved.

Pork is not just an American institution, you know.

So today, Cowen will become Taoiseach and, if Tullamore is lucky, it'll mean lots of pork for Offaly.

 As it happens, it appears that today may not just be a big day for Cowen the BIFFO. The other thing folks here wanted to talk about—as elsewhere in my trip—was who would win the Democratic nomination for President (and who would eventually win the election in November). Once again, there was a special twist for Offaly.

It seems that Barack Obama has—in addition to his celebrated Kenyan roots and his distant relations with Cheney—Irish roots. His great-great-great-great grandfather (or something like that) is from a small town in Offaly, Moneygall. So folks in Offaly have a heightened interest in whether Barry O'Bama will become the next American President. In fact, mr. emptywheel already suggested they rename Tullamore's Patrick Street—which used to be called Barrack Street—Barack Street.

As I'm boarding a plane home, it's unclear still whether or not last night's results will be enough to seal the nomination for Obama, though they might. I confess, as I've grown increasingly exhausted by the nomination fight, I've long hoped that May 7 would be a big day for two BIFFOs—Cowen and Obama.

Here's hoping for a little luck of the Irish as
I fly home.