

FORMER INDEPENDENT WINS FIRST SEAT FOR GREEN PARTY

Mussen is the history man

HILLTOWN man Ciaran Mussen created history on Monday night in the Newry Sports Centre when he became the first ever Green Party representative to be elected to Newry and Mourne District Council.

A Green Party candidate was returned in neighbouring Down District Council, as well as in North Down Borough Council, marking a truly momentous day and the emergence of a new force in local politics.

Mr. Mussen is no stranger to the political scene, having served four successive terms in the Crothieve area as an Independent before narrowly losing his seat at the last elections four years ago.

But his election on Monday, at the end of a grueling 10-hour count, has still emerged as one of the biggest stories of the 2005 local government elections.

Speaking afterwards the well-known former Independent Councillor was tired but clearly delighted by his achievement.

"It's been an awful long day and really it's been an awful long month," he said. "It's been a very hard campaign but this makes me feel great."

"I hope this is the first of many. I hope this inspires other people to realise there is an alternative to the politics we have been accustomed to."

"I have been an Independent for many years in the Council and I have always felt it was too polarised. Too many sectarian arguments and debates go on."

There has to be a better way, I have tried to do that as an Independent but it has been much too difficult."

The new Councillor attributed his success to his past work as an Independent Councillor and to the new vision created by the Green Party.

"I was involved very much in community politics in the Hilltown area and wider afield. I feel that people throughout the Crothieve area recognise I was a bit of a workhorse when I was in the Council," he said.

"I know there is a lot of work to do now and I am almost grateful for the rest I had for the past four years and I come in with renewed enthusiasm."

Cllr. Mussen pointed to Green Party advances across County Down and hinted at a possible Assembly seat for the party in the future.

"I think the Green Party is one that offers a great future for politics in Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland."



Green Party election manager Cadogan Enright (centre) chats with successful Green Party Councillors Ciaran Mussen (right) who won a seat on Newry and Mourne Council and Bill Corry who won a Council seat for the Party in neighbouring Down District.

"It is up to us who are now elected and the people who have tried to put this project together to build on that."

"I hope we can now go to build a party and take in young people who we feel the party is almost made for. Young people are very idealistic, they think the Green Party message is a good one."

His election also means the return of a Hilltown representative to the Council chamber, something he feels the electorate missed during the past four years.

"I think they felt somewhat cheated and they turned up in good numbers for me this time. I am very grateful for that and I hope to repay their faith in me," he added.

Cadogan Enright, the Green Party's election organiser for the Northern Ireland elections, joined the jubilant Crothieve candidate at Monday's count.

He believed Cllr. Mussen's success was highly significant.

"It has changed the agenda," he said. "All the other parties will have to become Green now they are aware people are interested in voting Green."

"In every case where a Green Party Councillor or a Green MP has been elected in any country in the world it has always totally changed the agenda for all the other parties."

"What you will find is the SDLP, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionists will all suddenly become Green."

Mr. Enright pointed out that in Down District Council the successful Green Party candidate was elected with the aid of Sinn Fein transfers, while in Crothieve transfers from Ulster Unionist Party candidate Kenny Donaldson helped to copperfasten victory.

"That is exactly what we want to achieve. As far as we are concerned we celebrate diversity. It is okay to be British and it is okay to be Irish."

"(It shows) people are prepared to walk across the national divide in order to address other issues."