The HANDSTAND

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he Jeanie Johnston replica famine ship during its sea trial yesterday in Tralee Bay, Co Kerry. Dominic Walsh

WHAT GOD FORSAKEN IRONY ?

This replica, one of two, of a famine transport to America, had her first sea trial during a week of massacres and war crimes in Palestine in the first week of April. During this time the Irish media have been pre-occupied with paedophilia and the resignation of two Church and Government. members.

Other than a lonely battle by Raymond Deane, Composer/Musician, about a media report on Palestine, by Kevin Myers in the Irish Times - there has only been one other letter during two weeks, that, I would like to quote: *"I am not alone in the belief that, in striving to achieve an equality of balance between Palestinian and Israeli claims, you have essentially lost the plot. ...The Israeli government has committed a cardinal crime.*

This reminds most Irish people of our own history, in which the British military sought to achieve their objectives by similar means...an overwhelming dominant force on a civilian population must always be forthrightly condemned. You have not done so. Michael Hassett."
Our last issue had various articles on the Palestine question, as we are witnessing a colonial crime by the Israeli government, that has perhaps surpassed in brutality many such crimes in history.

Irish, our Language

by Enda Cunningham

The Future, with a fresh look at the teaching of Irish in National Schools.

In the light of all the controversy regarding the teaching of Irish, it is time to decide if indeed our language is a barrier to our progress and prosperity in this modern age.
Irish is one of the three oldest languages in Europe - its roots go back thousands of years. Our island home has guaranteed that it has remained relatively pure and free from outside influence. It remained so until the period of conquest and the Plantations of English settlers in the 16th Century, with the introduction of sever penal law against the language. The Great Famine of 1846-49 resulted in the language being equated with poverty. Churchmen preached in English to Gaelic-speaking congregations; Landlords, Agents, Government Officials, lawyers, teachers, successful traders - all well fed - led the people to believe that Irish was little help to them at home and a positive barrier for the vast numbers of emigrants who sought a new life in other countries.

Do mheasas im aigne is fós im chroidhe,	I thought in my soul and even in my heart
An marbh ba mharbh gur beo do bhí.	That the dead who had died was living.

Were it not for the intervention of literary, professional, educated people in the 19th Century the language would now be extinct. These visionaries - mostly Protestant - people like Thomas Davis, Douglas Hyde, Seosamh Cleaver, Padriac Pearse. Eoin McNeill, Ethna Carbery, Sinead DeValera and others realised that we had a language rich in literature, poetry, song, story and music, going back thousands of years - a treasure worthy of salvation. The Gaelic League set-up at the end of the 19th Century was the bulwark which halted the decline.
Over recent years pressure from pseudo-intellectuals, revisionist historians, media presenters and journalists, has resulted in a new crisis for the language.
Over the past ten years we have shaken off most of our inferiority complexes. Our young, well-educated and vibrant people have given us a new confidence. The Irish success is now the goal of new emerging nations. Surely, in our new-found affluence, we must not abandon the very badge of our Nationality - our language.
If we are to succeed we need a fresh look at the teaching of Irish.
It is freely accepted that the teaching of Irish in schools has been unsuccessful. Despite various new programmes and approaches, a majority of pupils enter 2nd and 3rd Level

schools with little grasp of speaking or writing of the language and little enthusiasm for it. The failure to date is caused not only by the attitude of politicians and journalists, but principally by the attitude of parents in the home.

Bhí foradh fiar ar a thaoibh— Is cian ó cuireadh i gcló— Ar a suidheadh saoithe is cliar As taistealaigh trialltha an róid.	"By its side was a crooked bench—long since it was fashioned!—where learned men and clerics used to sit, as well as wayfarers passing the road."

If the language is to survive, we must try to change the attitude in the home. This has been brought home to me recently with the new wave of immigrants to our country.
My two daughters teach in Inner City Dublin schools, as I did myself when Principal of one of these schools. They have told me that after 3 months in their classes, immigtant pupils have proven to be best at Irish. It is interesting to hear of an 8 yr. old Moldovian girl helping her pal Mary, from Dublin, understand the meaning of "Cheannaigh Mamai Cota Nua." It reminds me of my cousin, Peg Cunningham, who taught in Rutland St. School all her life. Peg, who had a class of 60 pupils, was trying to teach a 7yr.old the intricacies of "Thainig si - nior thainig si."After a fruitless few minutes, a bright spark put her hand up and said, "Miss Cunningham, I'll teach her." This girl then shook her pal roughly and told her, "When she comes she thainigs, and when she doesn't come, she nior thainigs" - a salutory lesson to Peg! Immigrant children are encouraged by their parents to embrace the language of the State, which has given them refuge and the chance of education, often denied in their native lands. It is a salutory lesson for us and one that convinces me that we can make the language attractive and acceptable to parents and pupils.



Two Irish alphabets: the upper one of the 7th century; the lower of the 11th. The three last characters of the first alphabet are Y, Z, and &c. (There are two forms of *s* in each.) From Miss Stokes's "Christian Inscriptions," II. 135.

(i) To teach successfully, a teacher must be comfortable with the language. I suggest the Dept. of Education make grants available to teachers for a two month intensive course at a language school such as Oidous Gael, Glencolmcille.

(ii) A new programme should be introduced which would not have any written work or formal grammar until 5th Class.

(iii) A programme of spoken Irish, based on the immediate locality of pupils, should be introduced. This programme to include local place names and their meaning. Teachers should use sources such as the O'Donovan Ordnance Survey letters & O'Donovan Ordnance Survey Name Books (covering all Ireland). Local stories and legends should be used to arouse interest in both pupils and parents. Grandparents and their friends should be consulted, and on certain days local historians or seanachai, such as Eamonn Mac Thomas, might come into the schools to talk with pupils, teachers and parents.
Inter-schools Competitions could be arranged with attractive prizes - a fortnight at a Gaeltacht Irish College ? Local radio might devote time to this, ending with a County and All Ireland competition.
Teachers could use the vast store available at An Cumann Bealoideas, University College Dublin, and embark on a scheme, similar to that of the 1930's, to collect and write down local folklore, songs, games, rhymes and stories. There is a vast archive from that time in the Library at U.C.D.
These programmes can be expanded to discuss surnames, how they came about; local trades and their history. Parents who are in local business might be encouraged to come to the schools to talk about their Companies, Shops and Stores. Government Office workers, Gardai, ESB and Telecommunications, modern Computer development workers, too could all play their part.

(iv) In larger schools I would recommend the provision of an Irish Language teacher whose job would be teaching all classes in the spoken Gaelic only. This specialist teacher would support those staff who had participated in the proposed intensive classes in their different grades.
Thus school texts could be compiled by the teachers, based on the local tradition and folklore with grant aid for publication. Poetry, music and songs would form part of the programme; pupils composing their own poems and local history, brought up to date in the Irish language. Local Music Centres could be established by professional artists and musicians, open at the weekends.
The Bellarmine Arts Centre in Glasgow, which I visited some years ago, when with a group of Inner City Dublin teachers was a revelation. We were guests of the Glasgow Educational Authority. Talented pupils who attended the Bellarmine Centre are now professional musicians and group performers all over the U.K. 'Simple Minds' was one famous group connected to that Centre.
A renewed interest in our local surroundings should form the basis for a better understanding of our Gaelic Place-names. Every field, lake, river, mountain, hill and croft still bears its Gaelic name: Dublin - Dubhlinn; Belfast - Beal Feirsde; Killybegs - Na Cealla Beaga. What better base to stimulate a renewal of interest in our native Language ?



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