

# **Irish Perspectives on British Education**



## **Report of a National Conference**

**London 13 October 1990**

**Irish in Britain Representation Group**  
*Cumann Ionadaíochta na n-Éireannach sa Bhreatain*

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# INTRODUCTION

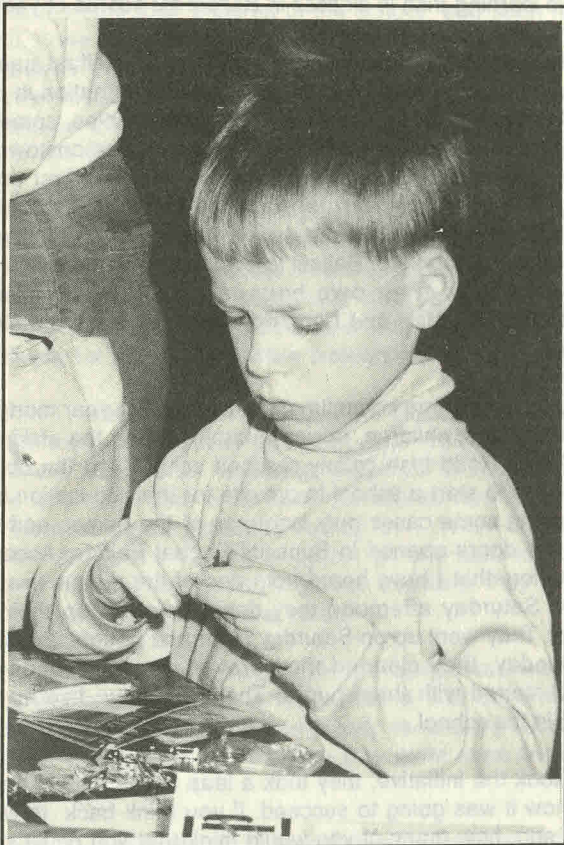


Photo: Gabrielle Humphreys

Massive emigration of Irish people to Britain throughout the 1980's means that more and more children entering the British education system in the '90s will be Irish. Our experience of that education system, to date, has been that there is little or no provision for our specific needs. Anti-Irish racism in schools is rarely acknowledged and seldom tackled. Our history is denied or rewritten. Campaigns for the inclusion of our language in the new curriculum have so far met with dismissal from the Department of Education. Irish Travellers are often effectively denied the right to education and to develop within their own culture.

This experience has a severe impact on the sense of identity of Irish children and youth.

It was our intention in this conference to explore positive actions which have been taken or which could be taken to counter this effect.

We focused in particular on the Irish language, An Ghaeilge, and on anti-Irish racism.

## AN GHAELIGE

The roots of anti-Irish racism in Britain lie in the ongoing colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland. Colonisation in Ireland, as elsewhere, involved not only the theft of land and resources and the brutal oppression of the people but also the suppression of all expression of a distinct national identity and culture. Resistance to this colonisation in Ireland has taken many forms and includes the struggle to hold on to and reclaim our language.

It has been our experience that there is within the Irish community in Britain a growing desire to speak and learn Irish. It is clear that this desire has its roots in a need to reassert our Irish identity in the face of anti-Irish racism, particularly here, where we live in the home of the coloniser.

How can we build the language movement in Britain, where in many ways the language has no context: many of us do not hear it spoken around us; its status as a language is ignored by the public sector; there are no Irish language programmes on the broadcast media in Britain; there is no provision of the language in the mainstream education system?

There is a lot that we can learn from the experiences of the Irish language community in west Belfast, home of the greatest revival of the language in recent times. Many of the same conditions that apply here exist also in the Six Counties, where Irish has no official status and where it is in fact heavily suppressed. The link between language and a people's sense of national identity in the face of racism and daily oppression is perhaps nowhere more clear than in the Six Counties.

Eoghan O Néill, journalist with Lá, the Irish language daily newspaper published in Belfast and a committed language activist, opened the conference with a talk on 'Rebuilding the Irish Speaking Community'.



# REBUILDING THE IRISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY

Eoghan O Néill

Ba mhaith liom a rá go bhfuil áthas an domhain ormsa a bheith anseo, go bhfuil mé iontach sásta bheith anseo i measc cuid mhaith de mhuintir na hÉireann anseo sa Bhreatain. Thall i mBéal Feirste is dócha nach bhfuil fhios acu go bhfuil an oiread sin ar bun agaibh anseo ar thaobh na Gaeilge agus is spléachadh maith é seo ar an méid atá ar bun agaibh sa Bhreatain.

It was left open to me to decide as to what subject I would like to talk about and basically what I wanted to do was to talk about the revival of the Irish language in Belfast which has taken place in the last twenty odd years.

The efforts of the Irish speaking population of Belfast to revive the native tongue within their own community has been documented and commented upon far and near. Newspapers delight in publishing photographs of smiling nursery or primary school kids being taught through the medium of Irish, while their struggling parents run concerts and céilís, raffles, treasure hunts and nights at the races, shake collection boxes at passers by and perhaps even try the dogs, horses and lotto tickets themselves to raise the necessary funds to keep the schools open. The whole Irish language educational system in the North generally has been deeply neglected by the British government.

We've appeared in the Guardian, the London Times, Le Monde, The Washington Post, The New York Times, as well as various other organs in Australia, New Zealand - even South Africa. Anywhere Irish people are found, in fact, they are invariably interested in the fortunes of the Irish language, nowhere more so than within the Irish community here in Britain.

Neither have the electronic media been far behind with radio and television crews tripping over themselves to capture the Irish language live and living within an urban society. Because it is a fact that the Irish language in Belfast is flourishing and prospering.

In recent years West Belfast has been acclaimed as the capital city of the Irish language revival, and deservedly so - we can boast some ten nursery schools, two primary schools, a daily newspaper and perhaps the highest concentration of Irish speakers in any urban area in the whole of Ireland.

There are almost one thousand adults learning Irish this week at various levels in Belfast and many more involved in some aspect of the Irish language revival movement.

In fact, an outsider could well be forgiven for thinking that the business of reviving the Irish language was all but completed!

Last week we buried a lifelong stalwart of the Irish language in Belfast. Tomás ó hÉanain actually started teaching Irish in 1933 and he was still teaching Irish till his death which was just a week ago. He remained a pillar of the language cause in Belfast until his sad death at the age of 75. Some years ago I was talking to Tomás and asked him his opinion of the great upsurge in interest in Irish that followed the Long Kesh hunger strikes of 1981. Tomás gazed slowly back through time.

*"In the thirties, there were thousands upon thousands of people learning Irish, running céilís, attending meetings. Everyone put great faith in de Valera. Everyone thought that Ireland would be reunited tomorrow and Irish would be the language of a united Ireland. But Dev let the people down, and they lost interest."*

I think that it is important that you bear in mind that classes are not going to save the Irish language. It is not enough. You have to have more than that. There have been thousands of people learning Irish in classes in Belfast for scores of years.

The turning point for the Irish language in Belfast came in 1969 - a turning point, of course, for the whole nation in many other ways - when a dozen Irish speaking couples, some with young families, bought a stretch of land in Andersonstown and proceeded to build their own homes. It was the first time in Ireland that an effort was made to actually rebuild the Gaeltacht physically. In those days it was virtually unknown for working class people in Belfast to own their own homes; to buy land and build their own houses was something more associated with Mills and Boon novels, or at best, the stuff of dreams.

A house is a lifetime commitment, a twenty-five year mortgage, responsibilities, children, raising a family. When the children of the Shaws Road Irish colony reached school age the obvious move was to start a school to provide for their education in the first and in some cases only language of the home...and so in 1971 the doors opened in Bunscoil Phobal Feirste. According to the story that I have heard from one of the people involved, on the Saturday afternoon they decided to set up their own school. They went up on Saturday night and bought a caravan. On Sunday, they cleaned the caravan and on Monday the school started with three pupils. There are now five hundred pupils in the school.

They took the initiative, they took a leap in the dark. They did not know it was going to succeed. If you think back to twenty years ago, how many of you would think that you could set up a school? Especially in a place like Belfast where the schools are very much dominated by the clergy and by the state. Now they have a permanent school, they have five hundred pupils, a staff of twenty teachers, and that all came from that initiative. If any lessons are to be learnt from the Irish language movement in Belfast, it is that sometimes you just have to take a jump in the dark.

This episode serves to illustrate the difference between the situation of the Irish language in Belfast now, and that which prevailed throughout this century. In previous years few families used the language as the normal language of the home. The poet Ciarán Carson, brought up in an Irish speaking home in the fifties and sixties, has written of the isolation he felt during those years, of how even in Andersonstown he felt odd to be speaking this funny language.

There were, of course, numerous dedicated Irish speakers in Belfast in those years, but they were thinly spread, and the language was often forced to become at best a subsidiary of the real stuff of life. You went out and you did your job during the day and you took an Irish class at night. But Irish hadn't anything to do with economics, it hadn't to do with anything



except enjoying taking Irish classes. There was no social life in Irish, there was no media in Irish, there were no jobs for Irish speakers. It didn't relate to anything except that educational strand of your life.

The founding of the Shaw's Road colony established the Irish language as the central plank in the lifestyle of a number of families, the foundation upon which they built their very lives and it is this theme that marks the difference between the language movement of this period and all of what has gone before.

Throughout the seventies the Shaw's Road school expanded as the children of the 'colony' came to school age. Irish speakers from the greater community outside the tiny group of Irish houses sent their children to the school and soon many parents, none of whom could speak Irish themselves but who nevertheless understood the value of the native tongue and were determined to support its re-establishment, were sending their children to what was by now the fastest growing primary school in the city.

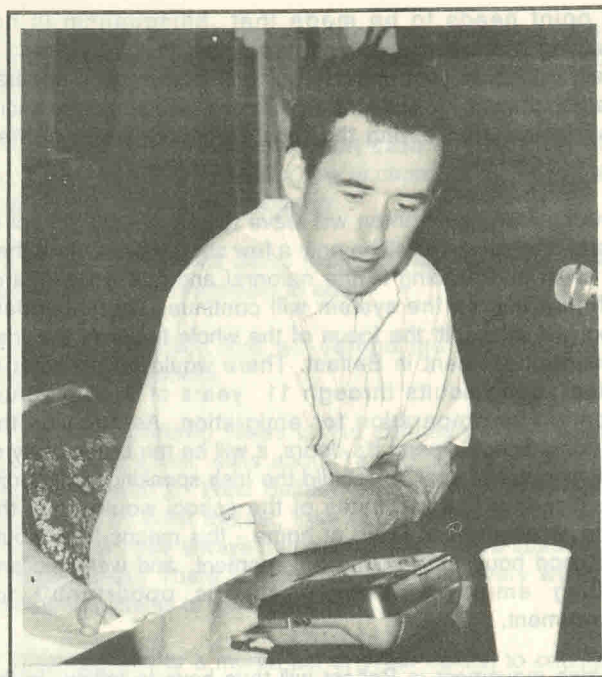
Nowadays the vast majority of pupils in both Irish medium primary schools in west Belfast come from exclusively or mostly English speaking homes. There is a network of nursery schools throughout the city which take children from the age of three and with games, music and dance prepare them linguistically for primary education through the medium of Irish.

From 1971, when the Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, the Shaw's Road primary school was opened, until 1984 the British government refused to finance or support it in any way. The parents who sent their children to that school had to make a commitment to go out and raise money for it. When they were finished their work they had to go out around bars to collect money at night. They had to organise bazaars, they had to organise functions, lotteries and so on.

That was really what strengthened and cemented the commitment of the parents to the school. It was not a normal school. The state forced the community to actually subsidise the school for fourteen years before they were even prepared to give a penny to it.

I will leave it to yourselves to establish why, for what motives they did that. I have no doubt whatsoever that if it had been an English language school it would have got the grant after three years. In a way it proved very beneficial because it forced the Irish speakers to go out and make their case within the wider community. And of course the Irish community came to the recognition that Irish was discriminated against. That was one of the most important factors in the whole development of the Irish language in Belfast. People realised that they are being penalised for having their education in Irish. It brought a lot of people into the Irish language movement who might not have come otherwise.

In 1984 the British government finally caved in and decided to grant the Bunscoil maintained status which meant that they supplied all the staffing and running costs plus seventy-five per cent of the capital. There were two implications arising from this decision. Firstly, the school parents and supporters, indeed the Irish speaking community in general, realised that they had scored a victory. This was very important psychologically, when people realised that after fourteen years of their sacrifice they had scored a victory. They had actually forced the British government to admit that the Irish language was just like any other language.



Eoghan O'Neill

Photo: Gabrielle Humphreys

From being totally opposed to supporting the venture, the British government had been turned around to a position of complete support. They accepted that Irish was a legitimate form of enhancing people's education, that bilingualism involving the Irish language was O.K.

Secondly, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste became an established institution of the Irish language community in Belfast. Today there are some five hundred pupils, with fifteen full-time teachers plus all the ancillary staff needed to help run a small and vibrant school smoothly. Parents depend on the Bunscoil to provide primary level education for their children but perhaps more importantly, the staff depend on the school for their livelihood. For the first time the Irish language pays people, it's got an economic value. They depend on the Irish language in Belfast for their mortgages.

Four years ago a second Irish medium primary school was opened in west Belfast, Gaeilscoil na bhFál, and though Brian Mawhinney, the minister for education at Stormont, stated categorically that the second school would not have to wait thirteen or fourteen years before being granted maintained status, Gaeilscoil na BhFál now has fifty pupils and is still completely dependant on voluntary effort to survive.

The next logical step in the development of this major institution of the Irish speaking community is the establishing of an Irish medium secondary school and it seems very likely that this vital link will be added to the chain next September. The importance of the secondary school cannot be over-estimated. At present, the Bunscoil turns out fifty Irish speaking eleven year olds every year. Unfortunately, by the time these children have spent five years in an English medium secondary school - given their almost exclusive English language home environment - their command of the language may well be no better than that of other pupils from English medium primary schooling who studied Irish at secondary level.

Establishing a secondary school would ensure that the Irish language speaking community would be increased by fifty well-educated young adults every year, young people who speak Irish as their first language and English as their second.



The point needs to be made that bilingualism is not something which is bad, it is something which is very good. It actually enhances your understanding of languages in general. More importantly, it would create a strong Irish language social milieu for children during the most formative years of their lives.

As young men and women will leave the secondary school at the age of eighteen it will be only a few short years before their own children are going to the naíonraí and bunscoileanna of the future and so the system will continue. The secondary school will also shift the focus of the whole thrust of the Irish language movement in Belfast. There would be no point in putting young adults through 11 years of Irish medium education as preparation for emigration. As soon as the secondary school opens its doors, it will be the urgent duty of those who would seek to rebuild the Irish speaking community to ensure that the graduates of the school would have the choice of staying and living at home - this means they would need good housing, a sound environment and well-paid and fulfilling employment with realistic opportunity for advancement.

The Irish movement in Belfast will thus have to follow in the footsteps of their counterparts in Wales and become involved in the overall process of building and sustaining an attractive society for their community.

Some movement has already been made in the area of employment for the Irish speaking community, most notably in the area of education. Not only, as has already been mentioned, have we teachers employed in the Irish medium sector, but also as Irish teachers in the English medium schools and colleges. Glór na nGael in west Belfast co-ordinate the employment of teachers and assistants in nine nursery schools, and the monthly draw An Carn Ultach hopes to be employing three people soon for this organisation that has a vital role in raising money for the educational sector.

Perhaps the best example of an Irish language venture providing employment is Lá, the daily newspaper which is run by a full-time staff of nine, with various other freelance contributors. In the years ahead many more examples will appear of Irish speakers establishing their own small businesses, or being employed together in English medium companies, or even being in a position to provide an Irish language service to the general public as part of their overall duties - perhaps in the civil service, driving taxis, working in shops...

There are obvious similarities between the Irish situation in the Six Counties and that of Welsh in Wales. True, we do not have so large a residual language community as exists in Wales, but the revival community is a lot larger and growing. The big difference, however is in relation to government spending. The British government in the Six Counties refuses to fund some fifteen nursery schools, and two out of the three primary schools. And although Secretary of State Peter Brooke has said he is reconsidering his decision to withdraw ACE funding from Glór na nGael, that organisation is as yet wholly dependant on voluntary effort to run its nine nursery schools and maintain its structure of Irish classes.

There is no Irish language television in the North and only a derisory three and a half hours per week on the radio, and although we are now talking of opening our secondary school next September, the government have so far given no indication that they intend to support it.

Tomás ó hÉanain, who I mentioned earlier, once told me about a delegation that went to the BBC in 1936. (As far back as 1936, Irish speakers were going to the BBC and asking them to provide radio programmes in Irish.) They refused. The first Irish language programme on radio came in 1982. The Northern Ireland state was set up in 1922, so it was a sixty year gap, although everyone acknowledged that there were Irish speakers in the North.

Another delegation went to meet the BBC in Belfast in 1985. They had a very simple demand. They asked them to put some Irish on the television to restore their credibility. They asked them to put on even two words, 'Good night', before they have the queen. They said, instead of saying 'Good night', would you not say 'Good night, oíche mhaith'. It was not exactly an earth shattering proposal but they turned it down.

What a contrast with Wales where the same British government spends millions of pounds per year in support of the Welsh language in all three recognised areas of need - education, media and the civil service.

Mention of the civil service brings us to what is the single worst aspect of British government neglect towards the Irish language in the North: Irish has simply no official status. The three year old son of a colleague at Lá does not officially exist because his parents refused to register his birth with an English-only form at the City Hall and were told that no bilingual format existed, nor was it required by law.

There is a lot of work to be done to develop the Irish speaking community in Belfast and Government finance is essential.

We now have the makings of a community, we are starting to lay the foundations of our institutions - the institutions that transform numbers of people into a community. We have the example of those who kept the Irish language torch alive in Belfast through generations before us and we have as our goal a vibrant, living, essential community completely existent within the Irish language.

The whole issue of Glór na nGael is very important. Glór na nGael is an independent body and this is important because the Irish language movement needs to be independent. There are times when our interests as a linguistic community will not accord with that of the British government. Basically what the British government is trying to do is to cut the finances to Glór na nGael and so stifle the voice of the independent Irish language movement. It is important that people write in and say that they object to the cutting of finance to Glór na nGael.

What they did in Belfast was very dangerous: they implied, without having any evidence whatsoever, that Glór na nGael had links with paramilitary groups. It is a very dangerous thing to say, particularly as the function of Glór na nGael is to run the nurseries. It runs Irish classes for adults and nurseries. Not exactly the breeding ground for potential terrorists!

It is very important that people do try to demonstrate their support for Glór na nGael.

Another thing which I have not mentioned is Ráidió Fáilte. We set up our own 'pirate' radio station, (we prefer to call it a community radio station), four years ago in Belfast. We stopped last year to formally apply for a licence. We were broadcasting for three years and were in a kind of limbo - we were not illegal but we were not legal.



There were to be changes in the legislation which would enable community radios to come on the air. We were never closed down because I think the British government recognised that it would be very foolish to be seen to be closing down a radio station which was providing a service which they were not providing. We were providing music, chat, discussion, all in Irish, for six, seven hours a day. The BBC was providing only three and a half hours a week.

We are now putting in an application for a licence for an Irish language radio station for Belfast. This is a very important institution. Irish language Institutions are important because they give the language an edge which it does not have if it is only associated with education.

We have also got an Irish language drama group, Aisteoirí an Dráma, who took part in the Dublin Theatre Festival recently. They received widespread acclaim for a tour in Ireland. Again, this provides a social function over and above education. Aisteoirí an Dráma are actors. The Irish is incidental, it is their natural medium for acting, but it is the acting which is important. People can do things in the Irish language without being conscious that they are speaking Irish.

The other point which I wanted to raise was Long Kesh, the prison camp. There are several hundred people there who are Irish speakers. To some people that is a problem, they have a problem with lending support to people who are convicted, rightly or wrongly of crimes. I think it is very important to lend support to the Irish language wherever it is put forward. If people are told that you are not allowed to have the Irish language in prisons, you will find that you are not allowed to have it in certain other sectors. The whole atmosphere of suppressing the language becomes acceptable. It is no more acceptable to suppress the language inside the prisons as it is outside in the wider society.

Two prisoners recently took a case to court in Belfast. They alleged that their rights as Irish speakers were not recognised. They had learnt the language over a period of fourteen years, they spoke Irish as the normal language between themselves but every time they went to write a letter in Irish, it was censored. If a word of Irish was spoken during a visit, the visit was terminated immediately.

There was also a problem with the Fáiinne. The Fáiinne is an emblem which shows that I am an Irish speaker. It is not a political emblem. That was banned from the prison.

Prisoners were not allowed to receive Lá, the paper I work for. They were not allowed to receive books in Irish. They were not allowed to receive records - Albert Fry's records were banned from Long Kesh because they were in Irish. There is nothing seditious about Albert Fry! Clannad were banned from Long Kesh because they were in Irish!

It is this mentality again - that Irish is dubious, that Irish is not treated the way French is or the way English is treated.

Shortly before the case came to court, concessions were made.

The other problem was that they were not allowed to play Irish sport. They were not allowed to play Gaelic football. The only game they could play was soccer. In Ireland soccer is one of the minor sports. Gaelic football is the major sport in Ireland. They were not allowed to play it because it is Irish, it has

something to do with national identity and feeling Irish. The governor and the prison authorities did not want to promote this.

Once again, just before the court case, the decision on this was reversed. The Fáiinne is now acceptable, as indeed are Lá and Irish columns in newspapers.

All these concessions came from the fact that two prisoners took the British government to court.

It is very important that we defend the rights of the Irish language *everywhere*.

The Andersonstown News is the community newspaper in West Belfast which sells about 14,000 copies a week and is really the voice of West Belfast. If anyone wants to speak to the people of West Belfast, they speak to the Andersonstown News. They have always had a very progressive attitude to the Irish language. There is a full page in Irish every week. This adds to the status of the language.

It is tantamount to a mortal sin in West Belfast to criticise the Irish language! This has got to do with the fact that it is probably one of the most nationalistic parts of Ireland but it has also got to do with the perception that the British government has suppressed the language to a large extent. This has driven people closer to the Irish language and there is a very supportive atmosphere, one example of which is the Andersonstown News.

Not one of the things I have discussed today came as a government initiative. They were all the results of initiatives taken by ordinary Irish speakers in conjunction with their English speaking neighbours.

It is the duty of the government to respond to the demands and needs of the community. They should use the money that we pay them to provide services in the Irish language and in the English language. Go raibh maith agaibh! ▲



# ANTI-IRISH RACISM - THE EXPERIENCE OF IRISH CHILDREN IN BRITISH SCHOOLS

**Dr Elinor Kelly**

*There has been very little research done into the experience of Irish children in schools in Britain. An IBRG research document into the promotion of Irish culture within the school curriculum in Haringey, published in 1986, found that there was little or no recognition of the needs of the Irish as a separate ethnic group. Our knowledge of the extent and degree of anti-Irish racism which Irish children encounter in schools here relies mostly on personal accounts rather than documented research.*

Dr Elinor Kelly of Manchester University, a researcher on the MacDonalld enquiry into racism in schools in Manchester, opened the afternoon session with a discussion of her findings. She has edited the transcript of her talk at the IBRG conference.

## Introduction

I was very pleased to be invited to participate in the IBRG conference. This was for several reasons. The first was to do with the Macdonald enquiry and with the fact that their work has not been completed. The second was because I am myself discovering the meaning of being Irish in the context of racism in Britain today. The third was to provide details of any race relations or research developments which could prove useful in efforts to win ethnic minority status for Irish children in school.

When I arrived at the conference I was afraid that I would disappoint everyone because I had so little to say about anti-Irish racism. It was during the conference that I learnt that my ignorance is shared by many other people and that the knowledge of what Irish children are experiencing is still locked away in their families. I have therefore revised a lot of my ideas and this article has been very much influenced by my discussions with IBRG participants.

## The Macdonald Enquiry

The Macdonald Enquiry was set up in the aftermath of the death of a Bangladeshi boy in a Manchester school in 1986 - a horrifying incident in which one thirteen year old pupil, Ahmed Ullah, was killed by another thirteen year old boy. After the court case, Manchester City Council decided to find out what had led to the murder and whether there were lessons to be learnt.

Some of you may have seen details of the Enquiry findings in the press. You may also have read about what happened to the Enquiry report. It was suppressed - Manchester City Council withdrew from support for the publishing of the full report and allowed only extracts to be released. In the end the Macdonald panel of four people raised funds in order to publish it themselves. **MURDER IN THE PLAYGROUND - THE REPORT OF THE MACDONALD ENQUIRY** was published at the beginning of 1990. It is now readily available. However, the City Council embargo ensured that circulation has been much more limited than it would otherwise have been and the report still needs a lot of publicising.



Dr. Elinor Kelly

Photo: Gabrielle Humphreys

In talking about racism we are dealing with issues which may start with ignorance and neglect but which can lead to something as extraordinary and horrifying as murder. One of the major findings of the Macdonald Enquiry was that there were good reasons for the school to have known well in advance that something serious was going on. The report states that if the teachers, school management and education department had responded effectively at an earlier stage to the complaints of parents and to the warnings of school governors, then pre-emptive action could have been taken. The boy killer would not have been in the school but would have been removed to a facility providing specialist support of which he was in obvious need. The school would have done something about the fact that Asian boys were being bullied, not just by Darren but also by others.

There is much more to say about the findings of the Macdonald Enquiry and its exhaustive analysis of the events which led inexorably towards their hideous climax. The murder was in Burnage school but it could equally well have occurred in any other school which neglects the welfare of its pupils and trivialises the impact of racism and bullying. It was a Bangladeshi boy who was killed and Asians are too often the targets of mistreatment and abuse in schools. It is tragic that a school which claimed to be working on anti-racist lines should have proved to be such a hostile environment for at least one of the minority groups for which it was responsible.

In the survey which I carried out on behalf of the Enquiry in three other Manchester secondary schools, I questioned 900 pupils about their experience of inter-racial group behaviour. I was very careful to ensure that we did not talk only about Black/White issues. In the questionnaire which was distributed to pupils, I made sure that there was space for pupils to claim Irish, Scottish, Welsh ancestry and the opportunity to state whether they had been called names or been mistreated in other ways.



I did this because I did not want to assume that Black/White were the only ethnic tensions in the schools. Manchester has a long history of Jewish and Irish migration and also of the rise and fall of anti-semitism and anti-Irish racism. I and the Macdonald panel wanted to give Celtic and Jewish pupils equal opportunities with all others to identify themselves and to record their experiences. We were not sure what we would find.

## Research Findings

In 1984, the Irish Post summarised the findings of a survey of 800 children in a Nottingham comprehensive school. Of seven groups - English, German, Indian, Irish, Jewish, Pakistani and West Indian - the Irish were the least liked, followed closely by the Pakistanis. The Irish were seen as 'violent' and 'dull' and a teacher told a researcher that *"in the school there is a feeling that anything to do with Ireland is backward or stupid and the Irish children would be ashamed of wearing the shamrock."*

Is this surprising? Since 1969 when the British troops were sent into Northern Ireland, there has been a barrage of media coverage portraying the barbarous behaviour of Irish nationalists and the restraint of the Army against intolerable provocation. If the children did not have an alternative version of current affairs and had not been taught anything about the positive and creative contributions of Irish people, then how could they fail to dislike the Irish - mock their accents, joke about 'paddies'? The question is what impact did this hostile environment have on Irish children and was there any link between this dislike of the Irish and action directed against Irish children?

In the Manchester schools, I surveyed a total of 902 pupils - 66 were Afro-Caribbean, 20 Chinese, 100 were Asian, 135 were Celtic, of whom 52 were Irish. In other words 6% of the pupils stated that they were Irish and this reflects to some extent the scale of Irish settlement in Manchester. In 1981 the Irish were still the largest migrant group in the city and Manchester has many ethnic associations - churches, schools, social clubs, pubs, poetry, music and dance - which the Irish have initiated and sustained. I searched my data for indicators of the experience of Irish children in the survey schools. I found that Irish was used in a friendly way to refer to other pupils but also negatively with reference to 'Irish bastard'. There were some indicators that Irish pupils seemed to be teased and bullied more frequently than other white pupils but they seemed also to be better supported by the teachers when they complained.

The indicators were not sufficiently clear for me to draw any conclusions. The more I combed the data for clues about the experience of Irish pupils, the more disappointed I became. In part I put this down to the fact that, for various technical reasons, I was using a questionnaire rather than interviews. Pupils of Asian, Caribbean and Chinese descent are reminded on a daily basis about their ethnic minority status, other pupils are not. So the Irish could have held back because they did not see the question as relevant to them. Other pupils may have failed to comment on Irish issues because while they knew that some individuals were Irish, they did not think of the Irish as being one of the minority groups in the school.

Nonetheless I was puzzled because at least one of the schools was located in a neighbourhood close to the graves of the Manchester Martyrs. Every November there are demonstrations and counter demonstrations. If the pupils' accounts were to be believed, then it seemed as if tensions at

the school gates were not reflected inside the school itself! This would have been a curious finding because it would fly in the face of all the other research into race relations inside and outside school.

I began to think that it was the silence itself which needed to be interpreted. Is it possible that Irish children experience particular barriers to realising their ethnicity and any form of 'group' as opposed to 'individual' identity? Does the situation in Northern Ireland create complications and pose unique problems for school pupils? If further research is to be done, then questions like these need to be posed and researchers need to cast around for the sources which will give them insight. I began by questioning my own biography and family history.

## Autobiography

I am a daughter of Irish experience - you may have detected the name Kelly which of course links me with Ireland. In fact I am an ethnic cocktail - I have Scottish, Irish, English and Jewish ancestry. For many years this cocktail was not problematic, I felt as if I was just me, an individual. What I did not realise was that I was actually submerging all aspects of my identity except the English. My Englishness dominated to the extent that I had no curiosity about my other ancestries until I was challenged. This process of challenge started when I left my convent school at the age of sixteen so that I could study for my 'A' levels in the local grammar school. There I was challenged about being Catholic, about Catholic beliefs, about our version of history, whether or not I would attend assembly. For the first time I became aware of being part of a minority - the Catholic minority in my family's small town.

There was a time lag before my next challenge. While studying at University, I visited my socialist, republican, bilingual great aunt in Galway. She sat me down in her kitchen and fed me history from the Irish perspective. The 17th century was transformed as I heard about the iniquities of Cromwell. For the first time I realised that I was not just Catholic but also Irish - linked to a people with proud historical traditions which had survived invasion, occupation and deliberate destruction.

This awareness led me to explore another aspect of myself - my Jewish ancestry. I became proud of being an ethnic cocktail and I refused to choose between the different elements in my ancestry. As a result, when I came to be involved in the anti-racist campaigns of the 1980's, I questioned the notion that racism started after the second world war with the mass migrations from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. I felt that if the race relations industry developed along those lines, then I and other Jews and Irish would be further suppressed and denied.

The question was, how to bring our histories and current experience onto the agenda, without diminishing the scale and depth of the injustice being meted out to the newest migrants? Again it took time to resolve the difficulties and I have no regrets about the priority which was and is given to defending the interests of black minority people. In the end, I decided that it was necessary to rethink the notion of 'racism' which implies something static and unchanging, and to turn towards something more dynamic in analysis. An approach which could take account of the rise and fall of anti-semitism and anti-Irish racism alongside the facts of the colour bar and other forms of racism against black people.



## Racialising

I have adopted the term 'racialising' to refer to the processes which lead

- a) to individuals and groups being picked out for mistreatment by others
- and
- b) to this mistreatment being rationalised and justified on the grounds that the victims are not full human beings.

The Jews and the Irish have their own history of being abused and mistreated and this history started long before the English encountered the peoples of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. However, this history has not been a steady stream of misery. There have been times when the abuse and mistreatment eased and these two ethnic groups were not racialised to quite the same extent. There have been other times when they were subjected to discrimination on a massive scale and in frightening forms, because the government and public authorities have themselves led the way with discriminatory legislation - immigration acts, internment, the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The recent rise in the number of attacks on Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in Manchester and elsewhere suggests that certain forms of the racialising of the Jews (anti-semitism) are being actively promoted again after a period of relative quiet. It seems as if anti-semitism is never eradicated; on the contrary it dies back for a time and then re-emerges. Is the same true for anti-Irish racism? Is anti-Irish racism focussed on churches, social clubs, pubs, or does it take other forms? Are Irish organisations, like Jewish organisations, going through debates about whether to keep quiet and lie low, or to come out in loud protest?

I think that Irish and Jewish people have much in common in the search for our histories. Racism is not static, it does not stand still. The racism of today is not the same as the racism of fifty or a hundred years ago. There is much to be learnt from the past in understanding the present and especially in warning us that ancient racisms lie fallow, but never lose their fertility.

So, if the history of the Irish in Britain is even less well recorded than that of the Jews, should we just wait around until the historians and researchers catch up? What about the children in school today? I consider that there are other paths for us to follow - paths which have been trodden by other ethnic groups before us.

## The 1976 Race Relations Act

One development which should have altered perceptions of minorities and minority claims to protection from mistreatment is the Race Relations Act of 1976. This Act outlawed discrimination against ethnic groups and completed the process of cleaning up our streets so that it is now illegal to post notices such as 'No Blacks', 'No Irish'.

However, the most insidious forms of racism cannot be tackled easily. Landlords continue to refuse accommodation to 'undesirables'; employers refuse jobs to people who 'do not fit in'; schools seek to maintain their monocultural ethos, subordinating minorities to the dominance of Englishness. The Government has put the clock back even further by insisting on a national curriculum for schools which pulls towards rote learning of facts and a narrow interpretation of history.

Yet all is not lost. There are some notable examples of minority groups refusing to accept the status quo and turning to the law for assistance. For our discussion, the most significant example is that of the Sikh boy who, in 1983, was refused entry to his school because he was wearing a turban. The school claimed that the turban was not part of the school uniform and that he had to conform to school regulations. The boy and his family refused to accept this action and fought his case all the way through the courts to the House of Lords. The Law Lords decided that the school was wrong because the boy was a member of an ethnic group which was entitled to maintain its culture and traditions, including the wearing of a turban.

Before researching their decision, the Law Lords outlined their definition of an ethnic group and this is something which we should study. They stated that an ethnic group, within the context of the 1976 Act, must be one which regards itself and is regarded by others as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics. Some of those characteristics are essential - a long shared history of which the group is conscious of distinguishing itself from other groups and the memory of which it keeps alive; a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners, often but not necessarily associated with religious observance. Other characteristics which could be relevant are common geographical origin, a common language, not necessarily peculiar to the group; a common literature peculiar to the group; a common religion different from that of neighbouring groups or from the general community surrounding it; and being a minority.

I would argue that Irish people in Britain meet all the essential conditions and many of the relevant characteristics. This ruling is one to which we should refer when arguing the case for Irish children in schools. The military-political situation may weigh heavily against the chances of a legal case being won if a complaint actually got as far as the courts, but the law can and should be used in other ways.

## Bullying

Many of the complaints of Irish parents are not so much about curriculum - the biased teaching of history, the refusal to acknowledge the Irish language - as about behaviour, particularly about name calling and bullying. When I worked for the Macdonald Enquiry I was surprised to find that practically no research had been done on pupils' experiences, especially on what happens when they are not supervised, eg. in the playgrounds, corridors, on the way to and from home etc. However, at the very time that I was working on the survey the pressure for open debate about name-calling and bullying was building up.

In 1988 the Commission for Racial Equality published a report which summarised evidence about racial harassment in schools and colleges throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Then, also in 1988, the first book on bullying was published. These two publications gave new impetus to the demands of parents and children's organisations for bullying to be taken seriously. Any of you who are parents know that one of the greatest fears of children is that they will be bullied; any of you whose child has been bullied know that it is a close, secretive and pathological relationship which locks bully and victim together in complicated ways. You will also know that teachers tend to be dismissive about bullying.



Campaigners against bullying are calling for whole school policies in which positive moves are made to encourage children to tell about what is happening to themselves or to others; for ethnic monitoring of all incidents; for the involvement of pupils and parents in programmes of action which aim to eradicate bullying from schools. Moreover, these programmes should focus not just on the victims but also on the bullies, many of whom are greatly in need of guidance and support if they are to unlearn their patterns of behaviour. The development of such programmes could bring new hope because once they sense a mood of partnership, parents will feel less inhibited about discussing their suspicions and fears.

It is time for us to reclaim Irish children in schools. We need to ensure that their experiences are recorded, so that if they become involved in bullying, whether as victims or bullies, their behaviour is viewed as a problem to be solved.

## Reclaiming Irish Children

It seems to me that we should look upon the experience of Irish children in English schools as being one of the most sensitive tests of whether or not schools have grasped the real meaning of racism. Racism is not just a matter of Black/White relations; it involves majority-minority, minority-minority group relations; it also involves scapegoating and abuse of individuals. In other words racism results from any of the processes which lead to individuals or groups being mistreated and to their mistreatment being justified on racial lines.

We need to reclaim Irish children so that they can learn how to experience the best of our multi-ethnic society. I consider that a key element in this learning is their growth to awareness and understanding of ethnicity - their own and that of others. By this I do not mean another variation on multi-culturalism - the celebration of folk festivals and customs. I mean appreciation of connections with the history of a people, in their homeland and as migrants and settlers in other lands. Novels such as Maude Casey's, collections of personal histories such as that by Lennon, McAdam and O'Brien open up both the negative (racism) and the positive (cultural expression in resistance). These writers are not romantic folklorists, nor are they political agitators. They are communicators of Irish ethnicity and are showing us the way forward. ▲ **References:**

Maude Casey  
**Over the Water**

*Livewire, Women's Press 1987*

**Learning in Terror - A Survey of Racial Harassment in Schools and Colleges in England, Scotland and Wales, 1985 - 1987** *Commission for Racial Equality 1988*

**The Irish Post** 14 April 1984

Elinor Kelly and Tessa Cohn

**Racism in Schools - New Research Evidence**  
*Trentham Books 1988*

Mary Lennon, Marie McAdam, Joanne O'Brien

**Across the Water - Irish Women's Lives in Britain**  
*Virago Press 1988*

**The Macdonald Enquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester Schools**

**Murder in the Playground - The Burnage Report**  
*Longsight Press 1989*

Delwyn Tattum and David Lane (eds)

**Bullying in Schools**  
*Trentham Books 1988*

# SEMINARS

Those facilitating the seminars took notes on the discussions and took proposals to the plenary session at the end of the day. *We hope that these proposals will be noted and acted upon by providers of education, teachers, education authorities and community activists throughout Britain.*

## An Ghaeilge - Siobhán Uí Néill

### Moltaí:

1 Ba cheart dúinn breathnú níos cúramáí ar an slí a bhfuil an teanga a mhúineadh de bhrí nach n-oireann an stíl múinte go minic don dalta nó do leibhéal an dalta.

2 Ba cheart feachtas a chur ar bun chun brú a chur ar eagraisí, comhluchtaí agus lucht gnó a bhfuil an-bhaint acu leis na nGael sa tír seo, chun go gcuirfidís seirbhís i nGaeilge ar fáil do dhaoine ar mian leo sin.

3 Ba cheart go gcomh-oibreodh eagraisí na nGael sa tír seo sa bhfeachtas seo agus tá sé ráite cheana féin ag an t-IBRG go bhfuil an-suim acu ann. D'fhéadfadh tithe tabhairne agus áiteanna eile gnó fógraithe a nochtadh a dheireann 'Fáilte Roimh Ghaeilge' agus d'fhéadfadh comhluchtaí mar AIB, B&I agus Aer Lingus am saor íochta a thabhairt dóibh siúd a bhfuil fostaithe acu chun Gaeilge a fhoghlaim nó a fheabhsú.

4 D'fhéadfaí cnaipí no boinn a chaitheamh a fhógraíonn go bhfuil Gaeilge ag duine no go bhfuiltear á fhoghlaim. Tá sreath beag de bhoinn mar iad á n-ullmhú cheana féin ag an t-IBRG ach táthar ag súil lena n-úsáid níos fairsinge ná ina measc féin

5 Beidh aistí i nGaeilge ag teastáil (suas le 600 focal) le haghaidh an 'Irish World'. Tá dream beag á soláthair ach tá an tobar ag eirí tirim againn.

### Proposals:

1 We need to look more carefully at the way in which Irish is taught as the style used is often not appropriate for the pupil or for the pupil's knowledge of the language.

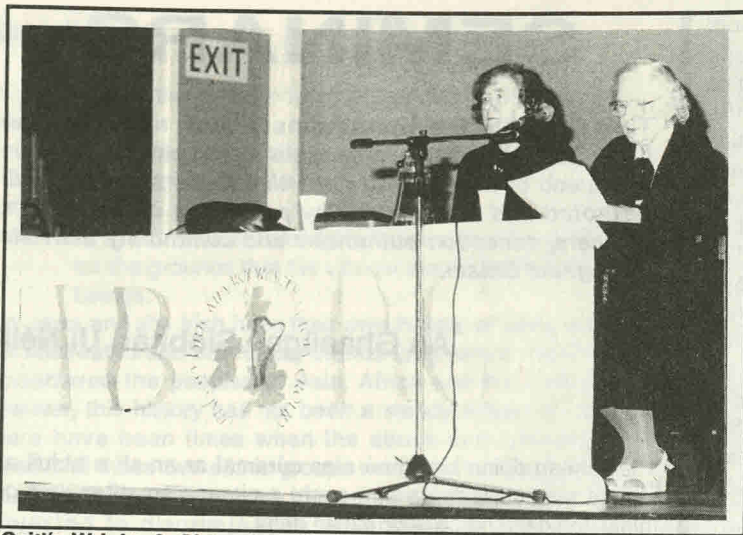
2 We should start a campaign to put pressure on organisations, companies and business people who have a lot of dealings with Irish people in this country to provide services in Irish for those who want them.

3 Irish organisations in this country should work together in this campaign and the IBRG have already said that they are very interested in it. Pubs and other places of business could display notices saying 'Irish welcome here' and companies like the AIB, B&I and Aer Lingus could give paid time off to their employees to learn Irish or to improve their Irish.

4 Badges could be worn to indicate that the wearer has Irish or is learning Irish. The IBRG is already preparing a few such badges but they hope that they will be more widely used than just among themselves.

5 The 'Irish World' is looking for a columnist to write in Irish (up to 600 words). There are a few people doing it now but the well is running dry. ▲





Caitlín Wright & Sister Jean Marie Photo: Gabrielle Humphreys

## Our Censored Voice - Maude Casey

### Proposals:

- 1 That the Labour Party in Britain should be tackled and challenged about its refusal to take on Ireland as an issue of colonisation.
- 2 That educationalists and teachers should be challenged about the fact that the history of Ireland is not represented as that of a colonised country.
- 3 That all ethnic monitoring should include the Irish in a separate category, not as UK or European.
- 4 There should be greater distribution of Irish newspapers in Britain to counter the lack of information about Ireland and the lack of proper representation for Irish people in the British media which can lead to a sense of isolation.
- 5 Irish people should make use of the complaints procedures in the media to demand better representation. Information about this can be had from the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, who produce an information pack with contact numbers and addresses. IBRG should make this known in the Irish community. ▲

## An Ghaeilge - Caitríona Ní Scanláin

(Seminar in English)

### Summary:

We place a high value on the language as a marker of Irish cultural distinctiveness. The promotion of Irish needs active leadership, commitment and action by the state and its institutions. In the late 19th century, a major movement for cultural revitalisation emerged in this country. It sought to rediscover and redefine an Irish identity which could restore to Irish people a full appreciation of their own culture and give them a sense of continuity with their Gaelic past. It reversed cultural and psychological demoralisation and released and refocused the energies of many Irish people towards the creation of a new, more egalitarian and self-confident society.

We perceive the Irish language as a means of re-establishing a sense of our distinctive identity, a confidence in our capacity to contribute to the rich cultural diversity of European society.

The average person places considerable emphasis on the importance of the language but it is within the education system that they have the most direct contact with Irish language policy. On the basis of popular attitudes we would suggest that at the root of many people's feelings about Irish is a sense that they are losing or have lost control over their own cultural and linguistic destiny. They see a decline in the Irish language as inevitable, while at the same time maintaining a strong ethnic attachment to its survival, especially as a mark of cultural distinctiveness.

### Proposals:

- 1 There should be a collation of information about where and when Irish language classes are available. (One pensioner in the group said she found it very difficult to find out about classes in the daytime in particular.)
- 2 Irish language radio should be made available in England. There was some discussion about the feasibility of having a booster in either Ireland or Britain so that Radio na Gaeltachta could be heard in Britain.
- 3 We should write to RTE and ask whether or not their Irish language programmes are available on video and if so, we should get an updated list of those programmes so that they could be shown regularly.
- 4 Irish community radio in Britain should include some Irish language input and the Irish radio programme on Greater London Radio in particular should be approached about this.
- 5 The Irish community in Britain should set up their own independent radio station which, in addition to dealing with other issues of concern to the Irish community, would have Irish language programmes.
- 6 All those organisations providing Irish language classes in Britain should work more closely together and there should be greater unity between them.
- 7 A drama group should be set up so that people would have the opportunity of learning Irish through drama.
- 8 Sometime in the future a conference should be held entirely through the medium of Irish. The conference may be on any topic: the important thing is that Irish should not be something which is spoken *about* but which is *spoken*. ▲



## Irish Women and British Education - Anne Rossiter

### Summary:

There were a number of issues discussed in the seminar and rather than drawing up proposals or resolutions, the group agreed to write papers on their experiences of working within, going through or having children in Catholic and other denominational and non-denominational schools in Britain.

The group discussed the following issues:

- Contradictions for women in terms of where to send their children, particularly if they happen to find that Catholicism is an ideology which does not sit easily on their shoulders, but who are worried about their children becoming 'little Englishers' (i.e. taking on an imperial and colonial ideology).

- The importance of surveys on how Catholic and indeed other schools promote a positive Irish identity. (Von McClary, one of those present, mentioned some of the work which she herself is currently carrying out in nurseries in Haringey and we look forward to hearing more about that.)

- The school curriculum: what it provides in terms of a positive attitude to Ireland and to Irishness.

- The opinion that many Irish parents hold, rightly or wrongly, that Catholic schools are better academically and in terms of discipline. There was quite a long discussion about the disciplinarian aspect of the Catholic school system, which some people suggested was imported, lock, stock and barrel from Ireland.

- That Catholic schools instill in children the 'correct' idea of their role in society: girls are taught to be mothers, boys to be the main providers. Of course we recognised that changes were happening, particularly in Ireland. Whether or not that had occurred in Catholic schools in Britain was open to question.

- Those who spoke positively about Catholic education in Britain, and these were men and women, spoke of the networking which their children would be able to take part in: networking with other Irish children, where willy-nilly an Irishness would emerge. However, others pointed out that this tended to be an extraneous, an extra-mural activity, not one necessarily conducted in the schools or even promoted or acknowledged as something positive which should be encouraged.

- Teachers present described their experiences of working in schools in Britain: many are paid less than their colleagues and are stereotyped and pushed into working in Catholic schools. They are further stereotyped within these schools by gender, with male teachers being encouraged to teach older children, and women infants. Teachers often find that working in Catholic schools can be a barrier to promotion into other educational institutions like the Inspectorate, as they are stereotyped as having reactionary Catholic views.

- It was noted that Catholic schools are in some way protected from having to abide by equal opportunities policies and often inflict corporal punishment on children at both primary and secondary levels.



Anne Rossiter

Photo: Gabrielle Humphreys

- As most Irish people living in Britain are working class, most issues relating to the education of working class children also relate to Irish children. For example, the divide between parents and teachers in relation to background and understanding: that teachers are invariably middle class.

- The new education act now provides for parental rights on the board of governors of schools and it was suggested that Catholic schools do not go out of their way to encourage parents to get involved. The Irish community should be made aware of its rights in this respect.

- Many Irish women present have the desire to have our daughters brought up in an egalitarian environment which Catholic schools frequently do not promote. ▲

## Youth - Provision for a Positive Identity - Mike Carroll

### Proposals:

- 1 Training: Youth workers should have awareness training on anti-Irish racism and the issues around Irish emigration. This training should include awareness of and sensitivity to issues facing Irish young women, Travellers, lesbians and gays and second generation Irish Youth.

- 2 Staffing: There should be more Irish youth workers, both full and part-time and the workers should be representative of women, lesbians and gays and Travellers. Part-time hours for these workers should be allocated from the local council.

- 3 Types of work: Work with Irish youth should include activities based in Irish-only settings and mixed provision. There should be separate work done with Irish young women, Travellers, lesbians and gays.

- 4 Emigrants: There is a need for more outreach/contact work and ongoing detached work with young Irish emigrants. This should include going to centres where the young emigrant Irish are, eg hostels, pubs etc. There needs to be an awareness of the sense of failure which sometimes goes with emigration and in particular the sense of failure in having to come to the home of the oppressor.

- 5 There should be support from the Irish community itself for Irish youth work and there needs to be an understanding of the different needs of second generation and Irish reared youth.



6 Work with Irish youth should include participation and involvement of young Irish people themselves, through youth committees and the provision of social support groups for young emigrants which would be run by the young people themselves. ▲

## **Travellers - A Right to Education - Brian Foster**

### **Proposals:**

1 There should be training for all council employees, including teachers and Councillors on Travellers, their way of life and their experiences.

2 There should be greater access to and encouragement for Travellers to represent themselves on Council committees, including Housing, Social Services, Education and School Governing bodies and local/regional training providers.

3 There should be greater provision of information to Travellers about facilities and services in the local area and their rights to these facilities and services. ▲

## **Irish History - Alan Clinton**

### **Proposals:**

1 People should get hold of the National Curriculum Document No. 3 (Price £3.50) - '**Cross Curriculum Work - A General Statement on Attainment, Targets, Subjects and Themes**'. It was felt that Irish related material could be brought into the curriculum through cross curriculum work on equal opportunities policies, race, class and ethnic subject matters.

2 Irish activists and the Irish community need to become more politically active in Parent Teacher Associations, school governing bodies and local political parties to ensure that Irish interests are put on the education agenda.

3 There is a need to monitor library and school books to counter anti-Irish racism and censorship.

4 We need to write material ourselves. (Eg. Maude Casey's book **Over the Water** is now on the curriculum)

5 We need to write a history of the Irish in Britain as no such history exists. (Jackson's book is out of print and very dated).

6 We need to tackle revisionist historians who are anti-Irish and anti-Republican and who use history as a British propaganda weapon.

7 We need a critical analysis of history. We must remember that history was written by the 'winners' who used extreme violence to steal the land, property, history and culture from the people. Thus the working class, women, Black, Irish and others have been excluded from history.

8 We need to get on to the local management of schools (LMS) to influence policy etc.

9 We need to create resources and teaching aid packs.

10 We need to raise awareness of Irish history within the educational system.

11 We need to involve Catholic schools in the debate on Irish history/culture.

12 It is vitally important that all British school children learn about Irish history - it is not just for Irish children.

13 We need to be aware of the power relationship between Britain and Ireland which has led to distorted history based on censorship and propaganda.

14 Past history is also the present: British colonial domination of Ireland is ongoing. This means that there is a war which is 'covered' in the daily media and which could be used to educate children. This raises certain questions: can a teacher teach history independently when her/his country is at war with another, when children of the 'enemy' country are in the classroom? Are the issues avoided? What are the implications of power between Britain/Ireland, teacher/pupil in that situation? ▲

## **Anti-Irish Racism - Brigid Loughran**

### **Summary:**

The group looked at anti-Irish racism at an institutional and at a personal level and at people's experience of the educational system in Britain, as both parents and teachers.

It was agreed that anti-Irish racism was a set of beliefs or an ideology which has its roots in Britain's colonisation of Ireland and that ultimately it could be conceived of as power plus prejudice which Britain holds over Ireland and Irish people.

This power manifested itself in history in various ways and continues to do so for Irish people living in Britain today. It manifests itself at a personal and at an institutional level. Anti-Irish prejudice draws on a set of ideas and a set of stereotypes of Irish people which have a very long history. This prejudice and these stereotypes are used daily in Britain to maintain the racist power that British society has over Irish people.

In terms of institutional racism, the group examined state power: local and national government, the law and how Irish people are on the one hand excluded from those very institutions and on the other hand how those institutions mete out anti-Irish legislation such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Irish people are also excluded in other ways: for example the Commission for Racial Equality refuses to give any credence to claims of discrimination from the Irish community and has refused to do work on Irish issues; the Office for Population Census has refused to have an Irish category in their census questionnaires.

The group looked at other state institutions: the British Army and its role in Ireland throughout history and their continued role today in the 6 counties; financial institutions in Britain and their role in financial imperialism and control.

The education system is an institution which metes out a daily diet of anti-Irish racism, which distorts Irish history and which in a sense robs Irish people of their heritage and tends to socialise Irish children into being good British citizens.



The group looked at images of Irish people and put them into what might broadly be conceived of as unacceptable and acceptable ones: unacceptable ones include the thick, drunken, inherently prone to violence stereotypes you get from Bruce Anderson and John Junor et al. The more acceptable images are that we are funny, we are hard-working, we are good writers, we are romantic and sentimental.

It was agreed that all of these images are unacceptable, as they are about locking us into a box and setting parameters around Irishness, defining what it is to be Irish from outside and not allowing us to define ourselves.

The group then went on to look at ways of addressing anti-Irish racism and came up with the following proposals:

1 At a personal level, Irish people need to have the opportunity to positively assert themselves and to have the chance to do assertiveness training. As Irish people we have been robbed of a positive sense of ourselves and we need an opportunity to come out positively as Irish.

2 It is important to make alliances with other groups who experience similar oppression, in particular those who have experienced colonial oppression in other situations.

3 It is very important that the Irish community themselves organise politically and that there should be political leadership in the Irish community in Britain. ▲

## RESOLUTIONS

1 This conference calls for the British Government to immediately restore funding to Glór na nGael and to end all discrimination against Irish language speakers.

**The resolution was carried unanimously.**

2 This conference calls on the British Government to give recognition to the Irish language in the National Curriculum, along with other European and community languages.

**The resolution was carried unanimously.**

## CONCLUSION

It is our hope that participants at the conference and those who are involved in the education of our community here in Britain will take note of what has been discussed and proposed and will continue to work to effect change.

The experience of the people of West Belfast shows that communities themselves can bring about change if they take an active role. We need to make demands of the educators - whether they be teachers, school governing boards, local education authorities or the Department of Education and Science. Where appropriate, we must provide for our own educational needs.

If you would like to get involved in promoting the educational interests of the Irish community, whether through campaigning for the Irish language to be included on the National Curriculum, for the rights of Travellers or on any other issue, please get in touch with the IBRG. We can put you in touch with other existing groups or can facilitate the setting up of new ones.

If you are involved in education, whether as a teacher or a local authority officer and would like to know more, please contact us.

## Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG)

Formed in the aftermath of the 1981 Hunger Strikes to represent the political, social and cultural interests of the Irish community in Britain, the IBRG campaigns and organises on a wide variety of issues.

### Prevention of Terrorism Act

We campaign for the immediate repeal of this racist piece of legislation which is directed at silencing and intimidating the Irish community.

### Anti - Irish Racism

We strongly oppose racism against any community and actively campaign against anti-Irish racism in the media.

### Votes for Irish Emigrants

We fully support the campaign to get the vote for the Irish abroad in Irish elections so that we who have been forced to emigrate can have our say in the future of Ireland.

### Employment

The Irish in Britain have often been forced to take low paid employment in unskilled jobs. We have campaigned for the Irish to be recognised as an ethnic minority so that the extent of our disadvantage may be recognised and tackled.

### Housing

The Irish in Britain have a very low rate of home ownership. Many of our young are homeless, many of the elderly live in private rented accommodation. We campaign for a proper share in housing provision and against the deportation of homeless Irish families.

### Prisoners

We are concerned about the welfare of all Irish prisoners in British Gaols, both political prisoners and those who have been framed. We support campaigns to release the framed prisoners. We actively campaign for the transfer of Irish prisoners home and for an end to the torture of strip searching.

### Culture and Traditions

We organise local classes in Irish music, dance and language and work to foster a strong sense of pride in Irish identity amongst our community here. We promote the work of Irish artists, musicians and writers through exhibitions, readings, theatre and film shows.

### Education

Recognising that our language is a vital part of our culture and history, we have led a campaign for the inclusion of the language in the school curriculum in Britain. We also work to ensure that Irish history is included so that our children may have a positive sense of their Irish identity.

### Equal Rights

We campaign for the rights of women, lesbians and gay men who are often marginalised within our own community.

Travellers in Britain face discrimination from the broader community and from Irish people in Britain. We campaign for sites and other resources for Travellers and challenge anti-Traveller racism.

### British Occupation of Ireland

The lives of Irish people in Britain are underscored by Britain's colonial relationship to Ireland and the racism and discrimination faced by us is a direct result of this colonisation. We campaign for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal, political, military and economical of Britain from Ireland and for self-determination for the Irish people as a whole.

We actively campaign for an end to abuses of Human Rights in the Six Counties.

- ▲ Non Jury Diplock Courts ▲ Plastic Bullets
- ▲ Shoot To Kill ▲ Media Ban/Censorship
- ▲ RUC and UDR collusion in loyalist murder gangs
- ▲ Discrimination in employment

Censorship and disinformation are an essential part of British policy in Ireland. To counter this we offer a platform at public meetings to representatives of the Nationalist community. ▲



# Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG)

Cumann Ionadaíochta na n-Éireannach sa Bhreatain

## Education Policy

IBRG recognises that the imperialist and colonial policies of Britain have been and continue to be the primary determinant of racism in this country and that racism is not and never has been based exclusively on perceived differences between racial groups.

Racism is a practice which assumes innate superiority by a dominant people or nation towards a subject people or nation and which also assumes the innate inferiority of the subject people.

In Britain this racism is endemic and is interwoven into the culture, history and traditions of Britain. The structures and institutions arising from this ideology have been created by Britain both at home and in its colonies to maintain its colonial domination and have developed forces intended to divide and thereby rule those subjected to its colonial ambitions.

IBRG therefore recognises that the colonial domination by Britain of Ireland has underscored and dictated the educational policies and practices toward the teaching of languages, history and culture in British schools. This has led to the suppression of Irish culture within the education system and has reinforced anti-Irish racism.

IBRG therefore calls for :

- 1) recognition of ethnic/colonial minority status for the Irish community in total
- 2) equal opportunities monitoring of all Irish staff at all levels within the education service
- 3) monitoring of the numbers, performances and achievement of Irish students in schools
- 4)
  - a) the monitoring of texts and other teaching materials and the re-evaluation of curriculum to eradicate anti-Irish racism
  - b) the adoption of a policy and effective procedures to deal with anti-Irish racism in language and behaviour of staff and pupils
- 5) the provision of Irish perspectives throughout all subject areas (especially British/Irish history) and the introduction of Irish language, music and dance as optional subjects in schools with a significant number of Irish students
- 6) the provision of Irish studies courses in schools with a significant number of Irish students
- 7) the introduction of training to acquaint staff with the needs of the Irish. This to include day schools and courses to raise awareness of anti-Irish racism and to include appropriate staff secondment for these courses. This to also include Irish studies courses up to degree level and courses for Irish games, dance, music and language, and teachers with staff secondment as appropriate
- 8) the commissioning of teaching packs, videos and exhibitions that could be developed and used in schools to help combat anti-Irish racism. The promotion of existing resources and their distribution or availability to all teaching staff
- 9) the provision of funding for adult and community education initiatives by Irish community groups
- 10) all Education Authorities to appoint an Education Officer with responsibility for Irish curriculum and Irish students and who will be accountable to the Irish community with responsibility for implementing these policies within the local education service. ■



# **Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG)**

**Cumann Ionadaíochta na n-Éireannach sa Bhreatain**

## **Irish Language - An Ghaeilge**

The Irish language is important because it is one of the most fundamental expressions of separate nationhood and ethnicity. It also serves as a vehicle for the integration of the Irish people with their geographical and cultural environment. Almost all place names in Ireland are corruptions or translations of the Irish and in many cases Irish explains the construction of English as spoken by Irish people.

The language was nearly destroyed as a vernacular by both conscious policy of English/British colonial administration and by effects arising out of its other policies.

The language continues to be lost by foreign cultural domination, emigration and the depopulation of the countryside, all of which are effects of the twenty six county government policies. The Irish people are not to blame for the loss of their language and both British and Irish governments should be called upon to go some way towards redressing their wrong.

In pursuance of this the Irish government should directly promote - by way of grants and paying teachers - the learning of Irish in Ireland and in Britain. These grants should be payable to organisations who show a commitment to education in the language and scholarships could also be offered to those who show promise.

All Irish social, cultural, political and commercial groups within Ireland and Britain should be encouraged to facilitate dealing in Irish with members of the public who wish to do so, to advertise such readiness and to give their staff time off in lieu as a minimum for attending lessons/courses and workshops on Irish.

Continued high emigration with a disproportionately higher loss in Irish speaking areas further undermines the use of the language.

Addresses in Irish should be given where possible.

Irish languages should be available within the curriculum in the Six Counties. Facilities for the teaching of it should be encouraged and funds should be withdrawn on academic or linguistic grounds only. The twenty six county government should insist on these provisions in their talks with unionist politicians.

Organisations should support a campaign of promoting the use of the Irish language in all walks of life in Ireland, from using it themselves whenever possible, to joining a campaign to get an Irish language facility in the provision of all services to the public, supported by training, posters (eg. 'Fáilte roimh Gaeilge anseo'), badges etc.

Organisations such as Irish airlines, shipping companies, travel agents, banks, pubs and centres which deal mainly or significantly with the Irish community in Britain should be encouraged to do as above by organisations in Ireland and by Irish expatriate organisations.

Irish language programming should be significantly increased in Ireland on RTÉ.

Irish language programming should be included on British radio and TV and representations to that effect should be made by Irish organisations and the Irish government.

Irish language organisations should work with IBRG and others to promote the teaching and use of Irish, to lobby the relevant authorities etc. ■



# **Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG)**

## **Cumann Ionadaíochta na n-Éireannach sa Bhreatain**

### **Policy on Anti-Irish Racism**

Racism is a practice which assumes innate superiority by a dominant people or nation towards a subject or formerly subject people or nation and which also assumes the innate inferiority of the subject people. Racism can be seen as a system based on power relationships between the oppressor and oppressed groups.

IBRG recognises that the imperialist and colonial policies of Britain have been and continue to be the primary determinant of racism in this country.

In Britain this racism is endemic and is interwoven into the culture, history and traditions of Britain. The structures and institutions arising from this ideology have been created by Britain both at home and in its colonies to maintain its colonial domination and have developed forces intended to divide and thereby rule those subjected to its colonial ambitions. This racism and division is also reflected in the policies and practices of the labour and trade union movement in Britain from whom oppressed groups should be able to expect complete support in their struggle for equal rights.

Both the denial of the difference between Irish and British culture and the denial of the existence of anti-Irish racism has resulted from a history of colonialism and a policy of stripping Ireland of its resources and culture. This leads to pressure on Irish people to assimilate and the appropriation as British of successful Irish people and the emphatic identification as Irish of any aspect of Irish culture or people perceived as negative.

Anti-Irish racism in Britain takes a number of forms. These include discrimination in terms of education, employment, housing, health care, culture and freedom to play a full part in the social and political life of country without fear of harassment or abuse from individuals or the security forces. Whether a person who identifies as Irish is obviously Irish or not, they see and hear all around them evidence of the belief that they and their people are inferior to the English.

IBRG is profoundly opposed to anti-Irish racism in all aspects of British society. IBRG stands for the right of every Irish person to absolute equality in terms of the goods which society has the power to dispense or withhold. IBRG also stands for the right of every Irish person to complete pride in their Irishness and the right to lead their lives unhindered by stereotypes and prejudice. No Irish child should grow up hearing that the Irish are stupid, violent, alcoholic, unreliable, superstitious, objects of fun, etc. and having to fight against internalising such stereotypes.

IBRG therefore demands for the Irish in Britain:

- a) Equal rights to education at all levels which fosters in each individual a sense of pride in her/his heritage and identity.
- b) Equal opportunities in employment with adequate pay, safe conditions and the right to organise.
- c) Enough decent housing at affordable cost.
- d) Adequate and appropriate health care.
- e) The right to participate in and have resources allocated to cultural activities reflecting Irish heritage.
- f) Freedom from discrimination and abuse.
- g) The right to play a full part in the social and political life of this country without fear of harassment and imprisonment by the security forces.
- h) Adequate and unbiased coverage of Irish issues in the media, the provision of programmes of Irish interest.
- i) An end to the institutional practices in employment, housing, education, health and social services which have caused disadvantage to our community.

IBRG believes that anti-Irish racism should be seen in the context of racism against all groups. The struggle against anti-Irish racism is part of the wider struggle against racism.

IBRG is resolved to challenge anti-Irish racism wherever it is met. IBRG will encourage and support its members and all other Irish people to develop their awareness of anti-Irish racism and their confidence in challenging it. IBRG will campaign to eliminate anti-Irish racism. IBRG will work with other ethnic minority groups on the elimination of all forms of racism.

Irish Travellers face dual racism based on both anti-Irish racism and anti-Traveller prejudice. The Irish should be recognised as an ethnic minority group and included in all equal opportunities policies and programmes. Such recognition should be based on the definition of the Irish as "those persons who originate from Ireland or whose forbears originate from Ireland and who consider themselves to be Irish." ■



# SOME USEFUL CONTACTS:

## IBRG

To find out more about  
the IBRG contact:

Irish in Britain  
Representation  
Group (IBRG)

c/o Hornsey Library  
Haringey Park  
Crouch End  
London N8  
(081) 348 3351

or

245 (a) Coldharbour  
Lane  
London SW9 8RR  
(071) 326 4740

### Anti-Irish Racism:

Commission for Racial  
Equality  
Elliott House  
Allington Street  
London SW1  
(071) 828 7022

Irish in Britain  
Representation Group  
(IBRG)  
(Contact one of the  
addresses below for details  
of local branches.)

### Irish Books:

Four Provinces Bookshop  
244-246 Gray's Inn Road  
London WC1X 8JR  
(071) 833 3022

Green Ink Bookshop  
8 Archway Mall  
London N19 5RG  
(071) 263 4748

### Irish Language Classes/Conversation:

Brent Irish Centre  
76 - 82 Salusbury Road  
London NW6  
(071) 625 9585

Cairde na nGael  
2c Windmill Lane  
Stratford  
London E16  
(081) 519 5089

Camden Irish Centre  
52 Camden Square  
London NW1 9XB  
(071) 485 0051/2

Celtic League  
G42 Du Cane Court  
London SW17 7JR  
(081) 675 3074

Cuideachta  
(Conversation)  
Irish Club  
Eaton Square  
London SW1  
(071) 235 4164

Haringey Irish Centre  
Pretoria Road  
Tottenham  
London N17  
(081) 885 3490

Roger Casement Irish Centre  
131 St John's Way  
London N19  
(071) 281 3225

Working Men's College  
(Conversation)  
Crowndale Road  
London NW1 1TR  
(071) 387 2037/8208

London Irish Women's  
Centre  
(See below)

*For classes outside London,  
contact your nearest Irish Centre.*

### Irish Sport:

GAA  
P. Griffin  
114 Burnley Road  
London NW10  
(081) 450 2772  
(For information on all GAA  
events in Britain, local GAA  
clubs etc.)

### Irish Studies:

British Association for Irish  
Studies  
9 Poland Street  
London W1  
(071) 439 3043

Irish Studies Unit (PNL)  
Prince of Wales Road  
London NW5

### Irish Women:

London Irish Women's  
Centre  
59 Stoke Newington Church  
Street  
London N16  
(071) 249 7318

Irish Women's Perspectives  
c/o 123 Lavender Sweep  
London SW11 1EA

### Others:

Brent Irish Mental Health  
Group  
c/o Brent Irish Cultural  
Centre  
76 - 82 Salusbury Road  
London NW6  
(071) 625 9585

Glór na nGael  
145 Bóthar na bhFál  
(Falls Rd)  
Béal Feirste BT12 6AF  
(Belfast)

Glór an Deoraí  
76 - 82 Salusbury Road  
London NW6 6NY  
(Campaigns for votes for  
Irish emigrants in Irish  
elections.)

Information on Ireland  
PO Box 958  
London W14 0JF  
(071) 602 4195

### Racism in the media:

**For complaints about  
particular articles/items,  
write to or call the  
publication or radio or TV  
station concerned.**

Advertising Standards  
Authority  
2 - 16 Torrington Place  
London WC1E 7HN  
(071) 580 5555

Broadcasting Complaints  
Commission  
20 Albert Embankment  
London SE1 7TL  
(071) 211 8463

Campaign for Press and  
Broadcasting Freedom  
96 Dalston Lane  
London E8  
(071) 923 3671

Commission for Racial  
Equality  
Independent Broadcasting  
Authority  
70 Brompton Road  
London SW1  
(071) 584 7011

Press Complaints  
Commission  
1 Salisbury Square  
London EC4Y 8AE  
(071) 353 1248

### Travellers:

Haringey Travellers Support  
Group  
c/o 72 Stroud Green Road  
London N4

Brent Travellers Support  
Group  
c/o Brent Irish Centre  
76 - 82 Salusbury Road  
London NW6