

THE IRISH TIMES

24-28 TARA STREET, DUBLIN 2
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18TH, 2010
www.irishtimes.com

Was it for this?

IT MAY seem strange to some that *The Irish Times* would ask whether this is what the men of 1916 died for: a bailout from the German chancellor with a few shillings of sympathy from the British chancellor on the side. There is the shame of it all. Having obtained our political independence from Britain to be the masters of our own affairs, we have now surrendered our sovereignty to the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Their representatives ride into Merrion Street today.

Fianna Fáil has sometimes served Ireland very well, sometimes very badly. Even in its worst times, however, it retained some respect for its underlying commitment that the Irish should control their own destinies. It lists among its primary aims the commitment "to maintain the status of Ireland as a sovereign State". Its founder, Eamon de Valera, in his inaugural address to his new party in 1926, spoke of "the inalienability of national sovereignty" as being fundamental to its beliefs. The Republican Party's ideals are in tatters now.

The Irish people do not need to be told that, especially for small nations, there is no such thing as absolute sovereignty. We know very well that we have made our independence more meaningful by sharing it with our European neighbours. We are not naive enough to think that this State ever can, or ever could, take large decisions in isolation from the rest of the world. What we do expect, however, is that those decisions will still be our own. A nation's independence is defined by the choices it can make for itself.

Irish history makes the loss of that sense of choice all the more shameful. The desire to be a sovereign people runs like a seam through all the struggles of the last 200 years. "Self-determination" is a phrase that echoes from the United Irishmen to the Belfast Agreement. It continues to have a genuine resonance for most Irish people today.

The true ignominy of our current situation is not that our sovereignty has been taken away from us, it is that we ourselves have squandered it. Let us not seek to assuage our sense of shame in the comforting illusion that powerful nations in Europe are conspiring to become our masters. We are, after all, no great prize for any would-be overlord now. No rational European would willingly take on the task of cleaning up the mess we have made. It is the incompetence of the governments we ourselves elected that has so deeply compromised our capacity to make our own decisions.

They did so, let us recall, from a period when Irish sovereignty had never been stronger. Our national debt was negligible. The mass emigration that had mocked our claims to be a people in control of our own destiny was reversed. A genuine act of national self-determination had occurred in 1998 when both parts of the island voted to accept the Belfast Agreement. The sense of failure and inferiority had been banished, we thought, for good.

To drag this State down from those heights and make it again subject to the decisions of others is an achievement that will not soon be forgiven. It must mark, surely, the ignominious end of a failed administration.

Letters to the Editor

Email: lettersed@irishtimes.com (no attachments)
Post: Letters to the Editor, 24-28 Tara St, Dublin 2
Fax: 01-6758035. Note: please provide name, postal address (at end of the letter) and telephone numbers. Letters may be edited or cut.

Public crisis, private crisis

Madam, - I have been standing at the kitchen table snipping apertures for my father-in-law's 80th birthday cake. As I snip, I look ahead through the French windows at the table on the deck, and the wobble of the wind is having with its plastic cover. It is a bitter, windy day, and we have bitter news. Driving my parents to the airport this morning, we are passed by a rushing Garda car and fire engine. It is only later that I hear about the man killed in a single-car crash just outside Ballycotton. When the gardai go to the man's house, close by, they find his two young daughters dead.

Yesterday, I drove this road with my parents, off for a quick walk along the cliffs in the brief few hours that my son is at Montesol. We step out in brilliant sun-

shine, stop to wonder at a circling sparrow hawk below us. Later, we drive back along the bog road to Shanagarry, where we grin over hot chocolate. Meanwhile, my sister-in-law, a financial journalist, also has a birthday tomorrow.

But instead of being at home in Rome, she's in Brussels covering the financial meeting in which the only item on the agenda is Ireland's economic crisis. So I snip my apricots, pile up cherries, suitanas, almonds, lemon zest, and curve my wooden spoon through cake batter, and teeter between national and private crises, cherishing my own family with an ache, whilst grieving for our neighbour in Ballycotton, who has just lost all of hers. - Yours, etc,
JOOLS GILSON,
Warren,
Ballynacoda, Co Cork.

Stories of suicide

Madam, - I am in bright sunny coffee shop in Dublin. It is 10.30am and I feel tears welling up inside me and a cold shiver throughout my entire body. I have just read Carl O'Brien's suicide story for November 17th. It has instantly transported me back to February 2004, when I, like young Shane D'Alton, was admitted to a psychiatric unit in a Dublin public hospital. His father, Eddie's harrowing description of what he encountered and comparison of it to a scene from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* mirror my experience exactly four years earlier.

I too had health insurance, yet I also encountered a disorganised environment without empathy or pity and devoid of all hope. I survived despite, not because of the system.

So I ask a simple question. When is the health system going to take this matter seriously, take

action and stop using ministers and spin-doctors to tell stories while people are dying in our communities? - Yours, etc,
BRIAN KENNEDY,
Ranelagh Road,
Dublin 6.

Madam, - To de-moralise as well as de-criminalise suicide, why not use "suicide" as a verb as well as a noun? The Romans invented it for use as a verb, which is why "suicide" literally means "self-kill" in Latin. We could, then, say a person suicided, that is, self-killed. It's true that the Romans believed that death ended life and, therefore, that the killing of one's body killed one's entire self. Not all of us today believe that. - Yours, etc,
JOSEPH F FOYLE,
Sandford Road,
Ranelagh,
Dublin 6.

Cutbacks in mental health services

Madam, - The HSE's planned cuts to mental health services in the West reported by Eithne Donnellan (Home News, November 15th) are a microcosm of what is planned nationally. The college is disheartened by the lack of commitment by Government through the HSE to implement its own mental health policy, the progressive disempowerment of mental health services through ill-considered service reductions, the withdrawal of funding and the pervasive absence of accountable leadership across the HSE.

The college wishes to highlight the disproportionate level of service cutbacks affecting mental health services. Those with the most disabling and enduring

Increasing corporation tax

A chara, - Having recently noted that multinational leaders are once again appealing to the Government to retain the corporation tax rate of 12.5 per cent. I feel this sacred tenet of the Irish economy should be discussed.

Corporate tax ensures that the profits of companies are spread throughout society so that the many may benefit rather than only the few. By pitching our tax rate extremely low we are in effect undercutting the good social policies of other countries. Similar to a worker crossing a picket line and being called a scab, we have in effect become the economic scabs of the world, allowing corporations to avoid paying tax, avoid social responsibility and maximise profits for shareholders.

I think it is time we take a look at this disgraceful policy and amend it by increasing it to at least 15 per cent. This is still a long way off the capitalist US rate of 35 per cent but at least would bring us more into line with other nations and signal our solidarity with nations trying to promote values such as fairness, equality and justice. - Is nise,
SEAN McMAHON,
West Terrace,
Inchicore,
Dublin 8.

Recession and possession

Madam, - Magnificent Munster (Sport, November 17th). What recession? Instead of recession they kept possession. They put the Australians in bonds and reaped a rich reward. They invested in youth while respecting the seniors. They ignored the "experts" and had confidence in themselves. They banked on their supporters who did not let them down. They sprouted red shoots of hope which may take on a shade of green beginning with the *Fields of Aghery*. They kept going forward to a bright future.

They were, like, magnificent - Yours, etc,
WALTON EMEPY,
(Former Archbishop of Dublin),
Rathmore,
Tullow,
Co Carlow.

We're all... now

Madam, - If our new leader Olli Rehn is Finnish, does that mean that we are too? - Yours, etc,
SHANE BOLAND,
Langton Park,
Newbridge,
Co Kildare.

An Irishman

Frank McNally

WAITING for the grim news from Brussels on Tuesday night, I passed watching the Munster-Australia rugby match. And while both events were highly dramatic in their own right, their juxtaposition made each somehow more compelling. There was even an instructive element to watching them in tandem, or so it seemed.

At first, the rugby was an uplifting contrast to what was happening at the EU ministerial meeting. On a night of national humiliation, I thought, here were old values reassuring themselves as if nothing had happened.

Never had torrential Limerick rain looked so comforting. And some of the other eternal virtues of Irish life were on welcome display too: men in red shirts playing like dervishes; guttural broad-vowelled support roaring them to victory; a team of frightened foreigners looking overwhelmed by their situation, like white missionaries who had stumbled into a village of cannibals during a food shortage. Indeed, *The Fields of Aghery* also made an inevitable appearance: as if to inform the visitors that, the local potato crop having failed and 'Trevethan's corn being unavailable, they would be on tonight's menu instead, marked "catch of the day". But then, as the game wore on, the proud members of the Australian team might have welcomed being swallowed, if only by the ground.

It was hard to know which was more comical: the weather conditions (as observed from a safe distance) or the visitors' utter inability to deal with them. Gratuitous as they were, jibes about the difference between Thomond Park and "Bondi Beach" were too tempting for the commentators to pass up.

In any case, the whole spectacle was thoroughly enjoyable, as the great Munster performances are. And when you switched over to the news channels temporarily to hear what was happening at the ministerial meeting, comparisons were all the more

Adams to contest I

Madam, - I note that Gerry Adams intends to stand for Sinn Féin in the Louth constituency in the next general election (Home News, November 15th). At this time of economic crisis most people of our Republic would agree we need more than ever honest politicians.

Honesty requires people to respond to straightforward questions with straightforward