

# Comment & Letters

## Letters to the Editor

Email: [letters@irishtimes.com](mailto:letters@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.

### Programme for government deal

Madam, - Now that the Green Party has added Fianna Fáil to its list of endangered species to be protected, I think the next election will show them that the "birds and the bees and the cottonwood trees" don't vote, but the people do - and they don't forget.

PAT BOWEN,  
Station Road,  
Sutton, Co Dublin.

Madam, - According to *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, deputies are supposed to represent constituencies. It seems, however, that Green deputies shall only be representing the members of their own party for the remainder of this Dáil. In particular, the Greens' strong following in educational circles seem to have secured a valuable ring fence for themselves at a time of universal strife. - Is mise,

TOMMY TIGHE,  
Grove Park,  
Dublin 6.

Madam, - The failure to reintroduce undergraduate fees means that the poor, whose children do not access higher education will continue to subsidise the affluent, whose children do.

This subsidy is particularly strong in the case of high-cost lengthy courses such as medicine.

- Yours, etc,  
SEAN Mc DONAGH,  
The Court,  
Bettyglan,  
Raheny, Dublin 5.

Madam, - The revised programme for government contains a commitment that "conscious of the economic pressures today" the Government would not proceed with the re-introduction of university tuition fees. At the weekend Green Party leader John Gormley added that "increasing registration fees was a matter for universities to decide".

There are three problems with this. First, all of the recent discussion on the potential for a student contribution centred on some form of deferred payment (ie a loan scheme) such as in the UK or Australia. This would mean that students would only be required to pay in the future and contingent on income. This would not add unduly to pressures today.

Secondly, a tax is a tax whatever you call it, just as calling a tax a "levy" or "contribution" does not change matters one iota. Asking students to stump up, say a registration fee of €2,000, is no different from asking to pay a tuition fee of the same amount and clearly will add to economic pressures today.

Finally, while there may be good arguments for effectively granting universities autonomy in setting fees (as UK universities have to a limited degree) this is quite a radical step and one that

has not been accompanied by any discussion or analysis. - Yours, etc,  
DR KEVIN DENNY,  
UCD Geary Institute,  
University College Dublin,  
Dublin 4.

Madam, - I don't think the Greens have realised that private water supply and community group water schemes are not provided with potable water by the local authority, or indeed managed by the local authority. Maybe because the Greens lost virtually all their councillors, they have lost touch with reality.

Are the Greens seriously thinking that they can introduce a water charge for a service the local authorities do not provide? Group water schemes are charging contributions already to run the schemes and private water schemes obviously are financed by households, so would a local authority water charge amount to a double charge in these cases? Or to turn the argument around, if I have to pay on the double, could I demand from the local authority a supply of water, and clean water at that? - Yours, etc,  
MONICA MULLER,  
Romeport,  
Ballina, Co Mayo.

Madam, - The promised ban on stag hunting in the programme for government represents a milestone on the road to the abolition of all blood sports in Ireland.

Coupled with the restrictions on the operation of hunt kennels engendered by a section of the upcoming puppy farm legislation, this move will greatly advance the cause of wildlife protection and prevention of cruelty to animals.

For decades, the majestic stag has had to run for its life from packs of hounds, mounted riders, and scores of hunt followers racing behind in SUVs and motorbikes. Fleeing its frenzied pursuers in terror, the stag would suffer extensive injuries, becoming entangled in barbed wire or brambles, or attempting to swim across rivers and sometimes drowning in the process.

By the end of a hunt, the animal would drop to the ground from exhaustion, covered in blood and mud, panting and wheezing, its eyes bulging with fear.

And the intention of the hunt wasn't even to kill the animal... just to put it through this harrowing ordeal for "sport".

So fair play to the Green Party for achieving this major breakthrough in the battle against blood sports. The campaign to ban hare coursing and fox hunting continues. - Yours, etc,  
JOHN FITZGERALD,  
(Campaign for the Abolition of Cruel Sports),  
Lower Coyne Street,  
Callan, Co Kilkenny.

There seems to be no acknowledgment of the fact that ordinary citizens have a right to feel betrayed by their representatives.

Indeed, some in Co Kerry are insisting that Mr O'Donoghue be re-elected so that he could, in due time, pass on his seat to his son.

Where does this sense of entitlement come from? What we desperately need at this time is visionary leaders who can somehow regain the trust of the Irish people. This will not be easy. We know from everyday experiences that once trust is lost it is not easily regained.

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### Three magical minutes

Madam, - For three minutes approximately at Croke Park on Saturday we were catapulted back to the summer of Italia '90. Not a care in the world, everything was great, only to have our dreams shattered by another Italian - oh, and some terrible defending. But for those three minutes it was brilliant. Thank you Seán St Ledger. - Yours, etc,  
JOE HARVEY,  
Glenageary Woods,  
Glenageary,  
Co Dublin.

### Ceann Comhairle replacement

Madam, - In view of the Government moratorium on recruitment, promotion and acting up allowances in the public service, the Dáil now has a golden opportunity to demonstrate patriotism by requiring the Leas-Ceann Comhairle to fill the position for the rest of this Dáil, without additional perks: If he won't do it, then it should be open to any TD who would and the Leas Ceann Comhairle should also be replaced. - Yours, etc,  
TED MURPHY,  
Shamrock Drive,  
Muskerry Estate,  
Ballincollig, Co Cork.

### Expenses controversy

Madam, - May I offer two simple suggestions to help clear up this sorry matter. 1. The setting up of a travel office in Leinster House which would be responsible for making all travel arrangements. 2. The issuing of credit cards to all members to pay for their expenses.

This would ensure that: they don't pay on the double for the government jet and business class flights; common standards are applied to all members; onfile records would be available showing who was spending what, when, and where; credit limits would restrict excesses; and we would not be paying unvouched expenses to those who fail to show up.

This is not complicated: simply how things operated 20 years ago in a company in the west of Ireland. - Yours, etc,  
SEAMUS O'CALLAGHAN,  
Bullock Park,  
Carlow.

Madam, - In the course of a letter critical of Government policy (October 10th), Jerry Kiersey states, "We have been unable to get loans written off, unlike the Anglo Irish directors Mr Lenihan has covered with our taxes." I would like to correct the record and make clear that the Minister for Finance has not used taxpayers' money to write off loans made to former Anglo Irish Bank directors. Under the terms of the Relationship Framework with Anglo Irish Bank, the Minister must approve any change to the terms of loans to former directors of Anglo Irish Bank and to date, no proposal has been made to the Minister. The former directors continue to owe the full amount of their loans to the bank. - Yours, etc,  
EÓIN DORGAN.

## An Irishman's Diary

Hugh Oram

MICHAEL HARTNETT, from west Limerick, one of the finest Irish poets of his generation, died 10 years ago today. Like so many poets before him, he succumbed to the fatal charms of that literary currency, the pint, and he died on October 13th, 1999, aged 58, from alcoholic liver syndrome.

Hartnett began his life with a mistake; his parents' name was Hartnet, but when his birth certificate was being written, he was called "Hartnett". He stuck with this name, as it was closer to the Irish version of his surname, O hAirtneide.

He was born in the local hospital in Croom, not far from Adare, but was brought up in Newcastle West, where the family eventually secured a new local authority house. Michael Hartnett's father was a house painter, and there was much discord caused by his drinking and there was not always a lot to eat.

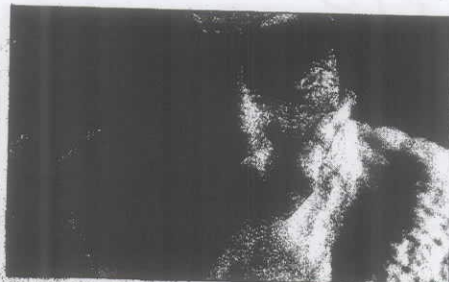
Michael Hartnett had his first and second-level schooling in Newcastle West, but he spent much time with his maternal grandmother, Bridget Halpin, who lived in the townland of Camas, in the countryside, but close to Newcastle West.

Although she had been born in north Kerry, she lived much of her life in west Limerick and was one of the last native speakers of Irish in that part of the country. She had a great array of Irish words in her vocabulary, many related to the animals of the countryside and life on the farm, although she and the family didn't use Irish in everyday conversation. But her knowledge of Irish had an immense influence on the young lad, who became as fluent in Irish as he was in English. She was the first person to recognise Michael Hartnett's poetic vocation.

The day after Hartnett finished secondary school, he emigrated to London, where he worked as a tea boy on a building site. He also worked there as a dish washer in a restaurant, developing a relationship with a cashier. Being beautiful and a Gaelic poet from Connemara, she was the perfect combination for the young aspiring poet. Hartnett also spent some time in Madrid. When he returned to Ireland, it was to start a new life in Dublin.

There he saw himself in the same mode as Patrick Kavanagh, a country poet among Dublin's sophisticated literati. Hartnett's first job in the city was on the night shift at the international telephone exchange in Exchequer Street, Dublin. At one stage, he was curator of what is now the Joyce museum in Sandycove.

But he fell in with the literary set with remarkable ease and his ability was soon recognised by John Jordan, another poet, who taught English literature at UCD. Jordan encouraged



Michael Hartnett, who died 10 years ago today, began his life with a mistake. Photograph: Frank Miller

Hartnett to study at UCD, but the young poet gave it up after a year: he and academia did not mix.

For a while, he co-edited the literary magazine, *Arena*, with James Liddy; later in his career, Hartnett was for a while poetry editor of this newspaper. For a couple of years, he presented a poetry programme for RTE.

His first book, *Anatomy of a Cliché*, was published in 1968, to critical acclaim. Hartnett's poetic career was well under way, resulting in the publication of many works in both English and Irish.

He became that literary cliché, the difficult but charismatic artist. In 1975, he declared that in future, he was going to write only in Irish, a move greeted mainly by indifference. At the time, he said that English was a language well suited to selling pigs. During this period, he was also teaching at Thomond College, Limerick, a rare settled job in a nomadic existence.

His sense of humour and mischievousness never abandoned him. In the ballad he wrote about Maiden Street, in Newcastle West, he declared that the one thing that wouldn't be found there were maidens.

In London, he had met Rosemary Grantley, whom he married in 1966. They had two children, Lara and Niall. The marriage broke up less than 20 years later, after the Hartnetts had moved back close to his native place, when they settled in Templeglantine in West Limerick. Many people believed that Rosemary Grantley was Jewish, but Michael Hartnett had made up this to bemuse people. For the last 15 years of his life, Hartnett's partner was Angela Liston, who supported him as his alcoholism grew worse.

Apart from his fondness for drink, Hartnett also had a great liking for women, as seen in his book, *Poems to Younger Women* (1989). Michael Hartnett had a predilection for romantic yarns. If they weren't true, he was amused by the way they were taken up, including by the media.

After the break-up of his marriage in the mid-1980s, partly caused by his drinking, Hartnett moved back to Dublin, living in Inchicore. The last

place he lived there, in Emmet Road, two doors from the Richmond House pub, has a plaque in his honour, put up five years ago by the Kilmainham and Inchicore Heritage group, which assiduously preserves the memory of Hartnett's time in the district.

Ironically, two other great artistic talents who had close connections with Inchicore also died young. Francis Ledwidge, the poet killed in the first World War, and Dermot Troy, the legendary lyric tenor. One of Hartnett's most noted works was the *Inchicore Haiku*, published in 1985, which marked his return to writing in English.

Michael O'Flanagan, a local poet, closely involved with the heritage group as its secretary, recalls that Hartnett liked Inchicore, its working class ethos and the people there. He has posted a rare video clip of Hartnett; it's on YouTube and shows the poet reciting in English and Irish at the Patriot Inn in Kilmainham.

Niall Hartnett says that his father liked nature imagery, especially birds, while non-Christian spiritualism, paganism and legend, factored his imagination. His books and collections of his work number about 25, according to Niall, who reckons that his father's work is also in about 100 anthologies. Here in Ireland, he and his work are reasonably well known, helped by events such as the annual Eigue in his honour in Newcastle West, the town where he is buried.

Niall brought out a book about his father earlier this year, and while Michael Hartnett would have a long way to go to become known like Seamus Heaney, Niall hopes that some day his father will reach the same level of recognition as Patrick Kavanagh.

Poetry Ireland presents an evening of elegies for Michael Hartnett today at 8.30pm in the Unitarian Church, St Stephen's Green, Dublin, with Theo Dorgan, Mary O'Malley, Pat Bora, Michael Coady, Tony Curtis, Gerard Smyth, Hugh McFadden, Thomas McCarthy, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Pauline Fayne and Moya Cannon. The evening will also feature piper Peter Browne and sean-nós singer Seosaimhin Ní Bheaglaíoch.

### Cork's bloody secret

Madam, - Senator Eoghan Harris (October 10th) is right to indicate that precise figures are difficult, if not impossible, to find for the number of Protestant "involuntary emigrants" between the inter-war periods of 1911 and 1926. I have researched this subject in some detail over many months with the help of Prof David Fitzpatrick of University College, Dublin. He pointed out to me that these speculations show, above

60,000 obtained? Secondly, why did so many other Protestants stay on when others left? Thirdly, was there a similar exodus of Catholics from the South? I have recently completed a project on my family's history and discovered that my own grandfather, who was both Protestant and an ex-British soldier, left Ireland some time around 1922 or 1923.

The principal reason appears to be that with the majority of the

### A rough ride in the cycle lane

Madam, - With reference to Ned Costello's view on taxing cyclists "zero" (October 10th), I think maybe cyclists should be paying for the upkeep of the footpaths which, in my area, is where most of them prefer to cycle. - Yours, etc,  
G MONAGHAN,  
Parnell Road, Dublin 12.

### Distrust of public representatives

Madam, - The biggest challenge confronting post-Celtic Tiger Ireland is the distrust that now exists between Irish citizens and the people paid to represent them. While much has been said and written about politicians who "fed like pigs at the trough", it's not the waste of taxpayers' money that's the real issue. I believe the damage done to our democratic system by self-serving politicians is much more serious.

The most incomprehensible aspect of recent news reports on the... (text cut off)