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John Horgan's years as Editor of the *Education Times* 1973 – 1976.

(Article by Áine Hyland for the John Horgan *Westschrift* – July 2014).

I first met John Horgan in the late 1960s when he was a specialist correspondent on religion and education with the Irish Times. My late husband, Bill Hyland, had been a member of the team which produced the *Investment in Education* report in 1965 – a report which John covered for the *Irish Times.* In 1966, Bill was appointed senior statistician in the Department of Education in Dublin. Bill got to know John around that time and they remained firm friends until Bill's death in 1996.

John's period as *Irish Times* special correspondent (1965 to 1973) was a period of foment and change in religion and education in Ireland - and his refreshingly forthright style of reporting contributed to what was then a palpable sense of excitement and anticipation. During the period leading up to the publication of the Second Vatican Council's report in 1965, Catholics throughout the world were full of hope and expectation – hope that the church's teaching on issues like priestly celibacy, the role of the laity, especially women, and contraception would be reformed and an expectation that Vatican 2 would herald the beginning of a new era within the Catholic Church. This did not happen and John's regular reports from Rome (as religious affairs correspondent for the *Irish Times*) during the mid 1960s provided the first intimations of the conservatism that was to continue to dominate Catholic Church teaching in the years to come.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, John's reports on education in the *Irish Times* both reflected and contributed to a new climate of debate and questioning of the long-standing status quo in Irish education. By the early 1970s, education issues were taking up more and more column inches in the main newspapers and John suggested to the board of the *Irish Times* that the idea of an educational weekly paper similar to the *Times Education Supplement* (TES) in the UK should be considered. John believed that such a venture would be financially feasible – that there was a potential pool of advertising revenue, which even if was less than that available to the TES, would be significant enough to support an educational publication in Ireland. The board of the *Irish Times* was interested in the idea of a bespoke education publication

and the then managing director, Major McDowell, called John to his office to discuss the suggestion. McDowell made it clear that if John undertook the project, he would rule himself out of contention for future editorship of the *Irish Times*. John indicated that this was a risk he was willing to take.

In early 1973, it was agreed that the project would go ahead and the first edition of the weekly *Education Times* was published in time for the teacher conferences at Easter 1973. The purchase price was set at 10p – a level at which it was hoped the publication would be self-financing and would be able to survive, even if advertising revenue did not materialise. Initial sales were very encouraging – around 20,000 copies of the early issues were sold. However, this rate of sales was not maintained and by the time the *Education Times* was wound up (in February 1976) weekly sales had dwindled to around 5,000 per issue.

From the start, it was decided that the *Education Times* would cover education issues north and south and would involve all sectors and levels of education – pre-school, first, second and third level. Each issue was a substantial one, consisting of about twenty pages. The Northern Ireland correspondent was Eugene McEldowney and Peppy Barlow, was a key correspondent on a wide range of educational issues, including educational disadvantage, as well as providing commentary on aspects of educational history and curriculum matters[1]. An analysis of the content of the *Education Times* throughout the three years of its existence leaves one in awe of the sheer volume of issues covered by such a small staff. One is also struck by the very high quality of the design and lay-out of the weekly issues as well as the impressive illustrations, including reproductions of nineteenth century woodcuts from classical literature.

Around the time the *Education Times* was being launched, there was a general election in the south and a coalition government led by Liam Cosgrave, came into power. The Minister for Education in the coalition government was Richard Burke and he held the education portfolio throughout the lifetime of the *Education Times.* While in some respects Burke was a reforming Minister, in other respects he was

[1] A proposal by John that Peppy would be appointed assistant editor was rejected by McDowell as inappropriate because of their relationship.

conservative and committed to maintaining the status quo, especially in relation to the role of the church in education. He objected to the removal of corporal punishment in schools and he was decidedly unsympathetic to the developing multi-denominational and integrated education movement. He was not interested in educational planning and within a short period of his appointment as Minister for Education, he "effectively terminated[2]" the work of the development branch in the Department of Education. His term of office as Minister for Education is exceptionally well documented in the *Education Times* of the period.

When John Horgan was appointed editor of the *Education Times*, he was already a member of Seanad Eireann, a position to which he had been first elected in 1969 and re-elected in 1973, representing the national university of Ireland constituency. The board of the *Irish Times* did not have a problem with John's role as senator as long as he remained an independent. However, in 1976, when the *Education Times* was in its dying throes, John joined the Labour Party. He knew he would pay a high price for this and sure enough, he was informed by the managing director, Major McDowell that he had broken his contract and that he could no longer work for the *Irish Times.* Moreover, he was reminded that his contract stipulated that after the termination of the contract he could not work as a journalist anywhere within thirty miles of Dublin for the next three years[3]. John left the Irish Times in 1976 and at the general election in 1977 he was elected to Dail Eireann where he remained a TD until 1981. He was a member of the European Parliament from 1981 to 1893.

A current reader of the *Education Times* cannot but be struck by the similarities between the issues which dominated the education world at that time and those of to-day. Whether one's focus is primary, second-level or higher education, the headlines could easily relate to present-day Ireland. The following examples of headlines from the *Education Times* of 1974 and 1975 are indicative:

"Civil servants plan education cuts for next budget".

"Integration a major Northern Ireland school issue".

"Time to take stock of the new Maths".

"Ban on selection (to second-level schools) demanded".

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[2] S. O Buachalla *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Dublin: 1988) p. 288.

[3] In practice, this stipulation was never enforced.

"Financial crisis in universities".
"The case for a technological university".
"Ongoing assessment should replace Inter Cert exam."
"Damage from exams revealed in (ESRI) survey of school attitudes".

Pre-school education was firmly on the agenda at the time with the Rutland St. project getting regular coverage. At primary level, the new curriculum of 1971 was in its early years of implementation and a weekly "pull-out" insert with advice for primary teachers and examples of lesson planning is as relevant to-day as it was then. One is struck by the number of complex (hand-drawn) diagrams and illustrations in these inserts – which must have caused many a headache for the staff on the production team. Those were the days when design and lay-was done by hand – there were no computers or automated systems to prepare copy.

A major issue which dominated headlines during the period was the emerging multi-denominational movement in the south and the integrated education movement in N.I. Anyone studying the origins of the Educate Together schools will find the *Education Times* an invaluable resource. Controversy in St. Patrick's N.S., Dalkey which ultimately led to the setting up of the first Educate Together school, the Dalkey School Project, is chronicled in detail. The objections to such a school, vociferously articulated by Minister Burke, and subsequently contained in a booklet entitled "*Have the snakes come back"* by an organisation which called itself Vera Verba (true words!) are also detailed. Early support from the then leader of the opposition, Jack. Lynch, is evident in the headline "Lynch backs pilot scheme on integration" followed some weeks later by the headline "Party backing for Lynch on integrated issue".

The issues relating to second-level education which were covered forty years ago continue to reverberate in Ireland to-day. The future role of religious in education was challenged by the FIRE report (future of Irish religious in education), written by Fr. Paul Andrews, SJ – a report which was impressively prescient. The question of who should control the new community schools was a source of ongoing controversy with successive draft deeds of trust being regularly "leaked" to the *Education Times*. Concerns about "the secularisation of education" were voiced. The ICE report (intermediate certificate examination) was published in 1974 and it recommended

major reform of junior cycle assessment and the introduction of school-based and continuous assessment. The need for curriculum reform was a constant refrain – and the inadequacy of P.E. and sports facilities in schools were highlighted. Forty years ago, Minister Burke pledged that "school sports facilities (would be provided) for all". And the reader was warned that "modern education cannot ignore the computer". Under the heading "Tomorrow is not cancelled", a full-page article by a young architect and Labour Party activist, Ruairi Quinn, called for the inclusion of futurology in the second-level curriculum.

The setting up of the Teaching Council (An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta) was also on the agenda. Would teachers be adequately represented on the council? How comprehensive would its role be? Would it result in more professional teacher training? There were calls for expanding initial teacher education to a four year B.Ed. for primary teachers and a two year H.Dip. for second level teachers.

Inadequate financing for higher education was a major issue. The newly-set up HEA drew attention to the danger of "money shortage putting university standards at risk". IFUT called for "more funding for research". UCD moved "to counter £1 million deficit". USIT added its voice to the clamour for better funding for higher education. Burke's reply was succinct:

> Unless one takes the irresponsible attitude of asking for more all around, with no thought as to where the money is to come from, one has to realise that more expenditure in one direction means less in another – an inequitable allocation to the third level sector would be at the expense of the second and first level sectors.

The question of whether the binary system should be the norm at third level or whether a "comprehensive" system should be introduced was discussed at length. The proposal that third level institutions in Dublin should be rationalised was a source of particular controversy. A suggestion that there should be one (higher education) school of engineering in Dublin, was not met with favour even though it was pointed out that "economies of scale were seen as necessary". Ed Walsh argued for the introduction of a 12 month academic year.

The *Education Times* provides a fascinating and insightful overview of educational issues in Ireland forty years ago. Even the cursory overview of issues provided in this article reminds us of how perennial many educational issues are and how difficult educational change can be. New generations of researchers and educational policy-makers will undoubtedly find the *Education Times* an invaluable resource when confronting the challenge of educational change[4]. John Horgan has left an invaluable legacy to future generations of educationalists for which we should be eternally grateful.

[4] In this regard, it would be very helpful if all issues of the *Education Times* were to be digitised and made available online for future researchers.