

the IRISH NEWS

Pro fide et patria

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Keep hatred from schools

WITH parents, pupils and teachers preparing for the new school term, it is depressing that sectarian hatred has again marred what should be a time of anticipation and hope.

Dominican College at Fortwilliam Park in north Belfast is the latest which has been targeted by sinister elements.

In an arson attack in the early hours of yesterday, a kitchen and storeroom in the sixth form building were damaged.

Police said the incident bore all the hallmarks of a sectarian attack.

Fortunately, the blaze will not disrupt the life of the school and the positive attitude of staff, like that of their colleagues at other schools which have been attacked, must be commended.

In the past year, and not just in north Belfast, teachers and pupils have been caught up in the most disgraceful and frightening situations.

But no matter how fraught the circumstances, staff have continued to perform their duties and to do their utmost to provide a haven where children can learn and grow.

It is difficult to imagine anywhere else in the world where places of learning have been subjected to sustained, vicious and terrifying attacks as a result of intolerance and bigotry.

In the past school year we have seen the picketing of Holy Cross girls' primary, intimidation at Our Lady of Mercy, Ballysillan and the sectarian interrogation of students at the Bifhe college in Tower Street in east Belfast.

Disgraceful and worrying incidents have also taken place at other schools.

It is disturbing that the tensions on our streets are encroaching on the education of our children.

As schools across Northern Ireland gear up for the new term, it is essential that the bigots and thugs stay well away.

Schools hold a special place in any society and it is crucial that the education of our children is not blighted by fear.

It's Antrim jockey by a long way

TONY McCoy must be regarded as among the greatest Irish sporting figures of all time after his latest record-breaking achievement yesterday.

The Co Antrim-born superstar became the leading UK National Hunt jockey in history after guiding home winner number 1,700 in his astonishing career.

He took the title from another Ulsterman, Richard Dunwoody, who later made the point that his friend has not had the full recognition he deserves for his status.

McCoy dominates his chosen field so comprehensively and with so little fuss that he seldom makes headlines outside the racing pages.

However, he is involved in one of the most dangerous and demanding sports and he has had to make huge sacrifices to get to the top.

The disciplines attached to maintaining a racing weight which is routinely a stone and a half below his natural level can only be imagined.

At only 28, McCoy has already captured every prize available to him... with one exception.

The Aintree Grand National has so far evaded his grasp, and a triumph there is his only remaining ambition.

Given his record, few would bet against it.

Quotes of the day

This is a callous act, the school has suffered extensive damage and much disruption has been caused at this time when pupils are due to return after the summer holidays

SDLP North Belfast assembly member Alban Maginness condemns an arson attack on Dominican College

If Michelle Jackson could have spoke from the grave, she would have told everybody Eddie Lloyd didn't do it

Detroit man Eddie Joe Lloyd speaking after he was freed from jail after serving 17 years for a rape and murder that DNA evidence has proved he did not commit

There is no point of having healthy children if they are going to die of malnutrition. There is no point in being an environmentalist with an empty stomach

Pedro Sanchez, former director of the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry speaking at the World Summit in South Africa

Batasuna ban could lead to more conflict

Failure to condemn Eta bomb attacks has led to the banning this week of the pro-independence Basque political party Batasuna.

Tony Bailie examines the background to the 30-year conflict in Spain's Basque region

WITHIN hours of a decision by the Spanish government on Monday to ban the pro-Basque independence political party Batasuna, a bomb was discovered in a town 15 miles south of San Sebastian.

A caller from the paramilitary separatist group Eta claimed it had planted the device, which contained several pounds of dynamite packed in with other explosive material in a cooking pot and hidden in a sports bag.

That device failed to go off and was dealt with by army bomb experts, but over a 30-year period Eta has killed more than 800 people and injured 3,000 others in bomb and gun attacks.

On August 4 this year, a six-year-old girl was one of two people killed in a bomb blast in the coastal resort of Santa Pola, near Alicante.

The failure of Batasuna leaders to condemn that attack led the Spanish prime minister, Jose Maria Aznar, to describe them as "human garbage", and set in process the decision by the country's parliament to ban the party for three years.

During the debate Luis de Grandes, who is a member of Mr Aznar's ruling Popular Party, told parliament: "Batasuna is a mask of Eta... that justifies Eta's crimes." Batasuna has always denied it is linked to Eta and party spokesman Arnaldo Otegi said on Monday that the decision to ban it "proved that Spain is a fascist and authoritarian state", adding that "Batasuna will continue working for sovereignty and independence".

Although the Spanish constitution allows for autonomous regions - including the Basque country, Galicia and Catalonia - Basque separatists are demanding the establishment of an independent state.

The separatists claim a unique Basque culture and heritage that dates back to pre-historic times, in a territory that straddles the Pyrenees region of northern Spain and southern France.

Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of human existence in the region dating from around 12,000 BC and believe these scattered tribes had evolved into a distinct Basque ethnic grouping by 7,000 BC.

Despite constant displacements by other early European tribes over the subsequent millennia - including the Celts - and invasions by the superior military forces of the Romans and Visigoths, the Basques somehow maintained their own identity.

Many people living in the Basque region today still have a distinctive blood group and the native language, Euskera, falls outside the pattern of most other languages spoken in Europe.

Linguists have identified a common mother tongue known as Indo-



■ BOMB SCENE: The Civil Guard barracks in Santa Pola, south-eastern Spain after a car bomb exploded damaging the building and killing a six-year-old girl and a Spanish man. Police suspect the attack was the work of the Basque separatist group Eta

European from which most languages on the continent have developed, including Spanish, French, German, English and Irish. Euskera, however, is unique - its vocabulary and grammar have evolved separately - and linguists believe it may be a surviving example of a pre-Indo European language.

The language issue has always been central to the Basque identity and the push by nationalists for independence.

The dictator General Franco, who ruled Spain between 1939 and 1975, came down hard on the Basques because of their fierce opposition to him during the Spanish Civil War, and the language and Basque culture were all but wiped out.

Despite widespread repression, Euskera survived and Basque nationalists began to group in the 1960s and formed Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Eta), which translates into English as "freedom in the Basque country".

In 1968 Eta began its shooting and bombing campaign, which continued after the death of Franco in 1975 and the election of a democratic parliament in Madrid. In recognition of the demands for regional independence, the new constitution created 17 autonomous regions which have varying degrees

of self-governing powers. Even though the Basque Autonomous Community, with a population of just under three million, has more legislative independence than any other region, hardline nationalists are still demanding full independence. Batasuna won 10 per cent of the vote in the last Basque regional election in May 2001 and the party also has nearly 900 town councillors in the three Basque provinces and neighbouring Navarra.

Despite this support, Batasuna has now been banned from taking part in elections for the next three years. The move was instigated by Judge Baltasar Garzon, one of Spain's most influential legal figures and was ratified by the country's national parliament.

Elected representatives will be allowed to serve out their terms in the 75-member Basque regional parliament, but they will be disqualified from taking part in elections next year.

The order banning Batasuna cites the 34-year campaign by Eta and also accuses the party of orchestrating 3,761 acts of low-level street violence since 1991. The order reads: "All of these acts have been systematically aimed at specific sectors of the population, and sometimes indiscriminate, so

that one should not hesitate to classify Eta's actions, of which Batasuna is an element, as crimes against humanity."

In the past the Spanish government has responded to Eta violence with enhanced powers of detention and special non-jury courts to try suspected Basque separatists. Basque nationalists have claimed that these powers have led to widespread human rights abuses, including cases of torture that have been logged by Amnesty International and the United Nations.

In June this year a Basque lawyer, visiting Belfast, appealed for the international community to lobby the Spanish government over alleged instances of state torture in the Basque country.

Julen Arzavaga said he had logged nearly 100 cases of reported torture by prisoners being held by the Spanish police under special anti-terrorist legislation.

"The violence in the Basque country has been well documented and everyone knows about the actions of Eta, but no one knows about the other side," he said.

"What I am trying to do is explain that there is also violence coming from the Spanish and French police."

■ World news P20

On This Day/August 28 1932

By Eamon Phoenix

Black Institution considers Irish unity

THE flutter that has been raised in the northern Orange dovecotes by the recent revived talk about the possibility of obtaining a united Ireland was reflected in the speeches made at the Black Institution's demonstrations on Saturday.

A surprise, however, was created at the Kilkeel meeting when one speaker actually said there was no reason why they should not have a united Ireland - men of the north and south working in

unity for the good of the country that gave them birth. The speaker was the Rev Henry O'Connor, rector of Dundrum, who, however, explained how his idea of unity could be fulfilled.

"We do not desire to say an unkind word of our Roman Catholic fellow countrymen," he said. "We are sorry for them for being so easily deceived. We pray that the day may soon come when they will follow the example of other countries and throw off the galling yoke of Rome."

When this was done, the reverend gentleman announced, he could see no reason why there should not be a united Ireland.

Much amusement was caused when, as Lord Craigavon was proceeding to the platform, an old woman with a shawl and basket ascended the steps and delivered the opening remarks of a 'speech'. The people laughed heartily as she was immediately led down the steps again to make way the prime minister.