

# THE POLITICIAN IN THE GAEDHEALTACHT.

By Pádraig Pearse.

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The politician we shall always have with us, and it is highly desirable that we should. Every nation has need of politician; Ireland, perhaps, more than most. We could not banish the politician if we would; we would not even if we could. He is a fact, a permanent fact, an inevitable fact.

While it is highly desirable that we should have politicians, it is highly undesirable that the operations of politicians should be allowed, in their actual working out, to injure the dearest interests of the nation. It is evident to everyone that the politician in the Irish-speaking districts is helping powerfully to kill the living Irish language. His whole propaganda is carried on in English. His newspapers are in English. His meetings and conventions are conducted in English. His election literature is printed in English. His speeches from his platform are in English, even when he is an Irish speaker himself. Of course, we are speaking in general terms. There have been such things as Irish speeches from political platforms and such things as Irish election addresses (the latter chiefly in anglicised districts). We are dealing with the general tone and colour of political activity in the Gaedhealtacht; and the general tone and colour of political activity in the Gaedhealtacht is English.

It would be unfair to pillory any one school of politicians for this state of affairs. The Sinn Féin Nationalist is as great a sinner as the Parliamentary Nationalist; the Parliamentary Nationalist as great a sinner as the Devolutionist or the frank Unionist. In this respect even avowed Gaelic Leaguers are far from blameless. The Gael, as soon as he steps on a political platform or enters a political conference, seems too often to forget all the principles and traditions which he cherishes *qua* Gael. We have known Gaelic Leaguers who are punctilious in always speaking Irish from Gaelic League platforms, to address Irish-

speaking crowds in English from political platforms. We have known politicians to speak Irish in Dublin and London, and English from the political platform in their own Irish-speaking constituencies. We have known delegates to the Ard-Fheis who shout for “Gaedhilg” all day in the Rotunda, to go home and shout in English from a platform or in a boardroom of the Gaedhealtacht.

Now, English may be excusable and even necessary at Gaelic League meetings in the Galldacht. From a non-Irish speaker English may be excusable, if not necessary, even in the Gaedhealtacht. But it can never be necessary and it can never be excusable for an Irish speaker to address an Irish-speaking audience in English. The thing should not be tolerated. It has been tolerated too long with disastrous effect to the influence and prestige of the national language.

We were once at a political meeting in a Welsh-speaking part of Wales. A Welsh Member of Parliament came forward to speak. He commenced in English. There was a roar of “CYMRAEG!” which literally shook the building. The member held up a deprecating hand. He attempted to explain that there were special reasons why he should address them in English on this particular occasion. The only answer was “CYMREAG!” shouted with ten-fold volume. The member stammered on in English. The crowd became threatening. A few moved hastily towards the platform. At the psychological moment the member turned to Cymreag, - indeed, he finished in Welsh a sentence begun in English. The crowd cheered, then quietened and listened to him with rapt attention until the close of the address. Had he hesitated a moment longer the platform would have been stormed.

We do not advocate the hooting of eminent political leaders who do not happen to know Irish off every platform in an Irish-speaking district on which they appear. We do advocate the insisting on Irish speakers being provided for political meetings in Irish-speaking places. Still more strenuously do we advocate the insisting on Irish speakers speaking Irish on political platforms and everywhere else. “In Flanders, Flemish,” – “In Wales, Welsh,” – “Gan Acht Gaedhilg San nGaedhealtacht!”

We wrote in a similar strain in AN CLAUDHEAMH SOLUIS some three years ago, and were promptly called to book by one irate

reader for having “sneered at politics,” and by another for having “attacked the Parliamentary Party.” We never “sneer” at anything. We never “attack” brother Irishmen, though we sometimes criticise their acts. To point out what politicians might do and fail to do is more to attack politics or a political party as an institution, than to point out what priests might do and fail to do is to attack the Church, or to point out what Gaelic Leaguers might do and fail to do is to attack the Gaelic League.