

## points of view

# GOP is thwarting Ireland's job rights

ST. PATRICK'S DAY is the love of family and friends alive and dead. It's the celebration of heritage and our forebears' triumph over sorrow and struggle.

But there was an ironic twist to St. Patrick's Day 1988 last week — a biting edge no number of tender Irish ballads could soften. It originated in Northern Ireland and manifested itself in the actions of our own state senators.

The MacBride Principles are guidelines designed to end employment discrimination in Northern Ireland, where, according to the British government's Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, the unemployment rate of Catholics is 2½ times greater than that of Protestants. Northern Ireland is 40 percent Catholic.

Unequal access to jobs is at the

root of the violence scarring lives in the British state.

U.S. firms, including General Motors, Fruehauf and Ford Motor Co., operate plants in Northern Ireland. The state of Michigan invests pension funds there.

THE MacBRIDE Principles — modeled after South Africa's Sullivan Principles by Nobel Peace Prize winner Sean MacBride — have passed or are pending in 19 states.

The Michigan House passed the bill 97-0 last May. It has been stalled before Sen. Rudy Nichols' Senate Judiciary Committee ever since. After being visited by representatives of the British government, Nichols has refused to schedule the bill for a hearing. Nichols, whose district includes Rochester, chairs the Judiciary Committee.



M.B. Dillon

Several weeks ago, three members of the committee signed a letter that would have forced a hearing.

But Sen. Majority Leader John Engler, R-Mt. Pleasant, took action to force its cancellation.

CO-SPONSORED BY 28 of 38 senators, the bill doesn't require divestiture or quotas. It poses no fiscal implications for the state of Michigan or its pensioners. In fact, the principles bar the state treasurer from doing anything inconsistent

with sound investment policy.

The Michigan Republican leadership was told by the U.S. State Department that the principles "undermine foreign policy," said state Sen. Robert Geake, R-Norville. Farmington Hills attorney John Cahill is spearheading the MacBride Principles campaign in Michigan for the Irish American Unity Conference.

"Here's a bill that is aimed at resolving one of the primary causes of violence in Northern Ireland, yet steps are being taken by the British government and Sens. Nichols and Engler to prevent a vote on the bill in the Michigan Senate," Cahill said.

"Just as the denial of our rights in 1776 led to our revolution, the denial of these rights today leads to frustration among voters in Michigan and

the nationalist community in Northern Ireland."

IF NICHOLS and Engler object to the bill, it's their duty to raise those objections in public debate, Cahill said.

"Are there no democratic rights for Irish-Americans? Rather than allow us a debate and the voting process that our Constitution guarantees us, these two men are preventing any vote at all, because they and the British government know that if there is a vote it will pass overwhelmingly because the bill is so unobjectionable."

"It's baffling to contemplate why the Senate Republican leadership would thwart the democratic process to serve the interests of the British government rather than the voters of Michigan."

If democracy and human rights matter to Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, and other Observer & Eccentric area state senators, they should demand a hearing.

VOTERS CAN help stop suffering and violence in Northern Ireland by urging their legislators to pass the bill.

Individuals who own stock in companies in Northern Ireland can help by voting their shares in favor of resolutions urging adoption of the MacBride Principles as corporate policy.

City councils can do their part by passing resolutions.

If enough pressure is exerted, persons in Northern Ireland will gain the same employment rights we take for granted in the U.S.

## Be wary of 'hard sell' rental agents

OVER A beer in his Redford Township castle, good ol' John gave me some advice. "When you rent a car in Florida," he said, "you don't have to buy their insurance. Your own car insurance covers a rental. Just ask your agent if you're not sure."

We asked, and the friendly agent on Farmington Road said yes, indeed, our policy covers a rental.

But the counter agent in the Florida agency which advertised the lowest rental rates put up a big, big fuss. "Most people," she insisted repeatedly, buy their insurance, called CDW for collision damage waiver, because it frees the customer from any liability whatsoever, even the smallest scrape.

Sounded OK. My policy has a \$200 deductible.

THEN CAME the bill — \$108 for insurance for a mere nine days. Hey, wait a second. That's \$12 a day or nearly \$4,400 a year — for a compact car with 20,000 miles on it already.

Gosh, no wonder the agency could advertise low daily rental rates. They were making a mint on insurance.

To make a long argument short, I rejected the CDW insurance. Back in the flu-bedecked north, I checked the Public Relations



Tim Richard

Newsweek last week and found this gem from Hertz Corp., which was not, incidentally, the company I had patronized:

HERTZ ANNOUNCED that in meetings this week with states' attorneys general in Kansas, it will call for regulation of sales practices relating to the damage waiver option offered on car rentals.

"In recent months, several states have undertaken efforts to regulate the waiver principally as a result of abuses in its sale by certain car rental companies. We think the waiver is a valid optional service for renters," said Frank A. Olson, Hertz chairman, chief executive officer and chief operating officer, "but the sales practices of some of our competitors have become abusive."

"You simply can't break even, let alone make a profit renting cars at the low advertised lead rates — such as \$39 a week in Florida — that can be seen in newspapers and travel

publications.

"Those artificially low rental rates are actually subsidized through the high-pressure sale of the damage waiver as well as add-on mandatory gas charges and airport surcharges, and unadvertised extras for additional drivers or a four-door car."

"IN FACT, we understand that counter agents at such companies earn more from CDW sales commissions than from wages. Their livelihood depends on the hard sell," he said.

Olson said Hertz is "now prepared to support their (attorney generals') efforts — and those of other governmental agencies — to regulate the waiver sales practices."

"We have heard of instances where renters who decline CDW are discriminated against. For example, the car they reserved may no longer be available, or the rate at which their reservation was confirmed may have increased."

"Hertz will also call for clear, readable signs at every car rental counter . . . What we have in mind is a disclosure similar to what Hertz already has on the face of its rental agreement, stating that 'Your own auto insurance may cover all or part of such damage. You may want to check before accepting. . .'"

## Newsroom bias not necessarily bad

IT WAS ONE of those good-news, bad-news phone calls. The woman thought a front-page story was well done, but she was unhappy with the editorial in the same issue on the same topic.

Other than the satisfaction of voicing her complaint, the woman probably didn't think she accomplished much by phoning our newspaper. I think she missed the point. Her complaint showed newspapers operating in their best light.

Almost no newspaper pretends anymore that it is staffed by unbiased, objective reporters and editors. This is not a startling revelation. Detroit Free Press publisher David Lawrence made the point a couple of weeks ago in Farmington Hills during a speech at the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College.

It is naive to think differently. Think of your colleagues and the people in your neighborhood. Some vote Republican, some Democratic, some not at all. Some are religious, others have no church affiliations. Some are young and some are old. They represent a hodgepodge of beliefs. Why should newspapers be any different?

The key to good reporting is to put the bias aside and report factually. That doesn't mean a reporter doesn't



Rich Perlberg

get involved in the story. In some cases, the emotions might run quite strong. You can't convince me that it is a sign of a good reporter to remain emotionally distant when hearing about child abuse, the plight of the homeless or violations of civil rights.

THOSE EMOTIONS can motivate the reporter to do a better job of covering the story. Those same emotions must be controlled, however, to make sure the story is fair. The molestation of a child is a horrid crime, to be sure, but the reporter must take care to fairly report about the person charged with the offense since he is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial.

I recall a reporter who broke down and cried after covering the funeral of five family members who died in a traffic accident. Then the reporter sat down to write a pair of excellent, straightforward stories about an event that was tearing at the heart of a small community. Her

ability to feel and her professional skills both came into play for her to write the accounts.

This is a roundabout way of getting back to the woman who liked our story, but disliked our editorial. She might not realize it, but it shows that our news staff can prevent opinions from getting in the way of news stories.

THE SAME editor who wrote the editorial that the woman disliked both assigned and edited the story that the woman liked. One article had to do with facts, the other had to do with opinion derived from the facts. It is possible to reach different conclusions from the same set of facts.

People love to criticize newspapers for what they call biased coverage, and they often point to the editorial page to prove their point. A former publisher used to tell of a city council candidate who would lobby hard for the newspaper's endorsement. When he didn't get it, he would paper the town with flyers proclaiming that voters shouldn't let the paper run the town.

Newspapers are far from perfect. But many people who complain about a paper's bias are really upset because the paper didn't turn a bias in their favor.



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