

Comment & Letters

s to
ditor

Email: 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.

Over Nama

about time
shareholders
Quite a lot
small share-
banks are
a number of
es that still
or me, and I
the nose.

ate pensions
down 40 per
ing pension
ers against
as pitching
ainst them-
vince people
we need to
eir money in
afe into the

urs, etc,

the objective of
uidity to the
to get banks
Es, big busi-
eholds, can
in why Irish
Society is
e?
businesses is
and we are

assured this is not a bailout for either banks or developers, why shouldn't Irish Nationwide pay the price for its own recklessness?

Irish Nationwide's loan book has revealed that it is almost exclusively involved in property deals, yet Nama is willing to devote almost 20 per cent of its resources or €8 billion to propping it up.

It is unlikely to play a sufficiently significant role in the rehabilitation of the Irish economy to justify the €8 billion price tag.

If the Government is thinking of creating a third force in Irish banking, wouldn't any new entity be far better off without Irish Nationwide? - Yours, etc,

PETER ROBBINS,
Maretime Gardens East,
Blackrock,
Co Dublin.

Madam, - It is hoped that Nama will solve Ireland's economic problems. But I continue to be pessimistic while those with an interest in a return to the boom of prior years refer to houses as "units".

It is this focus on mass production of "units" that got us to where we are today. - Yours, etc,
ASHLEY GODDEN
Friary Walk,
Callan, Co Kilkenny.

Goldstone Report on Gaza

on'
reference to the
lad Invaded,
ember 1st, I
ear the false
inently por-
her, Kevin
and govern-
e supposed
the situation
given great

Kevin if the
assistance of
He looked
Kevin had
during the
Emergency
ter minister
ne that such
been crazy
and poorly
the Army at
ld have had
of this. The
on a hypo-
that never
ever consid-

ars of age, I
ollections of
a bit hazy.
that Kevin
book, We
after he had
government

d this little
a detailed
by a person
art of them.
heeded this
have seen
to advocate
es.

imme, when
uched on, it
resigned his
rt of Blaney
fact, Kevin
re Haughey
ed because
h Lynch's
- Is mise,
LAIN,

Madam, - It is regrettable that your editorial on the Goldstone Report on Israel's military operation in Gaza (September 17th) draws a moral equivalence between Israel, a democratic state obliged to defend its citizens against attack, and Hamas, a fundamentalist terrorist group that for many years has deliberately attacked Israeli civilians and persecuted its own people.

Goldstone's outrageous report unfairly describes Israel's defence of its citizens as "war crimes", while ignoring the well-documented and even boasted Hamas policy of deliberately using Gazan civilians as human shields. By casting doubts over Israel's motivation for launching its operation against Hamas, the report dismisses the eight-year-long barrage of 12,000 rockets endured by Israel's civilians, and questions Israel's basic right to protect its citizens.

Israel is not, however, surprised. The Goldstone Report is - more than anything else - a political statement, rather than a legal analysis.

This report was produced by the UN's new "Human Rights Council" (HRC), a body whose obsession with Israel has led it to produce more resolutions condemning Israel than those referring to all other countries combined.

But what else can be expected from an anti-Israel body whose membership includes such renowned "champions" of human rights as Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Nicaragua, Pakistan and Qatar, to name but a few.

It should come as no surprise that the mandate designed by the HRC for the Goldstone mission was one-sided and prejudicial. Besides making no mention whatsoever of possible Palestinian violations, it first assumed Israel's guilt, and then sent Goldstone to gather up some evidence. Israel can at least take comfort

Collision on O'Connell Street

Madam, - I was not impressed by the ignorance of the Rules of the Road displayed by Dr John Lynch, chairman of CIÉ, in your report on the Luas and bus crash (Home News, September 18th). "We're very clear that there was a green light for the driver," he said. "What can a driver do if he has a green light except go through?"

May I refer Dr Lynch to the meaning of a green light as set down in the Rules of the Road: "A green light means you may go on if the way is clear. . . A green light is not a right of way, it is a licence to proceed with caution."

Dr Lynch's remarks may help explain the aggressive behaviour of a minority of Dublin bus drivers towards less weighty road users in general, and cyclists in particular.

He may not drive a bus, or indeed any vehicle, but as chairman of CIÉ Dr Lynch should have at least a basic understanding of the Rules of the Road and should take a more considered approach to public utterances. - Yours, etc,

DAVID JACOBS,
Marley Close,
Rathfarnham,
Dublin 16.

minority of HRC members - states such as Switzerland, Canada, Korea, Japan, France, the UK, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and other EU members - refused to support the politically motivated resolution establishing the Mission. Also telling is the fact that many distinguished human rights leaders, including Ireland's Mary Robinson, refused to lead the Mission, because it was, in her words "guided not by human rights but by politics".

Members appointed by the HRC to take part in the Mission are on record declaring their bias even before they were chosen. This is most glaringly seen in the two letters published by Mission member Christine Chinkin, even as the fighting in Gaza was raging. In them, she accused Israel of "repeated breaches of international human rights" and declared that "Israel's bombardment of Gaza is not self-defence - it's a war crime". So much for later becoming an "objective investigator".

The Report's attempt to present Israel's internationally respected justice system as unable to examine the actions of its own military, is not only ignorant of the facts, but also highly insulting to the citizens of the only truly democratic state in the Middle East. To date, Israel has opened investigations into over 100 allegations regarding the conduct of its forces during the Gaza Operation. Of these, 23 criminal investigations are still under way.

Tragically, as a result of this report, terrorists throughout the world are now strengthened in their belief that a law-abiding democratic state can be "handcuffed" by the "Human Rights Council", and be prevented from carrying out appropriate and necessary actions to protect its own citizens. - Yours, etc,

Zion Evrony,
Ambassador of Israel,
Embassy of Israel,
Pembroke Road,

An Irishman's Diary

Hugh Oram

THE ANNIVERSARY of the first major disaster in the Irish Free State fell recently. The Drumcollogher, Co Limerick, cinema fire happened on the evening of September 5th, 1926. It claimed 48 lives, by a strange twist of fate exactly the number of people killed in the Stardust inferno in 1981.

Just over 30 years before the cinema fire, Drumcollogher, in south Co Limerick, almost on the border with Co Cork, had been in the news for an altogether different and more positive reason. It was here that Ireland's first co-operative creamery had been set up 1889, and that fact is now commemorated in the creamery museum in the village, run by Seamus Stack, chairman of the local community council. The original creamery has been restored as part of the museum.

Drumcollogher was also known, for close on five decades, for the German-run Irish Dresden factory, which made porcelain figurines; it closed earlier this summer, a victim of the recession.

But what happened on that fateful early September evening in 1926 was tragedy on a grand scale. It should never have happened, and the cause of it was an unedifying mix of illegality and incompetence.

Two local men, Patrick Downing, who worked as a cinema projectionist, and William "Baby" Forde, came up with a scheme to make a few pounds for themselves and at the same time to entertain the people of Drumcollogher, who had seen only a few films before.

What Downing and Forde decided to do was to borrow reels of film, without permission, from the Assembly Rooms Theatre in Oliver Plunkett Street in Cork city centre. In those far off days, films weren't screened in Cork on a Sunday night, so the two men decided to purloin the current batch of films from the cinema in Cork, taking them away on the Sunday.

They planned to show them in Drumcollogher that evening, and then first thing on the Monday morning return them to the cinema in Cork, so that the cinema manager wouldn't know what had happened.

All cinema screenings had to be licensed by local authorities. In addition to cinemas, many church halls showed films and so too did travelling showmen. The showing planned for Drumcollogher wasn't licensed.

Downing and Forde took the reels of film out of their fireproof metal cases and left the cases in the cinema in Cork, to



A scene from *Irish Destiny*, made in 1926, the year of "The Burning" in Drumcollogher. Early films were supplied on highly flammable cellulose nitrate film

preserve the illusion that the films were still where they should have been.

They transported the reels of film up to Drumcollogher in a Gladstone bag.

The cellulose nitrate film material that was used in the early days of cinema, indeed up to the early 1950s, was highly flammable, so a sequence of events was set in train that ended in disaster.

The films were shown to the audience that crammed into the upstairs loft above a hardware shop in Drumcollogher. The audience got up into the makeshift cinema by means of wooden steps up the outside of the building.

The loft had only one door.

During the film, a couple of candles were left burning to create a little illumination on the table where the takings were counted. The candles had been placed there haphazardly, simply secured with molten wax. The first candle burned out and then the second candle tipped over on to one of the reels of film that was lying around and set it on fire.

There were some suggestions later on that some young lads in the "cinema" had tried to extinguish the candle to help them escape with the takings.

Within seconds, the building was alight. Two gardai were in the audience, to keep an eye on the local "boyos"; they managed to escape, but the fiancée of one of them was killed.

Other people escaped through a window in the room; during the War of Independence the room had been used for clandestine IRA meetings and the bars on the window had been cut to allow for a speedy exit if the RIC raided the place.

One former IRA man and the sacristan in the local church, John Gleason, was in the audience and knew this. He helped many people jump through the window. This escape route worked well until a plump woman got stuck and blocked the window.

Soon afterwards, the floor of the "cinema" collapsed into the shop beneath, which had highly flammable items in stock, like wood and petrol.

Within half an hour, the whole building was completely engulfed. The nearest fire brigade unit was in Limerick city, over 50km away. Local wells were empty after a very dry summer.

A total of 46 people died in the fire and two died later in hospital. All but one of the dead were buried in a mass grave surmounted by a Celtic cross, beside the local church.

Later, Downing, Forde and Patrick Brennan, who owned the shop and the loft, were tried in the Central Criminal Court on manslaughter charges, but were acquitted.

Forde emigrated to Australia and he died there after apparently putting strychnine that he was using to hunt rabbits into bread that he was baking.

In those days, cinema and theatre fires were more common than they are in these more regulated times. Three years after the Drumcollogher fire, a fire in a cinema in Paisley, central Scotland, killed 71 and back in 1887, a fire at the original Paris opera house had killed 200.

In the Drumcollogher disaster, half of those who died were below 25 years of age, another eerie echo of the Stardust tragedy.

The tragedy in Drumcollogher generated an enormous amount of international news coverage. It took *Time* magazine in New York until its September 20th edition to carry its report. It described how "a crowd of eager Irish peasants had climbed the single rickety ladder and sat down in rapt expectation of Drumcollogher's first cinema show". The tone of the report caused much local annoyance, as people considered it disparaging.

Locally, the dreadful fire became known as "The Burning".

Crisis currency

Madam, - I write to propose that in future reporting of the excesses of the great and the good in our society, you adopt a new unit of currency, for example the cost of giving a cervical cancer vaccination to a young girl. Let us assume a rate of exchange of 1 CCV to €100. Now we can grasp the obscenity of the €500,000 spent by Mr O'Donoghue over the past years and the €600,000 spent by Fás for the advert that has never been used. For €1 million, some 10,000 young women could be assured that they will not die of cervical cancer. - Yours, etc,
CHARLES M. QUINN,
Eglinton Road,

The doors on the bus

Madam, - Aidan Collins wonders (September 17th) why Dublin Bus does not operate the centre doors on its buses.

This issue has been knocked back and forth between the public, Dublin Bus and the drivers' unions for at least two decades. At various times, it looked like a resolution was imminent.

Dublin Bus once even went so far as to widely circulate a leaflet entitled, if memory serves me, *The Ins and Outs of a Dublin Bus*, explaining to the public how, from a certain date, passengers would be required to exit via the centre doors. The date came and went, and the drivers continued to

It seems to have escaped Mr Collins's attention that Dublin Bus, quite some time ago, came up with an innovative solution to the problem: since the year 2000, with a very small number of exceptions, it has purchased only buses without centre doors.

(The elimination of the centre doors was to compensate for the capacity loss suffered by the inclusion of wheelchair space in every bus purchased since 2000.)

With the eventual retirement of the pre-2000 fleet, there won't be any centre doors to operate. Problem solved. - Yours, etc,
STEPHEN KERNAN,
Glasnevin,