



An Comunn Gaidhealach

AITHISG NA BLIADHNA 1978/79

Annual Report

Nuair a bha sluagh ro lionmhor air a' Ghaidhealtachd, cus a bharrachd na b'urrainn an teachd-an-tir fhaighinn ann, dh'fheumadh moran a dhol a shireadh cosnadh air falbh bhon duthaich agus cha robh seo furasda as aonais na Beurla. Mar sin, bha e riatanach gun teagamh a' Bheurla a thoirt a steach do na sgoiltean Gaidhealach. Ach cha robh an fheadhainn a bha a' riaghladh an fhoghlum aig an am riarachaid seo a mhain a dheanamh. Is ann a rinn iad e 'na aobhar (no 'na leisgeul) foghlum 'nan canain fhein a dhiultadh do na Gaidheil a bha ag eirigh suas. Chaidh a' Ghaidhlig anns an sgoil a thoirmeasg. Dh'aobharaich sin gu bheil a' Ghaidhlig ann an iomadh cearnaidh an diugh a' dol a dholaidh no air seargadh buileach as. Thug am polasaidh ghrainneil ud a chreidsinn eadhon air moran de na Gaidheal fhein nach robh luach mor sam bith anns a' Ghaidhlig agus gur ann a chuireadh i moill air an oigridh a bha deonach adhartas a dheanamh anns an t-saoghal.

Is fhada bhon a dhearbhadh na Gaidheil cho ealanta is a tha iad a' togail na Beurla, agus gu dearbha cha deanadh duine againn an gnothach as a h-aonais an diugh. Ach, coltach ri moran anns an Roinn Eorpa agus ann an duthchannan eile, tha na Gaidheil comasach air da chanain a chleachdadh, gun aon te a' cur moill air an te eile, ach a' cuideachadh a cheile. Gidheadh tha an seann pholasaidh fhathast a' cothachadh an aghaidh na Gaidhlig anns an sgoil agus is e sin suidheachadh a dh'fheumar a cheartachadh.

Tha aobhar againn a nis a bhith dochasach gu bheil riaghladairean an fhoghlum a' gluasad beag air bheag gu bhith nas deonaiche na bha iad riamh roimhe a coraichean dligheadh a thoirt don Ghaidhlig sna sgoiltean ma dhearbhar dhaibh gur e sin da-rireadh toil nam parantan. Tha seo a' fagail na cuise ann an ire mhath an urra ris na parantan. Ma leigeas iadsan fhaicinn gu bheil iad ag iarraidh foghlum Gaidhlig air son an cuid chloinne, faodaidh e bhith gun urrainnear fhathast canain agus dualchas nan Gaidheal a ghleidheadh tearainte air son nan ginealach a tha ri teachd. Is ann air son adhartas a dheanamh a dh'ionnsaidh seo a tha an Comunn gu mor a' stri.

GENERAL: One result of suffering a period of financial stringency is that An Comunn has been compelled to concentrate on a careful selection of those issues which are judged the most vital for securing a future for the Gaelic language and culture. The pointer to what we think these should be is contained in the first objective of An Comunn as set out in our constitution namely, "the teaching, learning and use of the Gaelic language". This objective argues the need:

- i to give prime consideration to the claims of Gaelic on the educational services through the various stages from nursery to primary and secondary schools and through to adult education;
- ii to win for Gaelic a higher status in the everyday life of the community and to get rid of the obstacles that inhibit the free use which is its due; and
- iii to join forces with the other agencies engaged in stemming the deterioration and erosion of the spoken language in its homeland and so secure a firm base from which to win back the areas that have been lost, or are being lost, to Gaelic.

Since the last A.G.M. we have issued for the information of members two News Letters recording current national and regional activities, the second as recently as last month. For that reason this Report is confined to a broad outline of major developments and policy trends in course of the year.

EDUCATION: To make progress in the field of education we have continued to establish and strengthen lines of communication with Central and Local Government and to generate active support at community level, with special reference to canvassing parent opinion.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT: We have already described how the original Parliamentary Gaelic Group (whose support and advice continue to be of great value to us) has been expanded to an all-party Gaelic lobby of fifty. In addition all four parties responded favourably to our request for adoption and publication of a party Gaelic policy in time for the recent General Election. As a result we now feel greatly strengthened and encouraged in making Submissions to the Scottish Office and in pursuing discussions with S.E.D.

MOD COMMITTEE (Convenor: Donald Thomson): We all greatly regret that for health reasons Convenor Donald Thomson has been compelled to restrict his activities and we send him our good wishes for continued progress to full recovery. We are indebted to Mrs Ann Draper, Vice-Chairman, and to Malcolm MacLeod, Depute Director, for so ably coping with the added responsibilities falling to them.

The splendid achievements of the Oban Local Mod Committee have already been acknowledged. There are encouraging reports of the progress being made by the Western Isles Local Committee with the arrangements for staging "Mod nan Eilean". We can expect further development of Iomall a' Mhoid (Mod Fringe) which this year is under the direction of the Western Isles Regional Council.

The General Council have confirmed that the title of "Bard a' Chomuinn" and the Crowning Ceremony should be allowed to lapse.

COMUNN BRANCHES: Nowadays, as a result of social change and for other reasons, it is not easy for a Branch to prosper if its efforts are largely devoted to a syllabus of ceilidhs and other social occasions. Some Branches meet this situation by developing a more active language promotion role and operating as a local pressure group for the purpose of canvassing parents and others, petitioning for the introduction of Gaelic into schools, monitoring Gaelic broadcasting programmes and generally watching over and promoting Gaelic interests in their area. Branches can make a most valuable contribution to the Gaelic cause by developing their interest in such directions and so adjusting to evolving Comunn policy.

RELATED AGENCIES: We cultivate a close relationship with the many other agencies which now exist for the promotion of Gaelic language and culture. Along with Comhairle nan Eilean and H. & I.D.B. we are in full partnership with Acair, the new publishing company which has already made a promising beginning with the appearance of its series of titles. Our Education Director, Colin Spencer, is on the Board of Governors of Sabhal Mor Ostaig. We have a continuing interest in Gaelic drama which was "hived off" to Comunn na Drama with Donnie Maclean as Secretary, to allow it to develop more freely under its own organisation. We look to Fir Chlis, the new Gaelic repertory company, to gain further recognition of the value of drama to the spoken language. We should also mention here our appreciation to officials of the S.E.D. in Edinburgh and Inverness with whom we hold regular discussions and whose help and advice have proved unfailing. There are a number of community bodies, for example to mention Councils of Social Service and Community Councils, which deserve mention for the support they have given to Gaelic questions and we look forward to increasing collaboration.

STAFF: Staff shortages slow down the rate of progress with the volume of work calling for attention, but we are fortunate in the quality of the staff we have. Malcolm MacLeod in Glasgow, Colin Spencer in Inverness and Donnie MacLean in Stornoway and their supporting staff deserve the greatest credit for the manner in which they respond to increasing demands on their time under working conditions that leave much to be desired. It is right for their sake, as well as for the advancement of Comunn aims, that we should continue to press urgently for the means to provide an adequate staffing structure and office facilities.

DIRECTORATE: While Comunn finances have been brought into balance, we are still far from commanding the resources required to relieve the Directorate of the many executive functions which, in the absence of adequate staffing, they are required to undertake in addition to the duty of direction. By happy chance three members of the Management Committee living within easy reach of H.Q. Office are willing to meet this heavy demand on their time. It is an arrangement that cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. The aim must therefore be to acquire the funds required to provide reasonable staffing if An Comunn is to maintain the progress and develop the initiatives that have been generated in recent times. That is the purpose of the major submission in support of the case for additional funds at present before the Scottish Office. Given that, a Directorate can reasonably be expected to meet the demands imposed by the duty of direction. It is our firm view that a Directorate linkage between the General Council and the Management Committee on the one hand and executive staff on the other is essential if An Comunn is to maintain control over development of policy and its efficient execution.

The Directorate is of course operating in exercise of authority derived from the General Council and Management Committee without whose continuous guidance and encouragement and confidence the progress now being made would not be possible.

SRUTH: An Comunn is grateful to D.J. MacIver, the Editor of Sruth, for his work on the paper, likewise to those assisting him and supplying contributions.

TAING: An Comunn as a body is deeply indebted to all members of the movement and in particular to those who give much of their time and energy in serving the Gaelic cause. Their work, although not always recognised as such, is vital to the success of Comunn's aims and objectives. Much credit is especially due to the Convenors and Chairmen of Standing Committees, Regional Councils and their members. From their example and the results of their energies, the General Council and Management Committee gain example and inspiration.

An Comunn Gaidhealach,
Abertarff House,
Inverness, IVI IEU.
May, 1979.

(D.J. MACCUISH)
President

AN COMMUN S ABILITY TO WORK FOR THE GAELIC CAUSE DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF ITS SUPPORT. CAN YOU AS A MEMBER BRING IN AT LEAST ONE NEW MEMBER DURING 1979/80? PLEASE HELP TO BUILD UP OUR MEMBERSHIP: THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THE LANGUAGE CAN DO THEIR BIT BY JOINING AN COMMUN.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: We are establishing a good relationship with Local Authorities, particularly with those whose educational policies most closely affect the future prospects of the language.

Comhairle nan Eilean's bilingual policy has already created a favourably climate in which a number of projects for the advancement of Gaelic, as well as the operations of An Comunn, are able to make progress.

We are in regular communication with the Highland Region about the provision being made for Gaelic in Highland Schools and its place in the curriculum. We maintain close liaison with the Committee set up under the chairmanship of Councillor John F. Munro which has already made heartening progress with its remit to advise the Highland Regional Council on the authority's role and responsibility relating to Gaelic language and culture.

We acknowledge generous support from Strathclyde Regional Council and the Argyll and Bute District Council, and the personal interest displayed by their respective Convenors, without which the prospective opening of an office in Oban to serve the Argyll Region would not prove possible.

PARENT OPINION: It is specifically provided by Act of Parliament that the Secretary of State and education authorities shall have regard to the general principle that pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. The informing of parents as to the educational value of Gaelic and the canvassing of parent opinion are of paramount importance to the success of any campaign to support a case for the introduction of Gaelic into schools. There is ample evidence now that an effective campaign can be undertaken by a Working Party of individuals able and willing to do the work. We congratulate those responsible for successful canvassing in Sutherland and Mull. We have co-operated in organising Working Parties in Skye, Lochalsh and Badenoch and much remains to be done along similar lines in other areas.

BROADCASTING: An intensive study (sponsored by An Comunn and funded by H.I.D.B.) of the claims that Gaelic can legitimately make on the broadcasting services by an experienced broadcaster, Martin MacDonald, is nearing completion. This study is designed to provide a basis on which to formulate counter-proposals to the dismal prospect held out for Gaelic broadcasting by the late Government's White Paper on "The Future of Broadcasting".

REGIONS: The device of dividing Comunn territory into four Regions, each vested with authority to promote Comunn objectives in the manner best suited to the conditions prevailing in the particular Region, will not bear full fruit until shortages of staffing and office facilities have been remedied.

- (i) The Western Isles Region is getting well into its stride, with substantial assistance from Comhairle nan Eilean and in close collaboration with the promoters of the projects in progress there.
- (ii) The Argyll Region already has a record of achievement and it will certainly make further progress following the opening of a Regional office in Oban.
- (iii) The illness, followed by the lamented death of its Convenor, Angus MacKay, checked the progress of the Southern Region. It is now well set to move forward under its new Convenor, Dòlina MacLennan.
- (iv) The Northern Region has the advantage of sharing H.Q. Office in Inverness. It has been particularly active in pressing the case for Gaelic in schools as well as campaigning for improvement and expansion of broadcasting services in the Region and for the organisation of Working Parties.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Convenor: Boyd Robertson): The Education Committee has been engaged on a wide variety of questions: materials for use in schools and in adult education, courses for young and old, ways of encouraging public support for Gaelic. The European institutions have been studied for the support they can give to minority languages. Working Parties and the ways they can stimulate local demand for the language have been encouraged. In all of this it has been made obvious that only a fraction of what needs to be tackled has been attempted, owing to shortages of staff and resources.

FINANCE COMMITTEE (Convenor: Neil McKechnie): Financial restraints have continued to rule in ordering An Comunn's priorities with the effect that certain very needful areas have been neglected. Only increased funds will allow us to respond to these needs. The Scottish Education Department has continued to grant revenue aid for general administration and in addition, this year, an element of capital grant and aid for special projects. The Department is at present considering our request for increased grant; a favourable response is hoped for. Local Authorities, at Regional and District levels, have assisted as before and we are intending to build and expand on the special relationship that has been initiated with, for example, The Highland Region, Strathclyde and Comhairle nan Eilean. An Comunn has to acknowledge the important financial assistance given by the Scottish Arts Council, particularly through its Literature Committee, and it is hoped to develop closer collaboration with the Council in future. The H. & I.D.B. has continued to give sympathetic consideration to An Comunn's needs as part of its commendable record of assistance to Gaelic developments in recent times. The association is grateful to the Gaelic Language Promotion Trust for the substantial aid it has granted and will continue to grant to An Comunn as well as to other bodies. Careful thought is being given to Trust Fund investments and revenue and how best to apply these in use. Voluntary effort in fund raising is recognised to be very important and we shall look to ways of increasing the income from subscriptions and the many fund raising activities of members at national and local levels. Without this the Gaelic movement would be immeasurably the poorer, literally and figuratively.

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