



Tuesday, January 6, 2004

Gaelic Unit  
Area 1-A  
Sport, the Arts and Culture, SEED  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Honored Members of Parliament,

At this historic time, as the Scottish Parliament is considering legislation that would give a measure of protection to the Gaelic language, we in Slighe nan Gaidheal would like to offer our thoughts and encouragement.

Being on the other side of the Atlantic, we don't feel qualified to comment on the intricacies of Scotland's domestic policies, or the competing needs for funding in your country. However, there are perspectives available from our vantage point that may be of use, and we offer them with respect and humility.

We understand that there are many groups that the draft bill is designed to help, who are convinced that it is not strong enough. Further, that there is opposition to the costs that many believe the bill would incur. We invite those participating in the debate to also consider what it would cost if Scotland were to lose Gaelic.

There is no way, and perhaps for the better, to put a price tag on cultural and linguistic diversity, but it must nonetheless be considered as an asset; a natural resource with untapped potential. The English Crown understood the power of Gaelic very well when it forbade its teaching with the Acts of Proscription in 1746. Scotland itself, however, seems still to be of a divided opinion on the matter.

Perhaps more easy to evaluate would be the value of the industries that have grown up to meet the increasing demand for Gaelic educational and entertainment materials, and learning opportunities within Scotland and overseas. As the Board of Directors of an organization dedicated to teaching the language, we are keenly aware of the hunger of our members for these materials and the steady growth of the size of that membership. Language-oriented tourism is only in its infancy at present, but seems to us to show great promise.

We do not believe that the Gaelic-speaking people of Scotland are asking their Government for anything more than a level playing field and a fighting chance to save their language and culture. We urge the Scottish Parliament to take swift action to create that level playing field with the most effective protection it can provide. As every student of history knows, some of the most profound acts in human events have occurred when a people resolve to do what is right, whether or not it is immediately profitable. The effort to revitalize Gaelic, if it succeeds, will benefit all of Scotland, and indeed, all lovers of Gaeldom throughout the world.

We hope with all our hearts that we will someday bring our Gaelic-speaking American and Canadian children back to your country so they may see and hear for themselves *in their own language* the origin of our most precious possession.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors of Slighe nan Gaidheal

Kathryn Cole, President  
Penny McLeod DeGraff, Vice President  
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