

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2008

Time to hand on baton



Last month, the all-island body Foras na Gaeilge decided not to continue to provide funding for an Irish language daily newspaper — spelling the end for our newspaper Lá Nua which received a grant from the Foras to cover the period January 2007-December 2008.

In that period, Lá Nua incurred substantial losses and when the project closes its doors next month, total losses in the project will be around £270,000.

However, when Belfast Media Group acquired Lá Nua in 1999, we always knew it was to be more of a idealistic project — we believe firmly that there should be a daily Irish language newspaper/news service — than a profit-making project.

Foras is seeking tenders for a new contract for a weekly Irish language paper and Belfast Media Group looked hard at that contract. However, it involves no daily news element and we do not believe it would be, for us, economically viable — even with government grant aid.

(Of course, it would also mean taking jobs to Belfast from the existing weekly Foinse,

which is doing an excellent job in Conamara, which seems to me to a zero sum game.)

Thus we have to make preparations to close down Lá and make its staff in West Belfast and Donegal redundant — a sad return for their tremendous commitment to the daily newspaper.

Foras did offer a three month extension (before execution) to March 2009. However, Belfast Media Group isn't able to carry the additional losses such a temporary extension would entail.

Thus an important chapter in the Irish language will come to a close — Lá was founded in 1984. I remain of the belief that there should be a daily news service in Irish in Ireland and would love to see that news service/newspaper come from Belfast. I'm glad to see Gerry Adams endorse that view yesterday when he said Irish speakers are entitled to have a daily newspaper — even if it is online — and called for a strategy to create the successor to Lá.

I wish the next group who takes up the mantle of providing a daily newspaper every success and I have no doubt that such a group will emerge. The environment for an Irish language daily newspaper/news service is much more favourable today than it was when Gearóid Ó Cairealláin and Eoghan Ó Néill set up Lá in West Belfast in 1984; it's nothing short of a tragedy that for want of government support, we are shortly to be without our daily Lá.

Source: <http://apublishersblog.blogspot.com/2008/10/time-to-hand-on-baton.html>