



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Christians gather to protest at desecration of Sabbath

Over 70 protesters stood outside the gates of Downpatrick racecourse, on Lord's Day March 21, to protest at the first ever race meeting to be held on the Sabbath in Northern Ireland. The protesters came mainly from the two local Free Presbyterian congregations of Crossgar and Ballynahinch, but were joined by Pastor William Creighton from Killyleagh Baptist Church along with some of his congregation and also some other Christians from Presbyterian and other denominations.

Rev. Gordon Dane of Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church had requested the organisers of the race meeting to come and receive a letter of protest from them but they refused. Mr Iain Duff, the Registrar of the Downpatrick Race Course, in a RadioTelefís Éireann interview had even likened the protesters to fascists. However, the protesters were glad of the opportunity to stand for the Lord and for His day. Mr Dane, speaking on an interview with the BBC World Service the previous day, had made the point that the nation would lose a valuable treasure if it lost its day of rest and worship.

Media interest

There was a great deal of press interest and the ministers at the protest spent a great deal of their time at the protest explaining the teaching of the Scriptures to television, radio and newspaper journalists.

Economy

The organisers of the event tried to make a great deal of the fact that the race meeting would bring a boost to the economy of the area. That argument might have held more water if they had held their meeting on a day the shops were open in Downpatrick. The meeting was far more to do with the economy of their own pockets and those of the bookmakers. The law in Northern Ireland had allowed Sunday horse racing for a long time. It was the Sunday on-course betting that was banned. It was only when the bookmakers could make money that they decided to break the Sabbath.

An amusing incident happened when one man stopped in his van to shout at the protesters that he had a right to go in if he wanted. However, having asserted his right to go in, he promptly turned round and came out again. Of course he had a perfect right to come out again too!!! But there was a feeling that many of the people at the races were there just to give support to Sunday racing. The meeting was apparently hastily arranged. When enquiries were made at the tourist office a few weeks before the event they had been given no details. There is an obvious campaign being waged against everything that is regarded as being Protestant and Christian in our land. One commentator predicted that Sunday soccer will be the next objective.

Losing

Many of the reporters asked if we were fighting a losing battle against Sunday opening. To the human eye it might seem that we are, but England was in a similar place at the end of the 18th century when profanity and pleasure seeking were the order of the day. It was then that God stepped in and sent the Great Awakening under Whitefield and Wesley. That



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awakening completely changed the climate of the nation. We pray for a similar thing to happen in our day.