

A Tribute to Jimmy O'Dwyer

By SEAMUS SLOYAN

It is with great pleasure, tinted with a little bit of sadness, that I take this opportunity to pen a few lines in tribute to a man it was my good fortune to have known.

In Coolnafarna School in the 'forties and early 'fifties, there were two teachers, Miss Walsh, who took infants, first and second classes, and the "Master", who took third, fourth, fifth and sixth classes. I emphasise the word, Master because that is what he was in every sense of the word. I speak of Jimmy O'Dwyer. R.I.P.

Our paths first crossed when I entered third class, having spent three years with Miss Walsh, who was also a very fine teacher and who now lives in Galway, I believe.

I can well remember the first day in his classroom. We were all standing in a circle the desks were taken up with the other classes. It was there I realised, even at the tender age of ten years, the Master's serious side and also his great sense of humour.

He sat facing us, as he always did, on the edge of a long desk with one foot on the ground and told us: "Boys and girls, you are here for one reason, that is to learn". Then, he said: "You will always call me Sir, both in and out of school. In four years' time, when you leave here you can call me Jimmy".

Over the next four years we all benefited from his vast knowledge. He taught us everything. Some Saturdays a few of us would give him a hand on the bog. Even then, in his own way, he was teaching us.

He was a great man for the Irish language, and everything Irish. Poetry and recitations were very much part of the daily routine. His favourite recitation was "Pearse's Speech at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa". Sports and football were also high on the list. Indeed, he often joined in the football games we played in Dalton's field, with coats for goal posts and hobnail boots and clogs instead of football boots.

He also had his own unique form of discipline. He never used



a cane, always a sally rod. Sometimes, any slap we got we earned. I remember on one occasion, for instance, it was a wet day. We were in the middle class room which was used at lunchtime on such days. There were bicycles stored there

belonging to the lads who cycled out from Ballyhaunis each day. We were banned from cycling in the classroom, but disobeyed. So Sir drew a circle with chalk around the floor. He said: "Now let's see what good cyclists you are". We had to cycle within the circle. Every time we broke out we got a slap. We earned quite a few that lunch hour.

The four years were not long passing. We all went our separate ways, blessed with the wisdom he instilled in us. Some went on to the other schools, most went to trades or other work. Some became priests and nuns but we all gathered on that sad day when we laid him to rest. There was not a dry eye in the place. You know, it's a funny thing, even though he was affectionately known as Jimmy to us all, no one ever called him Jimmy to his face.

Well, Jimmy, you left an indelible mark on all who passed through your class.

U.M.P. reactions and reflection

By Liam Damron

DISBELIEF as the rumours start to circulate, comments from customers, UMP in financial difficulty, shock as it is announced on RTE 1 o'clock news 'Examiner in UMP'. This is the first definite statement.

After lunch there is much discussion of this bombshell. Gradually a feeling of hope starts to emerge. 'Sure hasn't Goodman an examiner for the last 18 months and there still going strong - 'UMP is a major employer they won't let it go to the wall with 800 odd jobs'.

By the second or third day things are more or less normal, but there is no official announcement by management to the workforce.

For a few days morale rose a little, but again the rumours start: 'Examiner can't get money, banks being difficult, deadlines are set', hope starts to fade. Again more discussion amongst the workforce, Goodman owed £400 million surely the Government won't let UMP go down for £60m.

As the examiner has more and more difficulty getting money, anger starts to grow, morale slumps and when eventually the examiner gives up frustration and serious concern sets in.

Now the Receiver has been appointed and redundancy notices are handed out. A feeling of anger and despair prevails amongst the work force. Doom and gloom in the business community.

Wages and holiday pay owed what about redundancy? Still no official comment from management. Eventually word goes around, 'Everyone to call to factory tonight for redundancy forms. UMP is no more.

Protest meetings, angry words, blockages, hot air from political figures.

Eventually UMP goes up for sale and after much speculation is sold. The end of an era in the history of Ballyhaunis.

It was the best of times,
It was the worst of times,
It was the end of an epoch.