

Gerry's News Digest 11: D-Day, immigration in Ireland and football (June 6, 2008)

Hi, this is Gerry and this is my News Digest for June 6th, 2008. June 6th, that's an interesting date, and on this show I'd like to explain the historical significance of this day. Then I have some items in the news that have caught my eye in the last couple of weeks or so. You may be interested to hear a bit about how the Irish are proposing to deal with the question of integration and naturalization of their now substantial foreign population. I've got another of those stories from America, where you say to yourself "This can't really be true." Buy a car and get a free gun! Then what about that Champions League final between Chelsea and Manchester United? Did you see it? Are you interested? What do you think about sport?

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Thanks for your comments. Marjorie wrote in after the show before last. She'd seen the same video as I saw with the American woman who had never heard of Hungary (Hungry?). I hope things are going better for you now after your unhelpful visit to the doctor. And now on with today's show.

June 6th is an important historical date. If you're old enough to remember the 2nd World War or if you know something about that war, you may know that this day was given the name D-Day and it was the day that the Allies launched their Northern invasion [1] of France in 1944. The Germans knew that sooner or later the Allies would have to cross the Channel and they had prepared their defences [2] very well. In order to maximise the chances of success, the Allies needed to somehow surprise the Germans. And they did this by spreading misinformation [3] and by pretending to prepare an invasion further up the coast towards Belgium. In fact the place chosen for the invasion was the beaches of Normandy near Caen. The operation was the largest single-day invasion of all time, with over 130,000 troops landed in a day. 195,700 naval and merchant navy personnel [4] were involved. And the whole thing might have failed for all sorts of reasons. One of them was the weather. The Allies couldn't keep the invasion secret for long after they began to collect all the ships necessary, and the weather turned really bad. In the end a group of meteorologists told the High Command [5] that there would be about 24 hours calm weather during this stormy period and they decided to take their chance. Fortunately, the forecast was correct and they managed to get across the Channel OK. The Allies organised both an airborne invasion [6] with paratroopers and the seaborne invasion. On D-Day itself, it is estimated that 2700 British soldiers and sailors died. The Canadians lost 946 casualties [7]. And the US forces lost 6603 men. In order to supply the invasion force once they were on land, the Allies then built a temporary harbour with prefabricated pieces that they towed across the Channel [9]. It was used to land over 2.5 million men, 500,000 vehicles, 4 million tonnes of supplies over a period of 10 months. You can still see parts of it if you visit the town of Arromanches in Normandy. Two big films have been made about this invasion: The Longest Day (made in 1962) and Saving Private Ryan (from the year 1998). Perhaps you've seen one or other of them. When you read about incredible events like D-Day, it's interesting to wonder what would have happened if the invasion had failed. What effect would it have had on today's world?

During the 2nd World War, the Republic of Ireland was a neutral, relatively unimportant little country. In the middle of the 19th century when Ireland was still under British rule it suffered a catastrophic famine [10] and the country lost about half of its population. For nearly a hundred and fifty years the country continued to export people - there was no work for the young people at home and they left to start new lives in Britain, America, Canada, Australia and so on. There was barely a family [11] in Ireland that didn't see children leave the country. Now, however, Ireland is one of the success stories in Europe. Its economy has boomed and for the first time it has become a land of immigration. Ireland has been taking in people from a huge variety of countries to meet the demands of the economy for workers [12]. Today, 12% of the Irish population is foreign - an incredible change. And the Irish government is now faced with the question of how best to integrate this new population into Irish life. Their proposed solution is to allow citizens from EU countries to vote in the Irish national elections. In return for this right, however, the government wants the foreigners to prove their ability to speak English and they want them to take up permanent residence [13]. They are thinking of introducing citizenship ceremonies [14] with an oath of allegiance [15] to the Irish state. Mr Conor Lenihan, the Minister for Integration was quoted as saying "There can be nothing more powerful in integrating people than allowing them to make a political decision by using a vote to shape the state they are in." At the same time, he also said "There can be no integration without deportation." The government seems to be trying to send out the message that they want people to take up citizenship but that there are clear requirements. You're in or you're out. I don't want to enter into the debate about citizenship in Switzerland. It's not my place to do so but having seen part of the recent debate on television in which Ms Widmer-Schlumpf and Mr Blocher took part, it's clear that it's a highly charged topic. I can only say that having lived in this country for some 20 years but not having applied for citizenship for various reasons, mainly out of inertia [16], I'm struck by the fact [17] that it's quite comfortable living a sort of 'detached' 'unintegrated' life here. I've never had to read any of the information that you citizens receive about all the things you have to decide. I don't bear any responsibility for decisions made. Perhaps I should have been encouraged to be more involved.

And now here's my American story. It comes from Missouri, one of those parts of America which I was saying last time is like the other side of the world for New Englanders. Anyway, a car dealership [18] in Butler, Missouri, is offering customers a free gun if they buy a car. And the offer has been very popular, it seems. Sales have quadrupled [19] claims the owner, Mr Max Muller. Customers get a choice between a gun or a card for gasoline worth \$250. Mr Muller says that every buyer so far "except one guy from Canada and one old guy" chose the gun, rather than the gas card. And what gave Mr Muller this idea? Barack Obama, it seems. If you remember, Mr Obama was rather rude about poor people in the States. He talked about them being "bitter working-class people clinging to guns or religion". Mr Muller says that where he lives people are happy to go to church and to carry guns. "We're just damn glad to live in a free country where you can have a gun if you want to," he says. But before we take our superior moral position on this, I guess we also have people in our countries who don't like other people telling them what to do or what to think. And when it comes to guns, I'm often struck by the similarities in the debate between the American belief in the right to "bear arms [20]" (which goes back to their struggle for independence) and the Swiss arguments about citizens keeping their military weapons at home and the fundamental Swiss belief in a citizen's army.

What is the fascination of football? After a seemingly endless series of qualifying matches, two teams play a final game that lasts 90 minutes, then it goes into a further 30 minutes of extra time. Still no result, so then they have a system, where they stop playing the game and just take turns at kicking a ball at the goal. This goes on until one player slips on the wet grass and that's it. End of the game. The new Champions are named and the manager of the losing side is sacked [21]. A bit absurd, isn't it? This was the dramatic plot of the Champions League Final in Moscow, and we might have something similar at the end of June when the European Championship comes to an end. I had an idea the other day for perhaps getting a result without these terrible penalties. You make the two sides carry on playing, but they have to remove one player from each side every ten minutes, but you don't know which player the other side is going to remove. So there are fewer and fewer players, getting more and more tired. And somebody must get a goal in the end, mustn't they?

After the football come the Olympic Games. After the terrible earthquake in China, our attention and concern has quite rightly been focussed on the suffering of the people in that area, and the Olympic Games have lost some of their prominence in the news. And that's not a bad thing. But I would like to share a quotation from a British journalist about the story of the torch [22] and the whole political side to the Games. The journalist's name is Alexander Chancellor and he wrote a few weeks ago; "It is difficult to grasp [23] how much trouble the Olympic torch - that symbol of peace and harmony- has caused. Everything is a nightmare when the torch comes to town. The cost of its world-circling holiday doesn't bear thinking about [24], nor does the threat to the planet of the airmiles it consumes. Yet world leaders go on pretending, through gritted teeth [25], that this stupid torch, which isn't even pretty, is somehow contributing to the peace of the world."

Well, this has been a provocative News Digest perhaps but I hope you've enjoyed it. And if you disagree with what I say, remember you can always write your comments on the website: www.podclub.ch. And until the next time, this is Gerry saying goodbye and "Take care!"

[1] launch [an] invasion: send an army into another country

[2] prepare their defences: get ready to fight the enemy

[3] spreading misinformation: telling people things that are not true but that you want them to believe

[4] naval and merchant navy personnel: people from military and commercial ships

[5] High Command: the generals, etc. in charge of the war

[6] airborne invasion: an invasion by air (see also: seaborne - by sea)

[7] casualties: people who are injured or killed in war or in an accident

[8] prefabricated pieces: pieces that are made and put together in one place and then brought to another place and put together (e.g. a prefabricated house: a house that is built out of a few big pieces that have been made in a factory)

[9] towed across the Channel: pulled across the sea between England and France

[10] famine: when people don't have enough food to eat and they become ill and die

[11] there was barely a family: there was nearly no family

[12] meet the demands of the economy for workers: supply workers to satisfy the needs of the economy

[13] take up permanent residence: start living somewhere permanently (= not temporarily)

[14] citizenship ceremonies: special events when people are made citizens of a country (people with a passport for that country)

[15] an oath of allegiance: when you swear (promise in a very serious way, for example with your hand on a holy book) to be loyal (to a person or a country: when you agree to obey their rules or orders)

[16] out of inertia: here: because I was too lazy to do anything about it (inertia = not moving)

[17] I'm struck by the fact: I am very conscious of the fact

[18] a car dealership: a company that has an agreement with a car manufacturer to sell their cars

[19] have quadrupled: have increased 400%

[20] bear arms: carry weapons (e.g. guns)

[21] is sacked: loses (his) job, is dismissed from his job

[22] torch: here: the burning object that is carried from Athens to the place where the Olympic Games are taking place

[23] grasp: here: understand

[24] doesn't bear thinking about: is too bad to think about

[25] through gritted teeth: an expression that means with their teeth together or, in other words, against what they really believe or want to say