

Manx Notes 562 (2021)

“THIS CORRESPONDENCE MUST NOW CLOSE”

“COMEOVERS”

LETTERS TO THE ISLE OF MAN WEEKLY TIMES

(1936)

(I)

“FAIR PLAY”

“THE COMPLAINT OF A ‘COME-OVER’”

To the Editor,

[18a] I am an Englishman, and have resided on this Island for the past five years. Often times I have felt a little perturbed and somewhat annoyed why so many people should ask me if I am a “come-over,” or why any other English people should be termed as “come-overs.” I believe I am right in saying there are hundreds of English people [18b] residing on this Island like myself not wage-earners, and who never seek a day’s employment, whose living entirely depends on money from oversea. which on reaching here is liberally spent and distributed amongst the Manx tradespeople. I have travelled very widely, especially in the British Dominions, such places as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Not once to my knowledge was I ever asked if I were a “come-over,” or heard English people referred to in that manner. In fairness to Manx people, for whom I have the greatest respect, I am confident this feeling about “come-overs” only exists in a very small majority of Island people, and it is to those people I address my letter. Probably they know no other world, and have never been farther than the doorstep of the home in which they were born.

I shall feel most kindly disposed to those people who still harbour that feeling about “come-overs,” if they can convince me in what way they are able to do without the visitor.

For example take the lightning strike. If that had lasted a fortnight every trade in the Island would have been brought to a standstill, not taking into consideration the fact that we should have been brought to a state of utter starvation, who would have befriended us and supported us? It doesn’t take a very intelligent person to answer that question, does it? Not only would the “come-overs” have befriended us; they would have supported us either by peaceful methods or in other ways if it had been necessary.

Don’t run away with the idea that it is impossible for the visitor to boycott this famous seaside resort. Remember that English people have a very deep sense of feeling, and once they got it well inside them that they were being subjected to all sorts of insults behind their backs, what some people imagine is inevitable might happen. There is other machinery far more vital. The great English Press could do

more damage in less than one minute than your Publicity Board could repair in a whole life time.

I know of a famous seaside resort in one of the British Dominions which was practically ruined and brought to a state of bankruptcy through the actions of the Corporation, trying to please a few fanatics who never knew a real day's enjoyment in their lives, and were never more happier than when they could spoil everybody else's, and there's a few of the sort knocking around here.

Take your Steam Packet Company, who have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds and who employ hundreds of extra hands to bring over the visitors, and the thousand and one boardinghouse keepers, the majority of them Manx, who entirely depend on about four months' catering for a living for the whole year. Doesn't it make you shudder to think what the depressing circumstances might be amongst the working class people if something was to happen in the way I have mentioned? What about the employers and shareholders? Before anyone begins to shout about "come-overs" I have two proposals to make. Take the thousands of acres of waste ground on the Island. Fill up the empty shops with the good things the earth provides. You will then begin to make me think you are more self-supporting, and at the same time you will be bringing down the cost of living to the working class people.

FAIR PLAY.

Pseud [signed as "Fair Play"]. "[Letter to the Editor] The Complaint of a 'Come-Over'." *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 29 February 1936: 18a-b.

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THE RESPONSES

(2)

To the Editor,

In referring to the assistance which the "come-overs" might have rendered if the lightning strike last year had lasted longer, "Fair Play" seems to have overlooked the fact that the strike was organised by a person who "came over" for that special purpose.

It seems to be generally agreed that if the matters in dispute had been left to the local Labour leaders and trades union officials, the strike would never have taken place.

GONE OVER. | Belfast.

Pseud [signed as "Gone Over"]. "[Letter to the Editor] 'Come-Overs' and the Strike." *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 7 March 1936: 6e.

(3)

To the Editor,

The letter of “Fair Play” is rather interesting. Why should it be considered an insult to be called a “come-over”? I have been a “come-over” for the last ten years and have found the Manx people very easy to live with; they are good-tempered and friendly, and without the snobbishness of a great many of the English who live here. The English do not come here for the Manx to benefit; they suit their own convenience. No doubt the income tax has an attraction for some, and when it suits their convenience they depart, regardless of the Island or the people.

COME-OVER.

Pseud [signed as “Come-Over”]. “[Letter to the Editor] A ‘Come-Over’ who likes the Manx.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 7 March 1936: 6e.

(4)

To the Editor,

I am a Manxman, and I entirely agree with “Fair Play.” The sooner Manx realise that we cannot afford to lose one English visitor and that the feeling about “come-overs” is a waste of time, the better for everyone. For several years I worked on public works in England. They called me Bill—I was one of them. There was no feeling about who you were or where you came from. Like many more, I am a qualified motor driver. The Highway Board find work for a number of us in the winter; English visitors find us all a job in the summer. I take my hat off to them every time, and it rarely ever comes back without being pretty well lined. I say, let ’em all come; the more the merrier!

MANXMAN. | Ballasalla.

Pseud [signed as “Manxman”]. “[Letter to the Editor] Hats off to the ‘Come-Overs’.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 7 March 1936: 6e.

(5)

To the Editor,

[6e] I was very interested in “Fair Play’s” letter printed in the “Times,” and I have come to the conclusion that he, like many of his kind, suffers from oversensitiveness. They take offence where none is intended—the sign of a guilty conscience. He complains because he is called a “come-over.” Can he suggest another word to distinguish between a Manxman and one living here who was born outside the Island? The word “English” cannot be used as it would not include Welsh, Irish or Scotch people. “Briton,” or “Britisher,” is clumsy, and furthermore would include Manx. The only other word I know is “Foreigner,” which is certainly more offensive than the word complained of.

“Fair Play” probably asserts that “come-over” is used in a derogatory sense. Doubtless it is—sometimes, but I think he is supersensitive to think that it always is. He also asserts that [6f] nowhere else is a person referred to as a “come-over.” Whereas this may not be the actual word used. I submit that the Manx are nowhere near the bottom of the list, where hospitality is concerned. A man from London is considered a foreigner in Lancashire. The Welsh, inside Wales, regard any outside their race with contempt, and will even speak another language in his presence to show it. I believe the inhabitants of the Channel Islands are even worse. A Manxman is regarded by persons living in Southern England as being half civilised. The Isle of Man is thought to be a rock somewhere in the Atlantic! In fact, we are “a goitre infected race, living on a goat-infested island!”

“Fair-play” has gone out of his way to show just how much we should love the English. I admit readily that we owe them much, both as visitors, and some who have come here and thrown themselves into the public life of the Island, but we also have reason for nursing grudges against them.

Look through any list of Government and Corporation posts and you will find the “plums,” almost without exception, are in the hands of come-overs (some who have done very good work) the majority of whom obtain a large pension and retire elsewhere to spend it. One has only to walk through Strand Street to see the premises of large English companies, whose profits are not spent here, forcing the Manx shopkeeper out of business. There are English building firms operating here, who bring their workmen with them from the other side, whilst the Manxman is unemployed.

“Fair Play” talks of a boycott of the Island by the English Press (incidentally one powerful national daily, which claims to have the highest circulation, is just about as unpleasant to the Isle of Man as it can be) to prevent visitors coming over. Perhaps they would also prevent the hosts of waitresses, maids, variety artistes, etc., coming for the season. Contrary to “Fair Play’s” statement, the majority of hotels and boarding houses, especially on the Douglas front, are kept by “come-overs.”

Just as there are a few Manx openly contemptuous at the expense of the “come-over,” so there are those who come to live here, who think themselves superior to the Manx in every way. They usually come to dodge the higher Income Tax on the adjacent Isle, and build hideous jerry bungalows with red roofs, in our beauty spots. Another reason we have for disliking the English is the interference of their Government in our affairs. Apparently, if the Corporation wish to build houses, the English Minister of Health must see the plans. If our Highway Board wish to remove our stone from our quarries, they must pay Britain. Our very mountains and shores are not our own. The Isle of Man shouldered half a million of England’s War Debt (quite justly in my opinion). England renounced these debts to America, but we still pay England. Furthermore, any action by the British Parliament (an action which we may deplore, but in which we have no say) may involve us in unpleasant

consequences, even war. It is too readily forgotten that during the last war, Manxland gave her men on a more generous scale than any other part of the Empire, even England. The spaces left by these Manx men in the Island, are now filled by “come-overs.”

I am prepared to try and forgive the “come-over” all the above, as I realise that it is not their individual faults.

I now come to my real grudge against the come-over, a grudge which I have difficulty in expressing. I am not a racial fanatic of the Hitler type, who objects to a proportion of 1 per cent of Jews in Germany, nor do I consider an occasional Manx child is any the worse for having “imported blood” in him, but I do state that as over 50 per cent, of the inhabitants of this Isle are “come-overs,” or are not pure Manx, the Manx as a race are being wiped out. Just as the Ancient Britons have been wiped out, by conquests, and that even more insidious and certain method—absorption, so are the Manx being exterminated. Our customs, history, heritage, language, characteristics, all are being ridden over, roughshod.

No race in history has been so ruthlessly “polluted” as the Manx have during the past half-century. Our children are taught by “come-over” teachers. No wonder that not one in a thousand knows who Illiam Dhoné was, or could recite one poem by T.E. Brown, or knows anything about his native land. The adults, ruled by “come-over” officials, and ministered to by “come-over” clergy, take no interest in things Manx. The active membership of the few Manx societies prove this. This is a subject upon which I could say a great deal more. The “come-overs” are apt to forget these less material matters. Very few of them become interested in Manx culture. In this respect I might mention Dr Marshall. Mr Sargeant, Col. Madoc—and doubtless a few others, as exceptions.

Thus as a Manxman clutching at the last straw that remains before all that is left of the Manx as an individual race merges into the conglomerate race with no defined source. I seek to differentiate— nay, I claim the privilege of, differentiating myself from “Fair Play,” the pseudo-Manxman of the future, by referring to him as a “come-over.”

MANXMAN.

Pseud [signed as “Manxman”]. “[Letter to the Editor] This ‘Come-Over’ Question.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 7 March 1936: 6e–f.

(6)

To the Editor.

I beg space to reply to “Fair Play’s” letter regarding the term, “come-over.” The expression has received unlimited advertisement recently due to some correspondence in a Manx paper.

“Come-over” cannot be rightly expressed as an offensive word. It is really a short cut for emigrant, and is used all over the world where the Union Jack flies. The Manx people as a rule are great leg-pullers, and a fair amount of British people who visit the Island and reside within its borders, from over seas, never seem to understand the jocular nature of the Manx folk at home who only hit hard when compelled to. As a “come-over” if you like to term it, to the mainland, of 40 odd years, the expression has been used to me hundreds of times. But I do not belong to a thin-skinned breed; I just laugh it off and hit back mildly. “Fair Play’s” idea of the Manx stay-at-homes is quite an error. They are just quiet home folk, who have no desire to travel. Good luck to them all. The Island is a lovely place to reside in, “Fair Play” has found that out after five years. Here’s a 70-years-old poem:

“Here in my lovely cottage home,
Glen Wyllin’s lovely dell,
Without a thought or wish to roam,
In calm content I dwell.”

An Englishman wrote that. And tills “come-over” correspondence will not keep one intending visitor away from the Island; neither will the English Press be foolish enough to boycott the land of my dreams, for there’s money in the game.

The British Isles is not self-supporting as a unit of the big world. We are all dependent on the other fellow’s energy. Here’s a few facts. Last year’s lightning strike was fostered by English money and brains, not Manx. The majority of boarding house keepers and those of hotels are not Manx, look at the names along the Douglas promenade. The Isle of Man Steam Packet Company carry all and sundry, and ask no questions. I agree with “Fair Play” re derelict land on the Island, which could be used for productive purposes, but I saw 100 miles of this over-looked problem on the mainland less than six months ago.

Cheerio, brother “Fair Play,” let not your slumbers be disturbed by trifles light as air.

MUSTARD FOR MANX RIGHTS.

Pseud [signed as “Mustard for Manx Rights”]. “[Letter to the Editor] A ‘Come-over’ in England.” *Isle of Man Weekly Times* 14 March 1936: 16d.

(7)

“FAIR PLAY”

“‘COME-OVER’S’ REPLY”

To the Editor.

In reply to my friends, I wish to thank them for the spirit which they have shown in answer to my letter. I thank “Hats Off” for his very kind feeling about “come-overs.”

“Gone-over” seems to think I may have overlooked the fact that the organiser of that strike was a “come-over.” I am very well acquainted with that man, and from several conversations I had with men concerned, I believe he was either appointed or invited by the Workers’ Union to organise that strike. I think the object was to give it an extra thrust, because there did not appear to be anyone here in authority who had the grit to bring the grievance of the workers to a head, and finish it. In my opinion the men were fully justified to an increase of pay.

“Come-over” says the English are not here to benefit the Manx, only dodge the income-tax. One would wonder what he, as a “come-over,” is here for.

I thank “Manxman,” who has gone into many subjects relating to the history of Manxland and its people. He, like the other two, seems to have dodged the most important point in my letter. In what way can he convince me that the Island is self-supporting enough to do without “come-overs”? He mentions a few names as exceptions. Colonel Madoc, the Chief Constable; no doubt a very fine man. However much he has adapted himself to Manx ways, the fact is not overlooked by the public, that a man of his long experience as a police chief “failed” to provide an efficient police reserve which he could have called upon in a case of emergency for the protection of life and property. Even in our peaceful loving Island it was most essential.

FAIR PLAY.

[Editor’s Note.—This correspondence must now close.]

Pseud [signed as “Fair Play”]. “[Letter to the Editor] ‘Come-over’s’ Reply.”
Isle of Man Weekly Times 14 March 1936: 16d.

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STEPHEN MILLER RBV

