

Feargal unveils his new labour of love

Language activist all set for busy launch spell

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IRISH language activist and Andersonstown News columnist Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh is preparing to launch his new book.

Language, Resistance and Revival: Republican Prisoners and the Irish Language in the North of Ireland will be unveiled in West Belfast before Feargal flies off to the United States for a whirlwind launch tour.

The Upper Springfield man took time out of his increasingly busy schedule to explain a little bit about the book and its theme that has grabbed his attention from a young age.

"My daddy learned Irish when he was interned," he said. "My teachers at Coláiste Feirste and Meánscoil Feirste would have spent time in jail and I always knew there was a connection between the struggle and the revival of the Irish language and it was an area that interested me.

"I got to work on it initially back in 2004 when I chose the same subject as the thesis for my Masters in Irish Language and Literature and I then developed it for a PhD.

"I had little interest in academic research but I did think it was a story that needed to be told."

The book overlaps the popular book on Bobby Sands written by Denis O'Hearn, which attracted the attention of publisher, Pluto Press. As Feargal explained, the years after the 1981 hunger strike saw a dramatic rise in interest in the language and its revival.

"I approached the project with two main threads," he said. "The first is how and why republican prisoners learned Irish. The second is



READ ALL ABOUT IT: Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh will launch his new book on the Irish language in the Cultúrlann next week

the revival of the language in the community post the 1981 hunger strike – why there was an upsurge in interest in the language. The book attempts to pull these strands together and there is a focus on the ideological motivation behind what the prisoners did while they

were incarcerated and later in the community. Much of the motivation is drawn from colonial experience, that was key."

In total, Feargal has interviewed 45 people for the book and renowned criminologist Phil Scraton wrote the foreword. Phil will

be launching the book along with another noted Irish language champion, Jake Mac Siacais, at Coláiste Feirste next week. After the book launch, Feargal will fly to the US for 11 days where he will launch his book in a number of venues on the Eastern seaboard, including

Amherst College in Massachusetts and several locations in New York City. On his return, he will take off around Ireland launching the book in Dublin, Kerry, Armagh and Derry, to name a few locations.

"It's all a bit surreal," admitted Feargal, "but now

I've got a copy in my hand and book launches coming up, I suppose it's finally real."

The launch, open to all, takes place on Thursday (April 18) at 7.30pm at Coláiste Feirste. The book will be available at all bookstores, including the Cultúrlann.

'Magnificent book' is key to understanding of conflict

THE groundbreaking new book, 'Language Resistance and Revival – Republican Prisoners and the Irish Language in the North of Ireland', which has received rave reviews from a range of activists and academics in the fields of Irish history and politics, will be available to buy from next week.

Language, Resistance and Revival tells the untold story of the truly unique developments that took place among republican prisoners in Long Kesh prison from 1972 to 2000. During a period of bitter struggle between republican prisoners and the British state in Long Kesh, the Irish language was taught and spoken as a form of resistance

during incarceration. The book unearths this story and analyses the rejuvenating impact this prison struggle had on the cultural revival in the nationalist community beyond the prison walls, where Irish medium schooling (Gaelscoileanna) underwent significant growth in the aftermath of the 1981 hunger strikes.

Based on unprecedented interviews with both language activists and republican ex-prisoners, author Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, himself a product of the Gaelscoileanna revival movement and whose father was also a republican ex-prisoner, explores a key period in Irish history through the 'insider' accounts of the prominent

players in the Irish language community revival.

Endorsements

Some of the ringing endorsements the book has already received highlights its importance in contributing to our understanding of contemporary Irish history. Prominent sociologist from Binghamton University NY and author of the biography on Bobby Sands, Prof Denis O'Hearn, describes it as a "magnificent book" which "for the first time gives a long history of the Irish language movement and its place in resistance and social transformation" and forms "necessary reading for anyone who wants to understand the

Irish conflict right up to the present day".

That praise was echoed by former IRA hunger striker and playwright Laurence McKeown who described it as an "excellent book" that "tells a story about a community in struggle, a community that rose off its feet, discovered a new voice, a new vocabulary, and began to articulate that new individual and communal identity through a revived language."

Further information on the book is available from www.feargalmac.org/language-resistance-and-revival