

resistance

irish socialist network

NUMBER 17 - SPRING 2013
www.irishsocialist.net

Ireland joins the Scramble for Africa

Andy Storey

As Ireland sends troops to Mali to assist the French-led intervention, some attention has focused on the fact that the intervention is shoring up a Malian army that has a track record of torture and murder. There has also been reference to the question of access to resources such as uranium. But surely Ireland is not motivated by the pursuit of such squalid commercial self-interest? In fact, Ireland's corporate priorities are increasingly prominent in this country's approach to Africa.

In 2011, the Department of Foreign Affairs produced a document entitled Ireland and Africa: Our Partnership with a Changing Continent. This new strategy contained a number of elements that suggested an increasing prioritisation of Irish commercial interests in Africa. For example, the discussion of the World Bank in Africa ignored critiques of its record and instead focused on increasing efforts to ensure that Irish companies get as many contracts as possible to supply goods and services to Bank projects. This ran counter to the document's claimed emphasis on 'building local systems and the capability to deliver local solutions'.

The strategy likewise claimed to be committed to reducing hunger in Africa but did not say how this was compatible with efforts (also highlighted in the document) to promote the sale of Irish food and drink products in Africa. If local production is displaced by such exports, how is African food security advanced? And in view of the contribution of the Irish financial services sector to the Celtic Tiger's collapse and to destabilization of the global economy, how appropriate was it for the strategy to prioritize Irish



financial service exports to African countries? Irish commercial interests already present in Africa were lauded in the strategy: 'The footprint of Irish economic activity has been enhanced by the presence of a small number of multinational companies with strong Irish connections . . . they are brands that would be recognized by many African business people and Government contacts.' But would they be recognized

for the right reasons? For example, Kenmare Resources in Mozambique has been documented avoiding local taxation, while Tullow Oil in Uganda and elsewhere has signed contracts for resource exploration that are far from transparent; it also faces charges of offering bribes to the Ugandan government to help it avoid taxes. This new Irish approach to Africa is equally evident in a consultancy report produced last September for the Irish

Engineering Enterprises Federation (part of IBEC), Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Winning Business in Africa concentrates on how Irish companies might win contracts from international aid donors—the World Bank (again), the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank and the European Development Fund—with a particular focus on the sectors of infrastructure, energy, water and mining. Some €12 billion of potential funding is identified in 11 different African countries. (The record of the European Investment Bank has been the subject of particular criticism on the grounds, amongst others, that it funds environmentally damaging projects).

In the foreword to the 2012 report, Joe Costello TD—Minister of State for Trade and Development—says that 'the Embassy network across Africa will support Irish business'. The report urges close cooperation between Irish companies and ventures such as the EU Water Initiative and the EU Raw Materials Initiative (intended to guarantee European access to vital inputs). Both these initiatives have been heavily criticized for reasons including the advancement of a water privatization agenda that has not delivered improved access to water for recipients, and attempted prohibitions on the use by African governments of export taxes on raw materials as development tools. Unsurprisingly, such EU initiatives do more to promote European commercial interests than the interests of African users of water or suppliers of raw materials. Just as Irish military involvement in Mali is designed to support the foreign policy and commercial objectives of large EU powers like France, so also is Irish policy towards Africa more generally coming to follow a corporate agenda.



Inside this issue

Venezuela after Chávez



Flag Protests



Launching the UNITED LEFT

After the ULA—what comes next?

Join the Resistance

Interested in the ideas and views you've read? Would you like to help to increase the circulation of Resistance? We are looking for people to distribute the Resistance freshsheet throughout Ireland; if you can regularly put copies in a shop (or two) near you, or if you want some copies to give to your friends, then please contact us at

Irishsocialistnetwork@dublin.ie
Spread the word!



Getting the party started

Clare Daly

Over 46 per cent of Irish voters support the formation of a new party, according to a recent Sunday Independent poll. Confirmation—if any were needed—of the enormous vacuum that exists in Irish society and the widespread hatred of the political establishment, which does not find an outlet in any of the main parties. Support for Labour continues to plummet as people pay them back for their betrayals—remember the promises to not touch child benefit, not to introduce water charges, and to ‘burn the bondholders’? As more and more people struggle to make ends meet, any hope that things might get better under the new government is fast disappearing. Two years ago people voted for change, but what they got was more of the same from Fine Gael and Labour. The lesson is simple: if you want things to change in this country, then you need to get active. There are no white knights coming over the hill to save the day. Austerity and neo-liberal policies are tearing the heart out of society. This is a race to the bottom, a war against the welfare state—the idea that everyone is entitled to a roof over our heads, a job, a basic standard of living, access to health

and education regardless of means, and a decent pension when we retire is now presented as a luxury that we cannot afford. Yet those at the top are getting richer. On a world scale the gap in earnings between the top 10 per cent and the bottom 10 per cent is 14 times greater than it was 25 years ago. There is more wealth in existence than at any previous time in history: it is just concentrated in fewer hands. It's time to take it back. Instead of imposing a new home tax, the government could have chosen to increase income tax on those earning over €100,000: a mere 3 per cent hike would net them the same amount of revenue. A paltry 1.5 per cent increase in corporation tax—already one of the lowest in Europe—would do the same. They have choices but will continue to choose to target ordinary people, until we organize against them. The Labour Party was founded in humble beginnings to represent the interests of working-class people. A year later, the 1913 lock-out led by Jim Larkin's new trade union brought workers to the streets in the greatest movement of industrial militancy in our history. A century later, the parallels are striking. New unions and new parties are needed for the road ahead. The left in Ireland has failed to take

advantage of the crisis. The United Left Alliance, which brought together activists from established left groups before the last general election, was a positive step forward, but it failed to achieve its potential. Bringing together groups with a different history was never going to be easy. But rather than pooling their strength in the interest of taking the movement forward, the existing groups tried to out-recruit each other to the detriment of the bigger project. But that project remains. Activists in the ULA are determined to keep this project alive. The United Left will be launched as a broad-based, bottom-up alternative to give trade unionists and community activists the chance to come together and push the struggle forward. We don't have all the answers but we hope that we are asking the right questions. The establishment and their media are hell-bent on trying to discredit the idea of an alternative. They attack us because they are fearful of people organising. Don't be intimidated: we are only beaten when we stop fighting. This is a weak, unpopular government. It's time to take them on.

Clare Daly is the ULA TD for Dublin North

what we stand for

The Irish Socialist Network is a radical democratic socialist organisation, committed to the complete abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist society, by which we mean:

- A transformation of power relationships, leading to democratic control of all aspects of society and an end to elite rule.
- Collective ownership and democratic control of all economic structures, wealth and resources, by the working class.
- Equality of all people and an end to all forms of privilege and discrimination.
- Vindication of all human rights: social, political and individual.
- A sustainable society, developing in harmony with the natural environment.

The Irish Socialist Network works to achieve this society on the basis of the following principles: change is brought about by the empowerment of ordinary people not by a revolutionary vanguard or parliamentary elite.

- Openness, equality, internal democracy, consistent activism and a commitment to class politics are essential traits of a socialist organisation.
- Non-dogmatic Marxist thought is essential for analysing society and advancing the struggle for socialism.
- While acknowledging differences, we will work in a non-sectarian manner with, and promote dialogue between, all socialist and progressive organisations.
- A key component of socialism is internationalism in the struggle for justice, equality and the defence of the environment.

web links

INDYMEDIA IRELAND

Independent news and postings, by activists and for activists. An indispensable resource.
www.indymedia.ie

ANTI-WAR IRELAND

A national, democratic, non-hierarchical antiwar organisation in which the ISN participates. Has branches in Dublin, Belfast and Cork, and can be contacted by emailing

info@antiwarireland.org
www.antiwarireland.org

IRELAND PALESTINE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

It is what it says on the tin – a national and very active organisation for Palestine solidarity activists.

www.ipsc.ie

HANDS OFF THE PEOPLE OF IRAN

A newly formed campaign that aims to mobilise people in opposition to US plans to attack Iran. Critical of the reactionary Iranian government.

www.hopoi.org

CHOICE IRELAND

A campaign formed to advocate abortion rights in Ireland. Believes in a woman's right to choose.

www.choiceireland.blogspot.com

SHELL TO SEA

Set up to support the people of Erris, Co. Mayo, in their struggle to fend off Shell's government-supported plans to build a dangerous gas pipeline in a scenic part of rural Ireland. Very active on a national basis.

www.corribsos.com

RESIDENTS AGAINST RACISM

Dublin-based and long-standing anti-racism organisation that is particularly active in opposing government misbehaviour. A vibrant and committed group.

www.residentsagainstracism.org

INDEPENDENT WORKERS UNION

A small union, containing many activists of a socialist disposition. Strongly opposed to social partnership, it organises particularly among lower-paid workers and immigrants.

A campaigning, left-wing trade union. Headquarters is in Cork.

www.union.ie

RED BANNER

An independent socialist magazine that has been produced regularly for the past 10 years. Always worth a read.

www.redbannermagazine.com



The enigma of Hugo Chávez

Ed Walsh (ISN)

The death of Hugo Chávez set off a torrent of bullshit in the western media, as if the journalists responsible were trying to re-live a decade of lying about Venezuela, all crammed into one week. Tearing itself away from the job of slobbering over Bono, Barack Obama and the British royal family, RTÉ joined the fray with gusto: Aine Lawlor, Pat Kenny and Marian Finucane all found time to give Chávez a kick on his way out. Further afield, supposedly liberal publications like the Guardian were as keen to vilify the late Venezuelan president as any Fox News anchor. One of the most irritating things about this blather is that it obliges left-wingers to spend much of their time refuting obvious lies about Venezuela and other Latin American states, when we should be having a serious discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the Chávez government and its regional allies. The premature

death of Hugo Chávez means that we will never know for sure how things would have panned out if he had remained healthy and active for another decade or more. His critics—when they were not claiming that Venezuela was already ruled by a dictatorship—argued that sooner or later, Chávez would become a despot, clinging on to power against the will of his people. Now that argument can never be proved or disproved: all that we can say is that Venezuela was, by any reasonable standard, a more democratic country after ten years of Chavista rule than it had been under the old two-party oligarchy.

Another puzzle will remain unsolved. In the second half of his presidency, Chávez frequently spoke about '21st century socialism' and condemned the capitalist system. Yet Venezuela is still without doubt a capitalist country today. Most of the economy remains under private control. While a number of companies were taken into state ownership, this kind of nationalization

has happened before in Europe and even the USA without capitalism being undermined. There were also some promising experiments in workers' self-management, but this model was never applied across the whole economy. The social reforms that were carried out under Chávez led to tremendous gains for the popular classes in terms of reducing poverty and illiteracy and improving public health. The danger is that such gains may prove vulnerable to counter-attack by capitalist elites as long as they retain their economic power.

If he had lived, would Chávez have acted on his rhetoric and led the Bolivarian revolution to a stage beyond capitalism? Impossible to say. One thing is certain, however: he never would have been able to accomplish this task on his own, without popular mobilization on an even greater scale than we have seen in Venezuela over the past decade. The future path of the country will depend on whether those who supported Chávez remain

organized and vigilant, with their own social movements—ready to support every positive move by the government, but also ready to challenge backward steps if and when they come. Salvation has never come from above and it never will. The same logic applies to countries like Bolivia and Ecuador that have also attracted the sympathy of the international left. Recognition of the progress that has been made in those countries should not blind us to the shortcomings and contradictions of their governments.

For the European left, the example of Latin America has never seemed more relevant, with the 'peripheral' states of the Eurozone—Ireland, Portugal, Greece and now Cyprus—subject to vicious austerity programmes imposed by the European Central Bank and the IMF. The demonization of Chávez surely betrays a fear that people will learn from the example of countries like Venezuela that have successfully defied the orthodoxy.

After the ULA—what comes next?

Henry Silke

Lately there has been a re-alignment of sorts on the Irish Left. The still-born United Left Alliance didn't live up to its early potential after winning five seats in the 2011 election. Those seats were won by long-serving political activists after decades of work; indeed, two of the successful candidates were former TDs. Yet there was a certain excitement surrounding the alliance and openness towards it far beyond its component parts. The main components of the ULA were the Socialist Party and the People Before Profit Alliance. The PBPA is itself a coalition dominated by the Socialist Workers' Party, although a substantial group within the PBPA was organized around Joan Collins, an ex-SP member who was elected to the Dáil in 2011. The third main founding organization was the Tipperary-based Workers and Unemployed Action Group, which had an impressive local electoral base.

What went wrong? Within two years, both the WUAG and the SP had walked away from the ULA. Clare Daly, the second SP TD, had resigned from her

party, prompting a lengthy and acrimonious media campaign against her by her ex-comrades. The SWP, while nominally still affiliated, have long since abandoned the project and re-launched People Before Profit as a direct rival. There were many problems which we do not have time to go into here but in short the ULA never developed towards a party structure, which made it a very brittle when put under any pressure. When a scandal broke involving Mick Wallace—a developer turned TD who avoided tax and workers' pension payments and was close to the SP's Clare Daly—the ULA was not able to withstand it.

But the underlying structural problems long preceded the Wallace affair. The SP believed—very early on—that the ULA hadn't attracted enough members and opposed any movement towards it becoming a party. It seemed to attach no value to the uniting of the left (including unaffiliated leftists) under a political banner. While happy to keep the ULA going solely as a loose electoral alliance, the SP all but abandoned on-the-ground ULA work. There is a chicken-and-egg problem here as the SP

didn't want to move towards a party until enough people joined, while at the same time fewer people were likely to join—and in fact many left—due to the ULA not progressing. For their part the SWP soon became frustrated when they realized they didn't have the level of control they were accustomed to.

ULA decision-making processes didn't include the rank-and-file of either SP or SWP who had no voice on the steering committee bar the usual leadership figures (who don't generally include the membership in decision-making outside annual conference). Only the independents had elected representation on the steering committee. Meanwhile, the sectarian culture between the two main groups did not change at all. Every issue—even a major EU referendum—had rival campaigns and meetings: one by the ULA, one by the SP and one by the SWP, with the ULA ironically being the poor cousin of the other two.

The remaining forces inside the ULA are attempting to salvage something by creating a United Left pole which will involve Clare Daly and Joan Collins, Declan Bree's Sligo activist group, the Irish Socialist Network, Socialist

Democracy and the few remaining independents. Their aim is to work towards building a multi-tendency broad-left political party in the here and now. The structures of the United Left are extremely democratic on paper, though there is still an issue about the autonomy of the two TDs. Only practice will tell if the branch structures and council will work.

A second, more political problem is the question of Dáil alliances. Both Collins and Daly have worked closely with Mick Wallace and another TD, Luke 'Ming' Flanagan. Wallace has little credibility due to his tax avoidance. Recently the four TDs—with the help of police whistle-blowers—launched a campaign to expose the fact that the great and good in Ireland were being excused from driving penalty points in a corrupt fashion. Yet it soon emerged that Luke Flanagan himself had been excused on two separate occasions. Alliances with discredited TDs will merely impede the growth of the United Left amongst present and potential activists.

Henry Silke is a member of the ULA's Dublin Central branch

Bordering on absurdity

Colin Couker

Martyn Turner once published a cartoon that captured the absurd imperatives of Northern Irish political life. A researcher was canvassing opinion in a working-class neighbourhood and posed the immortal question: 'Under which constitutional arrangement would you prefer to be unemployed?' The look of bewilderment on the jobless respondent's face was the entirely reasonable response of someone confronted with the nonsense of a political culture that elevates the immaterial priorities of nation over the profoundly material priorities of class.

It was hard not to think of that when Sinn Féin recently unveiled a dog-eared project which they sought to pass off as radical and fresh. Their 'big idea' is to invoke the clause of the Belfast Agreement that allows for a referendum on the future of Northern Ireland. Gerry Adams engaged in a brazenly self-serving interpretation of recent census data to argue that shifts in population and attitudes have created the conditions for ending partition. The calling of a 'border poll' would clear the way for a united Ireland that would be equitable and prosperous—a new society in which, presumably, there would be Kia Provos for all. The demand for a referendum addresses none of the principal concerns of ordinary people anywhere on this island. If a border poll were to be called, it would simply be another way of asking Northern Irish workers to identify the constitutional arrangements under which they would prefer to endure high unemployment, poor pay, and record levels of child poverty. The

sense that Sinn Féin's 'initiative' is a distraction from other, more pressing issues is heightened by the fact that there is little prospect of a referendum producing the outcome Republicans desire. Regardless of the liberties that Adams takes with the census data, the numbers don't add up.

The most respected opinion poll in the six counties suggests that while unionists remain resolutely opposed to a united Ireland, nationalists have become increasingly ambivalent: just one third of Catholics in the region would prefer Irish unity and two out of five even appear to find the idea objectionable. This ambivalence owes a great deal to the political economy of the region. Three decades of direct rule created a large and affluent nationalist middle class whose privilege remains undiminished in the era of devolution. While well-heeled nationalists clearly do not see themselves as British in cultural terms, the prospect of remaining British citizens for the foreseeable future does not appear to be keeping them awake at night. It would have been difficult to persuade middle-class nationalists to opt for a united Ireland when the southern boom was in full swing. That possibility may have disappeared altogether now that the Irish state teeters on the brink of ruin.

It is thus hard to see Sinn Féin's border poll wheeze as anything more than a sleight of hand—a seemingly radical gesture to placate the rank and file as the party hierarchy becomes rather comfortable administering British rule and serving corporate interests at

Stormont. Regardless of its motivation, the timing of the referendum call was especially unfortunate: it raised temperatures just when the heat seemed to be going out of another, equally pointless exercise in flag waving.

Few moments have captured the fragility of the post-conflict settlement more vividly than the protests sparked by a decision to limit the flying of the Union Jack over Belfast City Hall. That young unionists from some of the most deprived communities on these islands can only vent their alienation through the most reactionary forms of British nationalism shows the urgent need for genuinely socialist ideas and organisation in the six counties. The spectacle was made even more dispiriting by the nauseating response on social media of many erstwhile progressives from the South upon discovering what a working-class Belfast accent can do to vowels. The heady brew of sectarian and class prejudice summoned by the verbal meme 'fleg' was perhaps to be expected though. Contempt for working-class unionists is a prejudice that can often be aired without sanction in the most liberal of Dublin gatherings.

Nationalism—whether British or Irish—has nothing to offer workers in the six counties other than division and distraction. At a time when many working-class children on either side of the border are going to school on an empty stomach, it is worth remembering that a flag makes for a very poor breakfast.

Nelson's pillar of greed

Sráid Marx—
www.irishmarxism.net

The news that the Stormont Executive is going to abolish the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is deeply symbolic. So is the fact that this is being done at the behest of Nelson McCausland, a minister from Ian Paisley's DUP. Paisley opposed the formation of the Housing Executive four decades ago and has finally got what he wanted. The executive was widely seen as the single biggest victory of the civil rights campaign when it was established in 1971. Until then, public housing had largely been allocated by local authorities on political grounds. This corralled Catholics into areas which allowed electoral boundaries to produce Protestant majorities in Catholic towns—Derry being the most notorious example. The demand of the civil rights campaign was that housing should be allocated fairly according to need through a points system. The solution was the creation of an agency independent of direct political control. The Housing Executive was by and large seen as a success and houses were allocated on the basis of points accumulated by applicants. At its height, 200,000 households were tenants of the Executive. By one obvious criterion, however, the Housing Executive was a failure. Set up to counter sectarianism, it presided over a housing stock almost completely segregated into Protestant and Catholic estates.

In many ways this was not the fault of the organisation or its staff, but it showed the limits of state reform. Cuts in state support and sale of the stock of social housing has reduced its role and now it has only 90,000 households as tenants. Lack of funding has become a major problem but more funding would not solve its biggest problem. The creation of the Housing Executive was the result of a campaign for democratic rights but its existence was justified precisely because it was supposed to be immune from democratic decisions. The re-introduction of local 'democracy' was bound to threaten its existence: this new 'democracy' has once again demonstrated the sectarian character of politics in the North.

All state bodies are more or less unaccountable and this lack of accountability sooner or later breeds cor-

ruption. The Housing Executive has been embroiled in scandals over procurement of maintenance services; most recently, the DUP lobbied on behalf of one particular maintenance firm. The Audit Office found 'serious weaknesses' in the management of Housing Executive contracts worth more than £200m, involving poor and bogus work. The report claimed the executive was exposed to fraud because of major problems in the oversight of work carried out by contractors—particularly by the one on whose behalf the DUP lobbied. The only effective antidote to corruption is democracy but in the North of Ireland that means the DUP!

Housing is already becoming more and more of a sectarian carve-up, even with the Housing Executive still in place. Plans for a site in north Belfast vacated by the British Army involve a development which has nothing to do with meeting the housing requirements of those local people with the most acute needs. This would require an allocation to mainly Catholic applicants but the electoral arithmetic in the constituency threatens the future of the local DUP MP so everything must be done to maximize the Protestant population and minimize the Catholic one. Social housing based on a fair calculation of need threatens this sectarian calculation. We are back to the 1960s except we have learned a few things. State bureaucracy is not the answer to sectarianism. It doesn't prevent it and inevitably falls into corruption. There is therefore no point in socialists demanding retention of a discredited bureaucratic institution which has failed to prevent housing apartheid.

The trade unions have focused on the threat to jobs and of privatization but have not highlighted the main reason for the change—making sectarian discrimination easier. The sharing of sectarian privileges in the Stormont Executive means that while this appears currently to be of benefit to Protestants, a new Minister would be perfectly free to discriminate the other way. Housing then becomes subject to arbitrary sectarian judgments for both Protestants and Catholics. The changes to housing are part and parcel of welfare changes from which no one will benefit. Socialists should campaign against Nelson McCausland's plans but demand that tenants themselves—along with housing staff—should have control.



Nelson bangs the sectarian drum again

Title: Resistance, No. 17

Organisation: Irish Socialist Network

Date: 2013

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit www.leftarchive.ie

The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to us, in addition to the original creators. For republication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to The Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.