

THE IRISH NATION



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DEFENDING IRISH NEUTRALITY

Following the foundation of the Irish State in 1922, the issue of Irish neutrality in relation to a major international military conflict first arose in 1939 when Britain and France declared war on Germany. At that time, the State was still a member of the Commonwealth and, while other members of that association also declared war on Germany, it was decided by the Dáil not to do likewise. Thus the position assumed was that of non-belligerence or, as otherwise expressed, neutrality.

Post-War Situation

When NATO was formed in 1949, it was decided by the, by then, Irish Republic not to join and thus neutrality was effectively maintained. The question of actual departure from a stance of neutrality next began to arise in the context of developing defence and security cooperation and proposals for same within what is now called the European Union. As a result, the Irish Constitution was amended in 2002 (Article 29, section 4, subsection 9) to provide that: “The State shall not adopt a decision taken by the European Council to establish a common defence pursuant to Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union where that common defence would include the State.” Along with that, there are the amendments to the



Defence Act of 1954 which provide that Irish participation in UN peacekeeping missions require, along with a government decision, a UN Security Council resolution (or one by the UN General Assembly) and an enabling resolution of Dáil Éireann.

The latter provisions have come to be known as the “triple lock”. However, there may be no constitutional (not consensually agreed) or statutory barrier to joining NATO, although, currently, any such membership would have to be construed alongside the triple lock.

Programme for Government

In 2020, the Programme for Government made the following commitments.

“The Government will ensure that all overseas operations will be conducted in line with our position of military neutrality and will be subject to a triple lock of UN, Government and Dáil Éireann approval.

“Ireland’s participation in PESCO [Permanent Structured Cooperation] projects will be maintained on an ‘opt-in’ basis, with contributions being entirely voluntary. Any projects undertaken within PESCO will be approved by Cabinet and Dáil Éireann.

“The Government will not participate in projects that are incompatible with our policy of active military neutrality and non-membership of military alliances.

“Within the context of the European Peace Facility [EPF], Ireland will not be part of decision-making or funding for lethal force weapons for non-peace-keeping purposes.”

Triple Lock

Although the recent public forums on neutrality organised by the Government seemed to have backfired for them in the light of the reactions from participants on the floor to perceived threats to neutrality, and also taking account of opinion polls which show a massive support among the people for the policy, the fear is that the Government will still try to press ahead with amendment of the triple lock so as to remove the necessity for UN sanction in connection with overseas commitments.

Cynical advantage is being taken of the Russo-Ukrainian war and Russia's membership of the Security Council to justify such an action. This is so even though there is no significant record of Russia exercising its veto on any proposed UN operation over the years. We must be on the lookout for any move in this direction and, if need be, organise vigorously against it.

Thin End of Wedge?

Apart from that, there is a serious doubt as to how far the Irish involvement since 2020 in PFP [Partnership for Peace], PESCO, EPF and coordinated defence procurement is in fact consistent with the policy of neutrality and these involvements need to be seriously reconsidered. Moreover, there are questions about Irish involvement in EU Battle Groups. These participations may be intended as the thin end of the wedge as regards the full abandonment of Irish neutrality.

The Austrian Precedent

On the other hand, from time to time, it has been advocated that Irish neutrality

should be both defined and enshrined in the Constitution. A precedent for this is the situation in Austria. The essential constitutional terms there are: “Austria declares ... her perpetual neutrality.”; and “Austria will not join any military alliances and will not permit the establishment of any foreign military bases on her territory.” Austria interprets these provisions further, as necessary, according to international law as outlined in the Hague Convention of 1907 concerning “Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers”. The latter are incompatible with the use which has been made of Shannon Airport by the US military (Article 5). Insofar as that is the case, it should be pointed out that the assertion by the Minister for Foreign Affairs that we are militarily neutral, just because we are not in a military alliance, is therefore not a completely accurate statement.

Military and Political Neutrality

In public debates about Irish neutrality, it has been asserted that there is a difference between military neutrality and political neutrality. This is in fact the case insofar as the policy of neutrality by a State, as generally understood, does not conflict with it adopting a position such as in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine whereby this has been rightly denounced, taking account of basic morality, international law, national sovereignty and popular democracy.

However, a clear distinction must be maintained between not necessarily being neutral politically, while decidedly being neutral militarily. There is a tendency by some people to attempt the *non sequitur* of the first being portrayed as requiring negation of the second. Moreover, one wonders why the Establishment keeps on saying that we are not politically neutral when nobody is

suggesting that we are; they are in fact just knocking down their own Aunt Sally and thus trying to distract from the fact that we are not fully militarily neutral. It seems we are being subtly prepared for the abandonment of military neutrality, at least in connection with an EU defence dimension.

Denigration of Neutrality

Otherwise, there have been various efforts made over the years to denigrate the policy of Irish neutrality. First of all, it has been said that the State is free-riding on NATO whereby it benefits from a defence umbrella provided by that organisation's nuclear and conventional forces. But it has not been demonstrated what invasional attack the Irish State needs to be concerned about and is being protected from. More recently, the line has been put out that

the State should participate in structures for the defence of the European Union of which it is a member. But it should be remembered that the EU is not the European Federal State which some people would like it to be and is still essentially a free trade area with an accompanying internal economic market. If some member States feel that there is a threat to their security, presumably in current circumstances, from the Russian Federation, it is a matter for them to make national and international arrangements accordingly, some of which may be met by them through NATO, if they so wish. It is not a legitimate expectation of neutrals such as Austria, Ireland and Malta to have them get involved in the resultant military alliances, especially when their own national security is not at risk'.

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The question of Irish defence policy is very much in the news nowadays and is also linked to the consideration of neutrality. The latter issue is dealt with specifically in the preceding article. Here, we want to look at defence policy in its own right.

The Defence Forces Today

The Irish Defence Forces consist of three components: the Army, the Naval Service and the Air Corps. The Army is the largest of the three and, in practice, its main functions in the State have been to aid the civil power in policing

activity when need be, and to help in emergencies such as when there is flood or storm damage. Otherwise, it is distinguished by the tasks that it carries out in UN peace keeping operations. The Naval Service is engaged in protecting Irish waters as regards fisheries and also has an emergency assistance role. The Air Corps mainly consists in emergency relief activities and additionally is responsible for transport of government personnel within Ireland and abroad.

World War II

In any country which has defence forces, it is usually envisaged that their primary purpose is to protect the State against foreign incursions or interference of any kind. The last time when this became a serious issue for the Irish State was during World War II. Then, there were potential threats from both Britain and Germany. In the first case, in the absence of the State declaring

war on Germany along with it, there was a danger that Britain would at least attempt to seize the 'treaty ports' (Spike Island, Berehaven, Lough Swilly) transferred to the Irish government in 1938, if not make forays into the country more generally. The British actually drew up plans for an Irish invasion, should that be considered ultimately necessary.

However, not having forgotten the War of Independence, it was concluded by their military authorities that a premature invasion of the Irish State would in fact end up in British forces being sucked into a guerilla quagmire. Germany also had plans to possibly invade Ireland as a way of attacking Britain from behind.

After the outbreak of the war in September 1939, the Irish State placed almost 150,000 men under arms, either in the front line or reserve. In fact, there were a number of incidents during the war when some German bombs were dropped within the State. However, these were accidental and arose from mistakes which the Luftwaffe made in seeking to carry out attacks on Belfast (because of the shipyards there) and Britain.

Are Defence Forces Necessary?

Currently, there are those who raise questions about the necessity of further expense on Irish defence beyond that which is provided for at present. They comment on the lack of perceived threats to the Irish State. The Russians are not likely to appear offshore and the British do not appear to be preparing for another invasion. The RAF is looking after our airspace and, besides, the only thing we need to be worried about, catastrophists tell us, is a nuclear war which will wipe us all out anyway. In the meanwhile, flower-power people advise

we should instead spend more money on the likes of hospitals and schools and forget about the defence forces. Indeed, in view of these attitudes, one wonders why such people regard any defence forces as necessary at all, beyond reducing the unemployment pool.

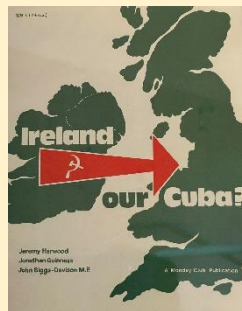
Of course, there was a similar state of mind among some in the 1930s. Who would have thought then that in just over twenty years from the end of the First World War, Germany would have risen again, subjugated France and knocked Britain for six at Dunkirk? It was completely unforeseen.

Contingency Planning

And it is the unforeseen that one has to prepare for in defence policy as well as any danger which is immediately perceivable on the horizon. There have been all sorts of unforeseen developments in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Among other things, there have been the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, not to mention the Russo-Ukrainian War. As we write, Ukraine is clearly trying to provoke a Russo-Nato war with its symbolic drone attacks on Moscow. If one were actually to break out, there would then perhaps be a danger of a Russian strike on Shannon with drones or missiles and we would be irresponsible to rely on the British to protect us from that. We refer more to that below in respect of the necessity to have an intercept capacity.

Independence and Defence

Any independent State which is established should automatically provide for its defence no matter how unclear as to when it should be essential for that to



come into effect. Switzerland is a good example here. The last time it was attacked was in 1798 by the French. Nonetheless, to this day, the Swiss have ensured that, both in terms of its formal defence forces and the citizenry in general, it is fully prepared for resistance should any attempt be made to violate its neutrality. The Third Reich drew up a prospectus for Operation Tannebaum to invade Switzerland along with Italy, but eventually concluded that a prolonged Alpine war would be too difficult, given Swiss preparations to resist. Switzerland is in reality a model which the Irish State should generally look to.

Threats?

In any event, if one were to speculate as to where a direct threat to Irish sovereignty could come from in this century, one need look no further than towards the traditional enemy. Imagine a radical left-wing and anti-imperialist party such as Sinn Féin assuming power in Dublin and a majority vote in the North led by Sinn Féin opting for Irish reunification, with perhaps a certain amount of ensuing unrest in the Six Counties, or parts thereof. Is it completely beyond the bounds of possibility that a British government, if led by Tories, would seek to interfere in some way, just as they did historically in urging the Free State bombardment of the Four Courts in 1922 under threat of renewed intervention otherwise in Ireland?

Or envisage the British Establishment developing a new paranoia as regards Russia when witnessing its navy operating in Irish economic waters and otherwise probably mapping ocean floor communication cables off our West coast.

As far as the Eighties, serious elements of British Toryism, up to and including the likes of NI Secretary of State, James Prior, warned about the dangers of an Irish Cuba, no matter how ridiculous we might have considered such ideas. It was, however, a valuable insight into the British Establishment mindset.

Some strategic thinkers, no less, consider that the scenario is for a general war to in fact occur soon in Europe between Russia and NATO, with an eye needed on China as to how it would react to same. Obviously, this is being thought about in the light of the current Ukrainian conflict alluded to above.

Those who tell us Switzerland is a special case because it last found itself threatened as it was then in the centre of a fascist Europe should contemplate that, if there were a Russo-Nato War, Ireland would be right in the centre of the Euro-Atlantic battle zone.

Therefore, anybody who thinks we are at last living in a generally stable Europe with no conceivably potential threat to Irish sovereignty is not mentally inhabiting planet earth. One is not talking about being able to defeat the Americans, British or Russians, but of a WW II rerun at a new level of us making it unattractive, with all the modern means at our disposal, for any occupation of Irish territory to be contemplated by anybody.

Action on Defence

So, what exactly should be done about Irish defence? If one were to draw inspiration from the Swiss example, while not necessarily simply following it in detail, a number of steps could be taken.

To start with, the core of a professional army for front-line immediate, resistance should be complemented by a part-time voluntary militia which all

able-bodied citizens would be encouraged to join. This militia would be a reserve force, rather like that instituted during World War II. Annual training sessions could be given in the use of small arms and weaponry (such as shoulder-held anti-tank rockets and in utilisation of drones) and general instruction take place in guerilla warfare. The arms concerned could be stored in local centres for distribution in a case of emergency. (As for expenditure considerations, this measure in particular would involve relatively little cost.) The focus of the army would likewise be on ultimate guerilla resistance beyond any initial open frustration of an intruder.

The provision of vehicular equipment and general materiel for the army should be adequate towards the tasks envisaged and much of it nowadays can be remote controlled, not least with a view to protecting the lives of defence personnel. What this would require in terms of artillery would have to be considered. An important component of modern warfare has proved to be drones. These come in a range of sophistication for surveillance and attack and, again, are, by definition, remote controlled.

In the 21st century, we appreciate only too well how cyber attacks can be a major feature of warfare. This should be regarded as a crucial area for heavy investment and have the benefit of multilateral protection including in peacetime against criminals as the recent experience of the HSE showed. It also provides a David-like opportunity for a deterrence counter-attack against any threatening Goliath. Cyber capability is

not confined to defence or attack as regards land-based computer centres, but is also important in disabling the equipment of assault operations by an enemy. Laser strike capability will also become increasingly of value here.

An Irish Air Force

Turning to the aerial dimension, it is not acceptable that defence for any of this should depend on the RAF (of all sources!). Appropriate equipment should be obtained for what would be a proper Irish Air Force. How far this would necessitate suitable jet aircraft and how far advanced drones is a matter for assessment. (This highlights a psychological aspect of Irish defence, namely national dignity and self-respect which has a bearing on an important



feature of protective capacity, namely morale in general. It is something of which some self-righteous sophisticates in the chattering classes

have no sense. (One thinks of the words of Wolfe Tone writing in 1790 about Irish neutrality when he cautioned against seeking to “skulk under the protection of England.”) An effective surface-to-air missile shield also needs to be installed. Laser technology could further come into play here.

An Irish Navy

As for the Naval Service, its surface capability for at least fishery protection and policing against the likes of drug smuggling needs to be adequately maintained as well as for initial deterrence in any conflict situation. A small-scale submarine capacity off the Atlantic coast and in the Irish Sea, yet again

perhaps relying upon drones, would probably be the most effective contribution in Irish circumstances. This would relate both to straightforward defence and protection of cable links.

Cyber Capability

Central to all of this, there should be established a Cyber Research And Defence Agency (CRADA) and an Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Drones Unit (AIRDU). The first, dealing with both civil and military perspectives, should both keep abreast of international research and undertake projects of its own. This would feed into the second which would be responsible for innovative and imaginative practical applications. The launch of a small satellite also could probably be contracted from a commercial source. This is the real future of military activity which can be undertaken at nothing like the expenditure needed to model ourselves, even on a scaled down basis, on the current types of defence capabilities of larger powers. Moreover, the military operations involved entail much less threat to the human lives of all personnel.

Expenditure

A significant aspect of such technologies is that they do not involve the expenditures that would be demanded by trying to imitate some of the systems of the big powers even to a limited extent. This is true both in terms of hardware and not having to expensively train specialist personnel such as jet pilots and highly skilled combat operatives

Ethos of Defence Preparedness

In addition to this, the Government should seek to cultivate the ethos of a vigorous citizenry robustly prepared to

defend the nation when need be. There is a memory to build on stretching from the mythical Fianna through stout Gaelic resistance, up to physical force republicanism from the time of Wolfe Tone and on to the War of Independence, which generates a tradition that is a matter of pride and honour, and which should sustain a spirit of democratic militancy throughout the nation. As part of this, the regular Defence Forces should be given the public respect and acknowledgement which they deserve.

Opposition to Proper Defence

Of course, the flower-power people and catastrophists will protest against all of this.

The first will dismiss the need for national security and continue to counter-

pose the likes of welfare expenditure against outlay on defence. They also seem to be suspicious at times of the money spent on museums, art galleries, concert halls and theatres; surely such

high falutin' enterprises ought not to diminish what is available for medicine and care. But, in a civilized society, the aim is to provide for both, and likewise for defence. Such persons would be better put to arguing for more taxes on the rich and more efficient management of public expenditure. Yet, that could mean that some of them might have less income or not so cushy jobs.

The catastrophists, for their part, seem never to have heard of 'MAD' - Mutually Assured Destruction - whereby the nuclear powers know full well that a nuclear war cannot be started and won without destroying virtually everybody. That is why they have not been used since Hiroshima and Nagasaki or in the Ukraine conflict and Xi Jin Ping has told Putin that he is not to



think about it, even on a tactical level. That is apart from the fact that, anyway, radiation fallout cannot be guaranteed not to fall on Moscow. There is a rough analogy with the use of gas in the First World War and none in the Second. The threat of war has not gone away as we can see, but it is likely to continue to be 'conventional', albeit on an increasingly sophisticated and deadly basis. The catastrophists are like the religious fanatics who repair to the tops of mountains on occasion to await the divine apocalypse.

More generally, some self-styled peaceniks will bleat on about 'militarism'. However, they cannot distinguish between a Prussian-like warrior cult and organised preparedness for potential resistance by a people which has learned all too well about imperialist aggression. Perhaps they should also tell the Vietnamese and others like them to disband their defence forces, because

we now exist in such a benign and secure world.

Tone's Advice

Let us once more recall the advice of Wolfe Tone when, referring to military matters, he wrote: "everything is beneficial to Ireland that throws us on our own strength. We should then look to our internal resources, and scorn to sue for protection to any foreign State; we should spurn the idea of moving a humble satellite round any power, however great." The flower-power people and catastrophists effectively subscribe to the Redmondite model of a flaccid and dependent Ireland in contrast to the Toneite one of a robust and stalwart nation.

At the end of the day, the aim should rightly be to build a militant democracy and a proudly personed *Fortified Ireland* which, like all fortifications, will resolutely defy and deter interference or incursions. ●

UNIONISM ON THE DEFENSIVE

The recent visit by American President Joe Biden to Ireland highlighted a most unattractive, but nonetheless undeniable, trait of Ulster Loyalism. While most societies around the world and Irish society in particular seek to be welcoming, friendly and accommodating to visiting foreign dignitaries (particularly if they are seeking their Foreign Direct Investment), the opposite appears to be the case with Ulster Loyalists who seem to revel in the role of 'neighbour from hell' and display their most bilious, cantankerous and dyspeptic qualities for the all world to see.

Former DUP First Minister Arlene Foster claimed during his visit that President Biden "hated the UK". Elements of the Tory press in Britain viewed the visit through similar 'orange tinted glasses' Nile Gardiner, a former advisor to Margaret Thatcher, in passing comment on Biden's cursory meeting with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, while embarking in a four-day visit to the Republic "gravely insulted Britain." He claimed that by declining to attend King Charles' coronation Biden was "putting two fingers up to the monarchy" and showed sneering arrogance and disrespect to Britain. This, however, ignores the fact that no sitting US

President has ever attended the coronation of a British Monarch.¹

Insults for All

Of course, it is not only President Biden that Unionism goes out of its way to insult and show disrespect to. Soon after her election on 9th November 2020, former Deputy leader of the UUP Lord John Taylor referred to US Vice President Kamala Harris as “the Indian”. Although he later withdrew the remark, he had previously also referred to Taoiseach Leo Varadkar as “the Indian”, a term he chose not to apply to his own Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak.

For Unionists, when it comes to dispensing gratuitous offence, you don't even have to be a foreigner, as former Ulster Unionist ‘moderate’ Lord Ken Maginnis demonstrated on 9th January 2020, when he called a SNP MP a “queer” in the Houses of Parliament and was reported to the police.

In January 2022, the new UUP leader and ex-RIR soldier, Doug Beattie, was forced to apologise for and remove tweets offensive to women, travellers, and Muslims. His biography openly boasted about shooting Afghans in the back when he served as a soldier there.

Nationalists and Irish Language

But their greatest ire is reserved for their nearest neighbours, their Catholic and nationalist fellow citizens of Northern Ireland. Unionists never cease to seize every opportunity to give offence and show contempt to their neighbours and their traditions. The DUP (aided by the British Government) had, since 2006, successfully blocked the enact-

ment of an Irish Language Act, either in Stormont or Westminster, despite agreeing to do so in the 2006 St Andrews Agreement and the 2020 New Decade-New Approach deal.

The new Identity and Language Act was only passed in December 2022, nearly 30 years after a similar Welsh Language Act of 1993. In November 2014, the DUP MP Gregory Campbell, who earlier had ridiculed the Irish language, told the DUP annual conference that we will never agree to an Irish Language Act at Stormont and we will treat their entire wish list as no more than toilet paper.

Blockages

Previously the DUP blocked another republican policy, the abolition of academic selection in secondary schools.

In 2010, the DUP insisted on an end to 50/50 recruitment of Catholics into the PSNI, a demand Northern Secretary of

State Owen Patterson delivered.

Unionists have dragged their heels since 2006 in building a Dublin to Derry A5 dual carriageway, despite the Southern Government offering to pay €470 million for part of it. In some cases, the upgrade has been delayed by public objections and legal challenges, some by the Alternative A5 Alliance led by Hamilton Hassard. Half of the 200 submissions regarding the 50 mile upgrade of the Dublin Derry road opposed the plan, despite an enormous public demand for an improvement.

In 2013, the Stormont Administration allocated £110 million to redevelop Ravenhill Rugby ground, Windsor Park Soccer club and Casement Park GAA



¹Irish Independent 14/4/23

ground. Ten years later, only Casement Park has not been redeveloped and both the DUP and UUP have objected to public money being used to finance the additional costs.

The Protocol

Unionism ambition to play for the ‘awkward squad’ has led them down many fruitless *cul de sacs* where they seem enthusiastic to cut their nose off to spite their face.

Loyalist rabble-rouser Jamie Bryson has led the charge of popular protest against ‘The Irish Sea Border’ and opposition to the two international agreements entered into by his sovereign British Government and the EU: the Northern Ireland Protocol and its replacement the Windsor Agreement. He has stated on several occasions that no agreement would be acceptable to his followers that keeps an Irish Sea border, even one that gives the North an advantageous trade position *vis à vis* the rest of the UK. Northern Ireland has to have exactly the same trade status as the rest of the UK, even if this hurts Northern businesses.

Rotating Leaders and Prejudice

Pro-Union Parties have seen a magic roundabout of leaders in recent years, The Conservatives have had five leaders and Prime Ministers since 2016. The DUP have had four leaders since 2015, while the Ulster Unionist Party have had five leaders since 2012. Each Unionist Party seems to suffer from insecurity and a crisis of confidence which prevents them from confronting their electorate with the stark realities that lie ahead. The UUP is always looking over its shoulder, afraid of being outmanoeuvred by the DUP, similarly

the DUP look over their shoulder at the TUV, and the TUV look over their shoulder at Jamie Bryson (who claims to advise DUP leader Jeffery Donaldson twice a week). The result is political paralysis whereby it is becoming increasingly apparent that Unionist outrage and opposition to the UK-EU's Northern Ireland Protocol is simply a fig leaf behind which they are seeking to hide deeply ingrained opposition and hostility towards cross border cooperation in general and cross community power-sharing in particular, especially when this would result in an Irish Republican First Minister presiding over their beloved ‘Orange State’.

Psychologists attribute a number of causes to such habitual petty churlishness. including low self esteem, personal problems, emotional immaturity, personality disorders and learned behaviour. The Brazilian novelist Paul Coelho said: “How people treat others is a direct result of how they feel about themselves”.²

Disrespect

Some may say Unionists are only displaying a defensive ‘hedgehog’ posture in order to deter the nationalists from discussing unification with them; they intentionally express the most extremely objectionable opinions to frighten away potential suitors - who wants to hug a hedgehog?

However I suspect that what we are faced with is a sustained, repeated and deeply ingrained pattern of learned disrespectful behaviour which Unionists of all parties, and over a period of decades if not centuries, have been allowed to get away with unchallenged. The Irish and British media and political establishment seem to have given the

² ‘Why Are Some People So Mean, Rude, And Disrespectful to Others?’ (aconsciousrethink.com)

leaders of political Unionism a “fool’s pardon.”

Like some misanthropic and semi senile grandparents, they are allowed to freely express every form of rude, objectionable, insulting and disrespectful views and behaviours which, if expressed by *anyone* else, would be immediately exposed and attacked as

beyond the pale of acceptable conduct. If the peoples of this island are ever to construct a positive accommodation with each other, it is incumbent upon all to repeatedly and publicly expose such unsavoury behaviour so that it is not learned by the next generation.

Pádraig Felan

Before “Build the wall!” there was “Tear down this wall!” In his famous 1987 speech, Ronald Reagan demanded that the “scar” of the Berlin Wall be removed and insisted that the offending restriction of movement it represented amounted to nothing less than a “question of freedom for all mankind.” He went on to say that those who “refuse to join the community of freedom” would “become obsolete” as a result of the irresistible force of the global market. And so they did. In celebration, Leonard Bernstein directed a performance of *Ode to Joy* and Roger Waters performed *The Wall*. Barriers to labour and capital came down all over the world; the end of history was declared; and decades of US-dominated globalization followed.

THE LEFT AND OPEN BORDERS

Angela Nagle

In its twenty-nine-year existence, around 140 people died attempting to cross the Berlin Wall. In the promised world of global economic freedom and prosperity, 412 people died crossing the US-Mexican border last year [2017] alone, and more than three thousand died the previous year in the Mediterranean. The pop songs and Hollywood movies about freedom are nowhere to be found. What went wrong?

Of course, the Reaganite project did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Reagan - and his successors from both parties - used the same triumphalist rhetoric to sell the hollowing out of trade unions, the deregulation of banks, the expansion of outsourcing, and the globalization of markets away from the deadweight of national economic interests. Central to this project was a neoliberal attack on national barriers to the flow of labour and capital. At home, Reagan also oversaw one of the most significant pro-migration reforms in American history, the 1986 “Reagan Amnesty” that expanded the labour market by allowing millions of illegal migrants to gain legal status.

Popular movements against different elements of this post-Cold War vision came initially from the Left in the form of the anti-globalization movements and later Occupy Wall Street. But, lacking the bargaining power to challenge international capital, protest movements went nowhere. The globalized and financialized economic system held firm despite all the devastation it wreaked, even through the 2008 financial crisis.

Today, by far the most visible anti-globalization movement takes the form of the anti-immigrant backlash led by Donald Trump and other ‘populists.’

The Left, meanwhile, seems to have no option but to recoil in horror at Trump's "Muslim ban" and news stories about ICE[♦] hunting down migrant families; it can only react against whatever Trump is doing. If Trump is for immigration controls, then the Left will demand the opposite. And so today talk of "open borders" has entered mainstream liberal discourse, where once it was confined to radical free market think tanks and libertarian anarchist circles.

While no serious political party of the Left is offering concrete proposals for a truly borderless society, by embracing the moral arguments of the open-borders Left and the economic arguments of free market think tanks, the Left has painted itself into a corner. If "no human is illegal!," as the protest chant goes, the Left is implicitly accepting the moral case for no borders or sovereign nations at all. But what implications will unlimited migration have for projects like universal public health care and education, or a federal jobs guarantee? And how will progressives convincingly explain these goals to the public?

During the 2016 Democratic primary campaign, when *Vox* editor Ezra Klein suggested open borders policies to Bernie Sanders, the Senator famously showed his vintage when he replied, "Open borders? No. That's a Koch brothers proposal." This momentarily confused the official narrative, and Sanders was quickly accused of "sounding like Donald Trump." Beneath the generational differences revealed in this exchange, however, is a larger issue. The destruction and abandonment of labour politics means that, at present, immigration issues can only play out within the framework of a culture war, fought entirely on moral grounds. In the

heightened emotions of America's public debate on migration, a simple moral and political dichotomy prevails. It is "right-wing" to be "against immigration" and "left-wing" to be "for immigration." But the economics of migration tell a different story.

Useful Idiots

The transformation of open borders into a "Left" position is a very new phenomenon and runs counter to the history of the organized Left in fundamental ways. Open borders has long been a rallying cry of the business and free market Right. Drawing from neoclassical economists, these groups have advocated for liberalizing migration on the grounds of market rationality and economic freedom. They oppose limits on migration for the same reasons that they oppose restrictions on the movement of capital. The Koch-funded Cato Institute, which also advocates lifting legal restrictions on child labour, has churned out radical open borders advocacy for decades, arguing that support for open borders is a fundamental tenet of libertarianism, and: "Forget the wall already, it's time for the US to have open borders." The Adam Smith Institute has done much the same, arguing that: "Immigration restrictions make us poorer."

Following Reagan and figures like Milton Friedman, George W Bush championed liberalizing migration before, during, and after his presidency. Grover Norquist, a zealous advocate of Trump's (and Bush's and Reagan's) tax cuts, has for years railed against the illiberalism of the trade unions, reminding us: "Hostility to immigration has traditionally been a union cause."

[♦] Immigration & Customs Enforcement

He's not wrong. From the first law restricting immigration in 1882 to Cesar Chavez and the famously multiethnic United Farm Workers protesting against employers' use and encouragement of illegal migration in 1969, trade unions have often opposed mass migration. They saw the deliberate importation of illegal, low-wage workers as weakening labour's bargaining power and as a form of exploitation. There is no getting around the fact that the power of unions relies by definition on their ability to restrict and withdraw the supply of labour, which becomes impossible if an entire workforce can be easily and cheaply replaced. Open borders and mass immigration are a victory for the bosses.

And the bosses almost universally support it. Mark Zuckerberg's think tank and lobbying organization, Forward, which advocates for liberalizing migration policies, lists among its "founders and funders" Eric Schmidt and Bill Gates, as well as CEOs and senior executives of YouTube, Dropbox, Airbnb, Netflix, Groupon, Walmart, Yahoo, Lyft, Instagram, and many others. The cumulative personal wealth represented on this list is enough to heavily influence most governing institutions and parliaments, if not buy them outright. While often celebrated by progressives, the motivations of these "liberal" billionaires are clear. Their generosity toward dogmatically anti-labour Republicans, like Jeff Flake of the famous 'Gang of Eight' bill, should come as no surprise.

Admittedly, union opposition to mass migration was sometimes intermingled with racism (which was present across American society) in previous eras. What is omitted in libertarian attempts

to smear trade unions as "the real racists," however, is that in the days of strong trade unions, they were also able to use their power to mount campaigns of international solidarity with workers' movements around the world. Unions raised the wages of millions of non-white members, while deunionization today is estimated to cost black American men \$50 a week.

During the Reagan neoliberal revolution, union power was dealt a blow from which it has never recovered, and wages have stagnated for decades.

Under this pressure, the Left itself has undergone a transformation. In the absence of a powerful workers' movement, it has remained radical in the sphere of culture and individual freedom, but can offer little more than toothless protests and appeals to no-

blesse oblige in the sphere of economics.

With obscene images of low-wage migrants being chased down as criminals by ICE, others drowning in the Mediterranean, and the worrying growth of anti-immigrant sentiment across the world, it is easy to see why the Left wants to defend illegal migrants against being targeted and victimized. And it should. But acting on the correct moral impulse to defend the human dignity of migrants, the Left has ended up pulling the front line too far back, effectively defending the exploitative system of migration itself.

Today's well-intentioned activists have become the useful idiots of big business. With their adoption of "open borders" advocacy - and a fierce moral absolutism that regards any limit to migration as an unspeakable evil - any criticism of the exploitative system of



mass migration is effectively dismissed as blasphemy. Even solidly leftist politicians, like Bernie Sanders in the United States and Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom, are accused of “nativism” by critics if they recognize the legitimacy of borders or migration restriction at any point. This open borders radicalism ultimately benefits the elites within the most powerful countries in the world, further disempowers organized labour, robs the developing world of desperately needed professionals, and turns workers against workers.

But the Left need not take my word for it. Just ask Karl Marx, whose position on immigration would get him banished from the modern Left. Although migration at today's speed and scale would have been unthinkable in Marx's time, he expressed a highly critical view of the effects of the migration that occurred in the nineteenth century. In a letter to two of his American fellow-travellers, Marx argued that the importation of low-paid Irish immigrants to England forced them into hostile competition with English workers. He saw it as part of a system of exploitation, which divided the working class and which represented an extension of the colonial system. He wrote:

“Owing to the constantly increasing concentration of leaseholds, Ireland constantly sends her own surplus to the English labour market, and thus forces down wages and lowers the material and moral position of the English working class.”

“And most important of all! Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member

of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the ‘poor whites’ to the Negroes in the former slave states of the USA. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland.

“This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this”

Marx went on to say that the priority for labour organizing in England was “to make the English workers realize that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of their own social emancipation.” Here Marx pointed the way to an approach that is scarcely found today. The importation of low-paid labour is a tool of oppression that divides workers and benefits those in power. The proper response, therefore, is not abstract moralism about welcoming all migrants as an imagined act of charity, but rather addressing the root causes of migration in the relationship between large and powerful economies and the smaller or developing economies from which people migrate.

The Human Cost of Globalization

Advocates of open borders often overlook the costs of mass migration for developing countries. Indeed, globalization often creates a vicious cycle: liberalized trade policies destroy a region's economy, which in turn leads to mass emigration from that area, further eroding the potential of the origin country while depressing wages for the lowest paid workers in the destination country. One of the major causes of labour migration from Mexico to the United States has been the economic and social devastation caused by the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta). Nafta forced Mexican farmers to compete with US agriculture, with disastrous consequences for Mexico.



Mexican imports doubled, and Mexico lost thousands of pig farms and corn growers to US competition. When coffee prices fell below the cost of production, Nafta prohibited state intervention to keep growers afloat. Additionally, US companies were allowed to buy infrastructure in Mexico, including, for example, the country's main north-south rail line. The railroad then discontinued passenger service, resulting in the decimation of the rail workforce after a wildcat strike was crushed. By 2002, Mexican wages had dropped by 22 percent, even though worker productivity increased by 45 percent. In regions like Oaxaca, emigration devastated local economies and communities, as men emigrated to work in America's farm labour force and slaughterhouses, leaving behind women, children, and the elderly.

And what about the significant skilled and white-collar migrant workforce? Despite the rhetoric about "shithole

countries" or nations "not sending their best," the toll of the migration brain drain on developing economies has been enormous. According to the Census Bureau's figures for 2017, about 45 percent of migrants who have arrived in the United States since 2010 are college educated. Developing countries are struggling to retain their skilled and professional citizens, often trained at great public cost, because the largest and wealthiest economies that dominate the global market have the wealth

to snap them up. Today, Mexico also ranks as one of the world's biggest exporters of educated professionals, and its economy consequently suffers from a persistent "qualified employment

deficit." This developmental injustice is certainly not limited to Mexico. According to *Foreign Policy* magazine, "There are more Ethiopian physicians practising in Chicago today than in all of Ethiopia, a country of 80 million." It is not difficult to see why the political and economic elites of the world's richest countries would want the world to "send their best," regardless of the consequences for the rest of the world. But why is the moralizing, pro-open borders Left providing a humanitarian face for this naked self-interest?

According to the best analysis of capital flows and global wealth today, globalization is enriching the wealthiest people in the wealthiest countries at the expense of the poorest, not the other way around. Some have called it "aid in reverse." Billions in debt interest payments move from Africa to the large banks in London and New York. Vast private wealth is generated in extractive commodity industries and through

labour arbitrage every year, and repatriated back to the wealthy nations where the multinational corporations are based. Trillions of dollars in capital flight occurs because international corporations take advantage of tax havens and secrecy jurisdictions, made possible by the World Trade Organization's liberalization of "trade inefficient" invoicing regulations and other policies.

Global wealth inequality is the primary push factor driving mass migration, and the globalization of capital cannot be separated from this matter. There is also the pull factor of exploitative employers in the United States who seek to profit from nonunionized, low-wage workers in sectors like agriculture as well as through the importation of a large white-collar workforce already trained in other countries. The net result is an estimated population of eleven million people living in the United States illegally.

Corporate Interests and Moral Blackmail

Open borders has no public mandate, but immigration policies that place the burden of enforcement on employers instead of migrants do attract overwhelming support. According to a survey by the *Washington Post* and *ABC News*, support for mandating use of the federal employment verification system (E-Verify), which would prevent employers from exploiting illegal labour, is at nearly 80 percent - more than double the support for building a wall along the Mexican border. So why do presidential campaigns revolve around building a vast border wall? Why do current migration debates revolve around controversial ICE tactics to target migrants - especially when the more humane and popular method of placing the burden on employers to hire legal labour in the first place is also the most effective?

The answer, in short, is that business lobbies have been blocking and sabotaging efforts like E-Verify for decades, while the open-borders Left has abandoned any serious discussion of these issues.

Recently, the Western Growers Association and California Farm Bureau Federation, among others, blocked a bill that would have made E-Verify mandatory, despite several pro-business concessions. Democrats seemed totally absent from this debate. As a result, workers from economies devastated by US agriculture will continue to be invited in with the promise of work in order to be cheaply and illegally exploited. Lacking full legal rights, these noncitizens will be impossible to unionize and will be kept in constant fear of being arrested and criminalized.

It has now become a common slogan among advocates of open borders - and many mainstream commentators - that "there is no migrant crisis." But whether they like it or not, radically transformative levels of mass migration are unpopular across every section of society and throughout the world. And the people among whom it is unpopular, the citizenry, have the right to vote. Thus migration increasingly presents a crisis that is fundamental to democracy. Any political party wishing to govern will either have to accept the will of the people, or it will have to repress dissent in order to impose the open borders agenda. Many on the libertarian Left are among the most aggressive advocates of the latter. And for what? To provide moral cover for exploitation? To ensure that left-wing parties that could actually address any of these issues at a deeper international level remain out of power?

The immigration expansionists have two key weapons. One is the big business and financial interests all working

on their side, but an equally powerful weapon - wielded more expertly by the left-leaning immigration expansionists - is moral blackmail and public shame. People are right to see the mistreatment of migrants as morally wrong. Many people are concerned about the growth of racism and callousness toward minorities that often accompanies anti-immigration sentiment. But the open borders position does not even live up to its own professed moral code.

There are many economic pros and cons to high immigration, but it is more likely to negatively impact low-skilled and low-paid native workers while benefiting wealthier native workers and the corporate sector. As George J Borjas has argued, it functions as a kind of upward wealth redistribution. A 2017 study by the National Academy of Sciences called *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration* found that current immigration policies have resulted in disproportionately negative effects on poor and minority Americans, a finding that would have come as no surprise to figures like Marcus Garvey or Frederick Douglass. No doubt they, too, would have to be considered “anti-immigrant” by today’s standards for warning of this.

In a public speech on immigration, Hillary Clinton said: “I believe that when we have millions of hardworking immigrants contributing to our economy, it would be self-defeating and inhumane to try to kick them out.” In a leaked private speech delivered to Latin American bankers, she went further: “My dream is a hemispheric common market, with open trade and open borders, some time in the future with energy that

is as green and sustainable as we can get it” (though she later claimed that she only meant borders open to energy). These statements, of course, drove the anti-immigration, pro-Trump Right crazy. Perhaps more revealing, however, is the convergence between the open-borders Left and the “respectable” pro-business Right that Clinton’s remarks epitomized. In a recent *National Review* article responding to Trump’s ‘nationalism,’ Jay Cost wrote: “To put matters bluntly, we do not have to like one another, so long as we continue to make money off one another. That is what will keep us together.” In



this monstrous sub-Thatcherism, the Buckleyites sound exactly like the liberal ‘cosmopolitans’ - but without the glamour or flair for moral self-delusion.

As the child of migrants, and someone who has spent most of

my life in a country with persistently high levels of emigration - Ireland - I have always viewed the migration question differently than my well intentioned friends on the left in large, world-dominating economies. When austerity and unemployment hit Ireland - after billions in public money was used to bail out the financial sector in 2008 - I watched my entire peer group leave and never return.

This isn’t just a technical matter. It touches the heart and soul of a nation, like a war. It means the constant haemorrhaging of idealistic and energetic young generations, who normally rejuvenate and reimagine a society. In Ireland, as in every high-emigration country, there have always been anti-emigration campaigns and movements, led

by the Left, demanding full employment in times of recession. But they're rarely strong enough to withstand the forces of the global market. Meanwhile, the guilty and nervous elites in office during a period of popular anger are only too happy to see a potentially radical generation scatter across the world.

I'm always amazed at the arrogance and the strangely imperial mentality of British and American pro-open borders progressives who believe that they are performing an act of enlightened charity when they 'welcome' PhDs from eastern Europe or Central America driving them around and serving them food. In the wealthiest nations, open borders advocacy seems to function as a fanatical cult among true believers - a product of big business and free market lobbying is carried along by a larger group of the urban creative, tech, media, and knowledge economy class, who are serving their own objective class interests by keeping their transient lifestyles cheap and their careers intact as they parrot the institutional ideology of their industries. The truth is that mass migration is a tragedy, and upper-middle-class moralizing about it is a farce. Perhaps the ultra-wealthy can afford to live in the borderless world they aggressively advocate for, but most people need - and want - a coherent, sovereign political body to defend their rights as citizens.

Defending Immigrants, Opposing Systemic Exploitation

If open borders is "a Koch brothers proposal," then what would an authentic Left position on immigration look like? In this case, instead of channelling Milton Friedman, the Left should take its bearings from its own long traditions. Progressives should focus on addressing the systemic exploitation at the root of mass migration rather than retreating

to a shallow moralism that legitimates these exploitative forces. This does not mean that leftists should ignore injustices against immigrants. They should vigorously defend migrants against inhumane treatment. At the same time, any sincere Left must take a hard line against the corporate, financial, and other actors who create the desperate circumstances underlying mass migration (which, in turn, produces the populist reaction against it). Only a strong national Left in the small and developing nations - acting in concert with a Left committed to ending financialization and global labour exploitation in the larger economies - could have any hope of addressing these problems.

To begin with, the Left must stop citing the latest Cato Institute propaganda in order to ignore the effects of immigration on domestic labour, especially the working poor who are likely to suffer disproportionately from expanding the labour pool. Immigration policies should be designed to ensure that the bargaining power of workers is not significantly imperilled. This is especially true in times of wage stagnation, weak unions, and massive inequality.

With respect to illegal immigration, the Left should support efforts to make E-Verify mandatory and push for stiff penalties on employers who fail to comply. Employers, not immigrants, should be the primary focus of enforcement efforts. These employers take advantage of immigrants who lack ordinary legal protections in order to perpetuate a race to the bottom in wages while also evading payroll taxes and the provision of other benefits. Such incentives must be eliminated if any workers are to be treated fairly.

Trump infamously complained about people coming from third-world "shithole countries" and suggested

Norwegians as an example of ideal immigrants. But Norwegians did once come to America in large numbers - when they were desperate and poor. Now that they have a prosperous and relatively egalitarian social democracy, built on public ownership of natural resources, they no longer want to. Ultimately, the motivation for mass migration will persist as long as the structural problems underlying it remain in place.

Reducing the tensions of mass migration thus requires improving the prospects of the world's poor. Mass migration itself will not accomplish this: it creates a race to the bottom for workers in wealthy countries and a brain drain in poor ones. The only real solution is to correct the imbalances in the global economy, and radically restructure a system of globalization that was designed to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor. This involves, to start with, structural changes to trade policies that prevent necessary, state-led development in emerging economies. Anti-labour trade deals like Nafta must also be opposed. It is equally necessary to take on a financial system that funnels capital away from the developing world and into inequality-heightening asset bubbles in rich countries. Finally, although the reckless foreign policies of the George W Bush administration have been discredited, the temptation to engage in military crusades seems to live on. This should be opposed. US-led foreign invasions have killed millions in the Middle East, created millions of refugees and migrants, and devastated fundamental infrastructure.

Marx's argument that the English

working class should see Irish nationhood as a potential compliment to their struggle, rather than as a threat to their identity, should resonate today, as we witness the rise of various identity movements around the world. The comforting delusion that immigrants come here because they love America is incredibly naïve - as naïve as suggesting that the nineteenth-century Irish immigrants Marx described loved England. Most migrants emigrate out of economic necessity, and the vast majority would prefer to have better opportunities at home, among their own family



and friends. But such opportunities are impossible within the current shape of globalization.

Just like the situation Marx described in the England of his day, politicians like Trump rally their base by stirring up anti-immigration sentiment, but they rarely if ever address the structural exploitation - whether at home or abroad - that is the root cause of mass migration. Often, they make these problems worse, expanding the power of employers and capital against labour, while turning the rage of their supporters - often the victims of these forces - against other victims, immigrants. But for all Trump's anti-immigration bluster, his administration has done virtually nothing to expand the implementation of E-Verify, preferring instead to boast about a border wall that never seems to materialize.¹⁸ While families are separated at the border, the Administration has turned a blind eye toward employers who use immigrants as pawns in a game of labour arbitrage.

Meanwhile, members of the open-

borders Left may try to convince themselves that they are adopting a radical position. But in practice they are just replacing the pursuit of economic equality with the politics of big business, masquerading as a virtuous identitarianism. America, still one of the richest countries in the world, should be able to provide not just full employment but a living wage for all of its people, including in jobs which, open borders advocates claim, “Americans won’t do.” Employers who exploit migrants for cheap labour illegally - at great risk to the migrants themselves - should be blamed, not the migrants who are simply doing what

people have always done when facing economic adversity. By providing inadvertent cover for the ruling elite’s business interests, the Left risks a significant existential crisis, as more and more ordinary people defect to far-right parties. At this moment of crisis, the stakes are too high to keep getting it wrong.

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Despite military movements to and fro, the Russo-Ukrainian war seems frozen at the moment along a line of confrontation stretching from Luhansk, through virtually the middle of Donetsk, and on through northern Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. What we must remember, however, is that this conflict involves not only maps of who controls what and where, but also a bloodbath throughout Ukraine. Countless numbers of soldiers and civilians have been killed or wounded. There are innocents on both sides, including young conscripted soldiers in both the Russian and Ukrainian armies. One is reminded of the horrors of this war, as with all wars, when one sees pictures of soldiers in hospital, one with no hands, and another lying on the

bed with his fiancé beside and holding him, and he with a shattered face and half a left arm; or one sees a 12-year old girl on a hospital bed, now an amputee.

Historical Background

How did this all come about? To properly answer this, one has to go back to the beginning of the last century. By then, a Ukrainian nation, in the full socio-cultural sense, was in existence and striving for its independence. Various attempts were made towards that end between 1914 and 1922. In the latter year, a Ukrainian state was firmly established, but only as a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union). It was not thus sovereign and separate. And its boundaries were not decided democratically, and according to ethnic wishes. Rather,

were they drawn up arbitrarily, essentially by Lenin and Stalin. As a result, large numbers of ethnic Russians were included in the new state in areas now under Russian control and beyond that.

In 1954, this situation was added to by the relocation, by diktat, of Crimea from the Soviet Russian Republic to Ukraine. This was an action by the Ukrainian Khrushchev ♦ as part of his attempt to gain support and bolster his leadership claims within the Soviet Union, following the death of Stalin.

Independence and Conflict

In 1991, when the Soviet Union broke up, complete Ukrainian independence was recognised and brought into being. However, this was on the basis of accepting the boundaries determined within the Soviet Union. That decision was therefore arrived at, not on the basis of plebiscites, but instead by the leaders of what was to become the Commonwealth of Independent States, thus including the new Russian Federation.

Subsequently, tensions developed between the ethnic Russian areas of the new Ukrainian state, in the East and South on the one hand, and the rest of the country on the other, which was, in the main, solidly Ukrainian. Eventually, large parts of Luhansk and Donetsk (i.e. Donbas), declared themselves independent as People's Republics and a localised war commenced.

Post-Soviet Europe

In order to fully understand the state of affairs that now prevails in Ukraine, it is necessary to consider the wide European situation as it developed from the late 1980s onwards.

When Gorbachev decided to with-

draw from Central and Eastern Europe, he was assured that NATO would not endeavour to move into that space. Indeed, it was even indicated to him that NATO would not establish a military presence in East Germany. Nonetheless, during the flaccid Yeltsin years, NATO did so expand.

It has been observed that this could be seen as in response to the desires of the countries in question from the Baltic to the Black Sea. However, they did not have to be accepted into membership, if it had been deemed unwise to do so.

In fact, apart from all this, one has to ask the question of what was the justification for the continuation of NATO in any form, following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, as its original rationale was to deter a Stalinist invasion of Western Europe?

Given both the assurances rendered to Gorbachev and a mature awareness of the Russian sense of national security, the sensible thing would have been to create a *cordon sanitaire* from the Baltic to the Black Sea, consisting of at least the countries having a frontier with Russia and its ally, Belarus. In the context then prevailing, that would have meant a Finlandisation of the areas in question.

Buildup to Invasion

However, clearly this was not done. Had it been, Russia would not have felt threatened as it came to feel by the continuation and expansion of NATO, apparently on the verge latterly of including Ukraine as well. And we probably would not be in the situation where we are now as the result of a Russian invasion. In saying this, one is not justifying the Russian invasion, as Western

♦ Ethnic Russian, born in Russia, but grew up in Ukraine.

propagandist bullies are wont to accuse, but conducting a realistic analysis of how a position has come about, which could have been avoided if NATO, in deciding to continue in existence, had been content to remain as it was, or perhaps with only minor accretions in the form of central European states not having a frontier with Russia. It is a *non sequitur* to suggest that, in criticising NATO, one is vindicating Russia.

In recognising that Russia was stupidly provoked, the question arises of what it could have done in response rather than invading Ukraine as it did. The alternative was world diplomatic and local economic measures. In the latter instance, Russia clearly had the capacity to exercise significant pressure through its control of energy supplies to the rest of Europe.

NATO Strategy

Apart from trying to grasp the sense of Russian national security, we have to ask what NATO was ultimately up to in acting in the way that it did by way of aggrandisement. In fact, the present Defense Secretary of the United States let the cat out of the bag in relation to the current phase of NATO-Russian relations when he stated openly that the aim was to weaken Russia. Today, that means not just surrounding it with NATO military bases, but actively engaging it militarily through Ukrainian proxies. NATO soldiers will not be involved, but NATO will fight to the last Ukrainian. Anybody who thinks that this is now just about Ukrainian independence is astoundingly naïve politically.



The Other Road to Hegemony

Of course, there are astute elements in the US establishment who think that this is all a mistake in the context of trying to promote American world hegemony. They regard China as the main threat to that aim and believe that the current US policy on Ukraine is driving Russia into the arms of China, when a sensible policy would be to cultivate good relations with Russia and concentrate on the global containment of China.

However, they are clearly not prevailing. Who is? Apart from political Russophobes in Washington, the main powerful, political lobby for the war is obviously the military-industrial complex that even Eisenhower warned about decades ago. Their concern is not about Ukrainian freedom or even about American interests, but about maintaining arms sales and rewarding their executives and shareholders accordingly.

The Progressive Response

Given all this, what progressives should be advocating as a just and democratic approach to the crisis is really not very complicated. But at the same time, it is far from easy to see the solution required actually being brought about. Nonetheless, the appropriate demands should be raised. These are: (1) that the bloodletting should cease and there be an immediate ceasefire; (2) plebiscites should be held in the five areas of Ukraine concerned and conducted by the UN in order to ascertain whether any or all of them wish to [a] be part of Ukraine, [b] be part of Russia, or [c] be independent.

International law has been quoted as

a reason for not going down this path. It is stated correctly that Russia agreed to the pre-2014 borders in 1991. However, international law must be subordinate to the principle of national democracy. Probably, the Irish War of Independence was contrary to international law as it stood at that stage. But, quite rightly that did not prevent us from undertaking it and hardly requires an apology for it now. Besides, one should reiterate that the Ukraine borders were decided by elites, not the peoples within them.

The problem with that is that Kyiv wants to reincorporate the occupied areas in question into a Ukrainian state whether or not that is the local desire of the people concerned, while the Kremlin would be apprehensive that the democratic wishes might not go the way that they wish; one cannot assume that all ethnic Russians would be happy to be part of Putin's Russia. But, likewise, the peoples affected may not be content to be included in Zelensky's Ukraine. In

those cases, it would direct towards independence.

So what is the point of progressives raising such demands in view of what has just been said? It is that, while they may not be immediately realisable, they may come to be considered as a *via media* and the only path out of the quagmire at a future juncture when it seems that neither side can have its way to any meaningful degree.

Stance of Irish Republicans

As for Irish republicans, while we naturally support the independence and integrity of a genuine Ukrainian national state, we should not be pushed into the camp of supporting a NATO-backed war to merely re-establish the pre-2014 'Ukraine'. Irish republicans should be wary of being urged to simply engage in Russia bashing. Our call should be:

NEITHER KREMLIN NOR KYIV, BUT THE PEOPLE

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE?

In Ireland, one frequently hears reference to the 'people' in some political commentary. For example, those hostile to Irish reunification often tell us what the 'people' of the 26 counties want and don't want. Occasionally, we are advised that they want reunification, but don't want to pay taxes for it. Other times, we are informed that they are not too sure they want unity at all.

But who are the 'people'? On closer examination, it often transpires that the 'people' are a particular social class or group therein, which also happens to dominate the media that tells us all about the 'people'. This is evident if, to take an example from Dublin, one surveys Foxrock and Kimmage.

The experience of this author in encountering the denizens of the two areas is that nationalism and republicanism thrives in west Dublin and is somewhat diminished, to say the least, in south Dublin; indeed, partitionism is more likely to be found in the latter. And, of course, Foxrockers *et al* realise quite well that if the Kimmagers have their wish of a united Ireland, they will not have to pay for it; rather will the well-heeled have to foot the bill. The galling thing for them is that a referendum will probably be held in the 26 counties on the issue, i.e. all citizens will have to be given a say on the matter and the 'proles' have the numbers to carry it their way.

There is nothing new about this kind of thing in history. At one stage, the aristocracy were the 'people', but now the bourgeoisie are the 'people'. The 'people' must never become the people.

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