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A week of setbacks for Shell in Ireland

Labour Party now to force Corrib refinery on community

Andrew Flood

March 29, 2011

Last week as Shell prepares to start construction on the final leg of their controversial Corrib gas pipeline & refinery they have faced multiple set backs. In Erris Shell were prevented accessing construction sites by a blockade of protesters on a number of days while in Dublin Shell were forced to pull out of a conference at the RDS. On top of this 22 TD's gathered under a Shell to Sea banner at the Dail demanding that the consents signed by the outgoing Fianna Fail minister on his last day in power be reversed. This public show of support for Shell to Sea by so many elected representatives is a demonstration of how strongly the public have turned against the project and the Great Oil & Gas Giveaway in general. Despite this it is now the Labour Party Minister Pat Rabbitte who is forcing the project through, who this week has refused to reverse the consents.

The week of hell for Shell started when 20 people helped set up the 2011 Rossport Solidarity Camp in Aughoo. This is beside the

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planned Shell compound from where a tunnel is to be dug to the Shell compound at Glengad some 5km away. In the following days members of the Rosspoint Solidarity camp have repeatedly stopped Shell gaining access to the Glengad compound with banners reading “*Shell out*” and “*Energy should not cost the Earth*” used to block the entrance. Over 20 personnel from the controversial private security firm IRMS were deployed against them, on one day “*IRMS security tore the banner from the campaigners’ hands and attempted to take it hostage.*” Campaigners then lay across the entrance, blocking it with their bodies.

The previous weekend in Dublin saw a 100 strong Shell to Sea planning meeting to prepare solidarity from Dublin for the final phase of resistance. The gathering was addressed by Erris fisherman Pat ‘The Chief’ O’Donnell who was jailed by Shell last year and whose fishing boat was sunk by masked men two years back ahead of the arrival of the pipe laying ship the Solitaire. Paul from the camp explained in some detail what Shell’s construction plans were and there then followed a long discussion on what could be done in which 40 or more people suggested and discussed various proposals for action.

Also in Dublin on Tuesday, Shell to Sea held a photocall at the gates of the Dail at which 22 opposition TD’s were present under a Shell to Sea banner reading ‘Reverse Carey’s Consent to Shell — Reclaim Our Oil & Gas.’ Not only does this public demonstration of support show the huge shift in how people in Ireland view the project but it also goes a long way to destroy the millions spent on PR spin to try and portray the campaign as lunatics or terrorists. It is barely two years since Shell’s PR highpoint, when TV3 broadcast Paul William’s mockumentary on the campaign was broadcast that sought to silence the few voices still willing to speak out against Shell. They must now be wondering how their enormously expensive effort has fallen so far, so fast.

Locked out of most of the Irish media (a very large segment is owned by the O’Reilly family who are also the owners of a oil ex-

ate to complete the project a whole decade after they had initially planned and at a cost of 2.5 billion euro, over five times the original projected cost. That has been the impact of the successful resistance over the last decade. A new wave of campaigners are being drawn into the struggle, convinced that even now at the 12th hour, Shell's tide can be turned back, the Oil & Gas Giveaway ended and the refinery sent to Sea. Will you be among them?

ploration company), Shell to Sea has gone to an enormous effort to speak directly to people in Ireland. As well as numerous public meetings all over the country 120,000 copies of The Someday Independent a 4 page brochure explaining the Great Oil & Gas Giveaway have been distributed by hundreds of volunteers all over the island. A second updated print run is now being distributed in this David v Goliath match that pits millions of euro and full time paid PR specialists on Shell's side against a handful of unpaid campaigners meeting in their spare time and self funding through gigs, pub quiz's and race nights.

In putting together this piece I came across Shell's PR efforts on youtube, which were some highly produced professional looking videos that probably cost an arm and a leg and which describes their view of the 2009 Solitaire operation. Part 1 has been viewed 162 times, Part 2 has only 141 views. On checking I was rather pleased to see that the crappy short video clip I shot on my mobile phone at the same time where someone from the Rosspoint Solidarity Camp describes the various Shell security ships while the Solitaire is in the bay had over 1,000 views. The photo montage of the huge Gardaí numbers deployed (with the song "Summer Holiday" as a backing track) has almost 28,000 views. A demonstration that when Goliath lacks control of the media even throwing huge amounts of money into production delivers little in the way of results. Unfortunately from RTE to the huge Independent Group the Oil industry is able to ensure the alternative voices don't get anything even vaguely resembling a level playing field.

Outside the Dail on Tuesday Dublin Shell to Sea spokesperson Caoimhe Kerins explained how *'these consents were issued in a highly dubious manner on the day of the recent general election. Pat Carey, who was only in the Department a matter of weeks, had no mandate to issue the consents to Shell. He was a cabinet minister in a government with minority support and it is scandalous that such a major decision relating to the state's natural resources should be taken in this way. It is noteworthy that a number of weeks prior*

to the general election former Minister of Finance Brian Lenihan postponed the injection of a further €10 billion into Allied Irish Bank, Bank of Ireland and EBS. This postponement was based on his belief that the then Fianna Fáil government had minority support and therefore had no mandate to sanction further bank bailouts.'

Despite the obvious dodgyness of the consents being signed by the previous minister on his last day in power the incoming Labour Party Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources Pat Rabbitte has now refused to revoke the consents. Rabbitte said in response to a Dáil question *"that the consents granted are valid consents. Accordingly, the issue of revocation does not arise."* In doing so, as was expected he steps into the shoes of the doomed Green Party ex-minister and ex-TD Eamon Ryan who played the role of minister for Shell for most of the lifetime of the last government. In the elections that followed not only did Ryan lose his seat but the Green party was wiped out, losing all six of their seats. Changing sides to stand by Shell certainly ended badly for them, whatever they were promised.

Caoimhe Kerins explained that *'While the new Fine Gael/Labour promised change, it appears that Pat Rabbitte is proceeding in the same fashion as the previous Fianna Fáil led administration. Far from a new broom being swept through government departments; the same old pro-corporate thinking prevails. The new Minister has accepted, without question, the advice of his senior Department officials, who for over ten years have consistently dismissed the real and genuine concerns of Erris residents about the construction of a high pressure, odourless gas pipeline in a Special Area of Conservation. Erris residents have, on numerous occasions, been forced to appeal planning permissions for the construction of the pipeline on health and safety grounds. The success of these appeals has highlighted the very real risks posed both to local residents and the pristine environment of north Mayo.'*

On Wednesday after Shell to Sea had announced a protest outside a planned address by Shell E&P Ireland Managing Director

Terry Nolan at the RDS on 'Securing Ireland's Energy Needs', the organizers postponed the event. Shell to Sea were going to highlight the reality that Ireland's 10 billion barrels of oil-equivalent off the West Coast go directly to the oil companies, with the Irish State retaining a 0% share, no security of energy supply and only 25% tax on profits against which all costs can be deducted. In the case of the Corrib field Brian O'Cathain, the Managing Director of Enterprise Energy Ireland, has admitted that "Corrib will never pay tax". As there is no requirement for either the oil or the gas to be sold in Ireland, the Great Giveaway does nothing to secure Ireland's energy needs.

Two years ago as the Solitaire steamed into Broadhaven bay, protected by two Irish navy ships, dozens of small police and security boats, the Gardai helicopter and up to 700 Gardai and private security on shore, Shell and its bought supporters in the media and the Dáil thought it was all over — all that would remain was for them to pick up their cheque or post-retirement job with Shell. They were convinced that the successful PR driven marginalisation of Shell to Sea and the grinding down of the local community over the decade (many have been beaten, left with permanent injuries, arrested and even jailed) meant that such overwhelming force would easily overcome the few who still dared to stand in the way. Instead the resistance and hard work of the local community and their supporters around Ireland have awoken a much wider and deeper understanding of the scale of the Great Oil & Gas Giveaway. The overwhelming display of state power and almost complete media hostility to the campaign that Shell saw as its strongest weapon backfired in getting many people to ask what is really going on.

The next two to three months will be key to the struggle against Shell. They will need to move up to 250 lorries a day along the narrow roads of Erris as they seek to construct their compounds. The new government faces enormous pressure to reverse the Oil & Gas Giveaway and the permissions for this project that is already years behind schedule and billions over budget. Shell are now desper-