

Shell retreats as solidarity with Pat O'Donnell continues

Round up of events in Dublin and a personal view of the progress of the campaign

Andrew Flood

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The week before last Erris fisherman Pat O'Donnell was jailed for seven months for his part in the communities ongoing resistance to Shell's attempt to impose an experimental gas pipeline on them. Across the country local Shell to Sea groups have been holding solidarity protests and other events for Pat. In Dublin this has included two protests and a public meeting in UCD. Meanwhile Shell have been forced to admit a temporary defeat in the face of local opposition and call off the construction they have planned for Glengad this year.

The first of the Dublin protests was Tuesday last week when campaigners gathered outside Shell HQ to highlight the role of Shell in Pat's jailing. Because Pat has the fishing rights along the pipeline route he has been repeatedly targeted for detention whenever Shell has needed to carry out construction work. And back in June, just before the arrival of Shell's pipeline ship the Solitaire, Pat's boat was boarded at night by four armed and masked men and sunk, an event reminiscent of how oil corporations have dealt with local protests around the world.

On Wednesday a well attended public meeting was held in UCD, speakers include Andy Storey chairperson of Afri (www.afri.ie/), Caoimhe Kerins from Dublin Shell to Sea and Maura Harrington, who like Pat has been imprisoned for resisting Shell's experimental gas pipeline. A report and pictures from that meeting can be found at www.indymedia.ie Below I've attached audio recordings of the meeting including the question and answer sessions after the speakers presentations.

On Saturday Dublin Shell to Sea campaigners joined friends of Pat's who had traveled from Mayo for a protest at the GPO. Banners highlighted not only the injustice of Pat's imprisonment but also the fact that the Irish state is giving billions of gas & oil to the energy corporations without them paying any royalties. This at a time when health, education and pay is being slashed to save a tiny percentage of the sums that are to be given away. Thousands of the 'Someday Independent', the leaflet that explains the issues around the campaign in detail were distributed to the public during the protest. This is a 30 second video of this protest at www.youtube.com

Before the protest another 1,000 copies had been distributed door to door in the Liberties. You can read the text of the leaflet at www.dublins2s.com

Three years ago Shell thought it was all over. The millions spent on the media campaign along with the fact that most of the media is either state owned or owned by those who are also in oil & gas exploration meant that all critical voices in the press had been silenced. The Gardai use of violence against protests had been used to smash and demoralize the opposition in the area allowing refinery construction to proceed with only the occasional interruption. It appears at that point it was decided the gloves could come off to smash those who were still holding out and hundreds of private security guards were deployed who intimidated, abused and videoed local residents. Pat O'Donnell's boat was sunk at sea and Willie Corduff was beaten in the Shell compound at Glengad. These tactics backfired in the Spring when it was discovered that not only were some of these security from east European fascist organisations but that several had been involved in an attempt to spark a civil war in Bolivia, see www.indymedia.ie

Resistance is fertile

Despite the ongoing attempt to suppress and silence the campaign spirits are high. The pressure created by the campaign meant that An Bord Pleanála felt unable to rubber stamp Shell's plan's for running the experimental gas pipeline through the village of Rossport and instead pointed out the obvious safety issues that campaigners had been highlighting for years (e.g. people living in the blast zone) and gave Shell two months to address these. Of course when Shell proved unable to do so that deadline was extended for a further four months but this has forced Shell to call off construction at Glengad this summer.

This is a significant if temporary victory over Shell but Dublin Shell to Sea spokesperson Caoimhe Kerins warned that "Although this announcement is a significant victory for the local community, other major works will still be going ahead, while fisherman Pat O'Donnell is out of Shell's way in prison. This means that 2010 is set to be another year of disruption for the community, continued harassment and intimidation by Gardai and Shell security, as well as the unlawful arrest and the targeted jailing of key campaigners. There are no options left for Shell, except to process the gas at sea, which is standard practice around the world. This is what local people have been demanding for almost a decade. It's still not too late to do the right thing."

The An Bord Pleanála decision has also started to break apart Shell's well funded media campaign with some of the more courageous journalists daring to stand up to Shell and publish articles questioning the project. As might be expected these journalists are now being targeted in the media for doing so. Shell themselves seem scared of debating the issues with Shell to Sea, at least two TV debates have been canceled due to Shell or pro-Shell journalists pulling out at the last minute in recent weeks.

As the scale of the Great Oil & Gas giveaway has been revealed more and more people are taking a stand against Shell. In the last couple of months new Shell to Sea groups have sprung up around the country, the recently formed Kildare group has been leafletting in Kildare town. You can help in a wide range of ways from simple things like sending a solidarity letter to Pat in prison to let him know he is not alone to getting copies of the 'Someday Independent' off Dublin Shell to Sea (contact details on their web site) to joining or forming a local Shell to Sea group to do this and more.

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