

The Europe of repression strikes a blow at social protest in Ireland

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After years of shamelessly plundering the country, the rich have turned their private debts into public ones and have imposed a program of austerity on its people so that the poorest have the burden of keeping the ship afloat. Not content with this, the foreign partners of this oligarchy, the same ones that permitted them to indebt themselves at astronomical levels and finance their extravagances, are using the crisis to guarantee success for their businesses: that debts are paid with its interest due and that the economy is opened up to them for new investment opportunities.

This has begun with the privatisation of basic services, with the domestic oligarchy becoming the commercial agency that administers the pillaging. When the people began to protest against this scandal, raids took place before dawn that hauled political activists from their homes to interrogate them, intimidate them and hand out draconian sentences against some of them. The judicial system prohibits social protest and the authorities threaten that they won't accept interruptions to "order".

We are not describing a small third-world republic of the late '70s, however this is what has been happening in recent weeks in the civilised and progressive European Union (EU). More particularly, in the banana republic of Ireland. Since 2008 the public has endured, with the stoicism bordering on stupidity, all of the conditions imposed by the troika (ECB, IMF, EU) in the midst of the crisis, the austerity programme, the lies of a government elected to do the exact opposite of what it has done, the taunts of some of the rich who have continued to be rich by looting the pockets of the working class. The legendary combative spirit of the Irish has evaporated without leaving a trace, to the point that the Greeks carry banners in their own protests stating "We are not Ireland".

But it has reached a point that even more than the most compliant Irish people have reached their limit. The privatisation of water was the drop that literally made the glass overflow. Even though they treat the privatisation of water with the argument that it is a necessary action due to the crisis, the truth is that for some time the EU has been pushing the privatisation of this said service in Ireland: in fact, there have been successive and successful campaigns against the conversion of this public right into a business since the late 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of people in this small country have been protesting against this policy and the government has

encountered a campaign of civil disobedience without precedent, in which the majority of the population refuse to pay. Horror of horrors, GMC Sierra, the company charged with the installation of water-meters of German and North American origin, has met acrimonious opposition from communities that don't allow them to install the meters, obstruct and block them from working. Direct action, ladies and gentlemen! This is what we are witnessing after decades of domestication of popular movements through the social pact.

The ruling class is scared and you can see it. They fear anarchy, that the disobedient population refuses to recognise the authority of those who govern. They have reacted clumsily, ordering in one week the detention of 17 people who participated in a protest in November last year in the district of Jobstown. On this occasion the car of the Deputy Prime Minister, Labour's Joan Burton, was blocked by the protesters, who were then shamelessly accused of "false imprisonment". Included among the first group of detainees (February 9) was Socialist Party deputy Paul Murphy, left-wing councillors and republican activists. In the days that followed, those detained, who are all protesters in the campaign against the privatisation of water, including minors and pensioners, making this an even more grotesque production. Even though all were released provisionally yesterday the courts condemned five activists – Bernie Hughes, Damien O'Neill, Paul Moore, Derek Byrne and Michael Batty, all from the working-class districts of the capital – to between 28 and 56 days in prison. The sentence openly criminalises civil disobedience, one of the classic forms of protest that is deliberately confused with violence, in open violation of the most fundamental human rights.

The use of police in response to protest in the peaceful Republic of Ireland is not new – those living in Rossport on the west coast of Ireland are well versed in it; for years they have been battling the presence of the petrol company Shell in their area and have been placed under a political siege. They have been subjected to more than one blow for speaking out. Curiously, on the same day that they handed out the first arrests against the protesters, Prime Minister Enda Kenny announced that there will be stricter anti-terrorism laws with the goal of combating the Islamic threat. We've already seen what will be done with these laws – the criminalisation of social movements. The popular response is to be seen: while Rossport is a rural area isolated from the rest of the country, political persecution in the heart of Dublin has awakened multiple spontaneous protests at police stations, and on Saturday they have called for a massive demonstration against this repression, at which attendance is expected from thousands of people from working-class communities, which have endured the worst of the transfer of the consequences of the crisis from the rich to the poor, and whose residents continue to suffer the worst of this bullying against the right to protest, . The time has arrived for the Irish people to show, to the Greeks, the world and to themselves, that here too dignity remains.

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