

1916 – what are they celebrating?

There is something very odd with the official commemoration of 1916. The same government which is celebrating an insurrection against imperialism 90 years ago is today – against the wishes of the majority of the Irish people – allowing Irish airports to be used in support of an imperialist war. And whereas the 1916 proclamation referred to “*the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland*” successive southern governments have shown themselves to be on the side of international corporations. Most recently this has shown itself in the manner in which the Corrib gas fields of Co’ Mayo were handed over to the Shell corporation.



The reason they can get away with this hypocrisy is because the 1916 proclamation is long on rhetoric about “*dead generations*” and “*august destiny*” but short on any sort of concrete program, never mind one that addressed the needs of the working class. This has allowed every party in the south to claim to stand in its tradition in the 90 years since it was first read out.

Three years after 1916 the war of Independence started. This was Irish republicanism in its most militant period, it was simultaneously a period when Irish workers were at their most militant. Land occupations, general strikes and ‘soviets’ spread across Ireland. Yet the republican leadership saw the direct actions of these workers as a hindrance to the struggle because they were something that threatened nationalist unity.

The weakness of republicanism is not in its failures but in its successes because success requires building nationalist unity, whether that be military as during the war of Independence or political as in the Peace Process. The price of such unity is constant – the marginalisation and removal from the agenda of any prospect of social revolution.

Peadar O’Donnell writing in 1963 observed “*Many an IRA man in jail in ’22 and ’23 cursed his use as a defender of pure ideals to patrol estate walls, enforce decrees for rent, arrest and even order out of the country leaders of local land agitation*”.

Find out more about the real history of this period and the limits of republicanism at

<http://www.wsm.ie/history>



Workers Solidarity Movement - 1916 Working Group, PO Box 1528 Dublin 8

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