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Since When Did the Irish Words “Sinn Féin” Mean Pro-Empire?

Brexit has exposed Ireland as much as it has exposed Britain. In the on and off deal between the UK and the EU, the future of the Irish border, and therefore the future of Ireland, is being decided by faceless bureaucrats in Britain and Brussels. This is yet more proof – if any more proof was needed – of Ireland’s dependent status. After the Irish banking disaster, this is the latest ignominy “Independent Ireland” must bear.

While the subjugation of Ireland by its powerful neighbors is nothing new – the almost cheerful acceptance of this current state of affairs by “rebel Ireland” is something new.

For decades now the Sinn Féin party has been the face of “rebel Ireland”. It fought British rule in the north. And openly defied the comprador capitalists in the south. But today it cheers on Brussels as the latter decides the fate of Ireland. Today Sinn Féin criticizes anyone who wishes to exit the European Union. Today – irony of ironies – Sinn Féin is the Unionist Party par excellence. In the most smug way, it is now loyal to the prevailing Empire.

The Irish words “sinn féin” mean “ourselves”, or in political terms, “ourselves alone” – as opposed to “ourselves following the orders of others”. So in contemporary terms, the words “sinn féin” best describe those arguing for Brexit. While those wishing to remain in the EU are anything but “sinn féin”. Following this semantic line, Ireland’s Sinn Féin party, by defending the EU and mocking Brexit, has turned the meaning of “sinn féin” on its head.

What explains this un-sinn féin like politics within Sinn Féin? In a few words: out of date Irish nationalism. Rebel Ireland has always been blinded by Britain. It could never see around Britain. For much of history this blindness was logical. For centuries Britain was the rising Empire. And up until recently, it was the greatest Empire the world had ever seen.

Over the centuries, in its struggle against this British behemoth, rebel Ireland has sought the assistance of imperial Spain (1601), imperial France (1798) and imperial Germany (1916). All this was justifiable back then because the British juggernaut was mercilessly crushing Ireland. And right up until the fall of Margaret Thatcher (1990) Britain continued to crush Ireland.

This crushing narrative, however, changed dramatically around the year 2000 and caught the rebel Irish off guard. As imperial Britain faded away and became “America’s poodle” – imperial Europe started to flex its muscles. The crush then was originating in the EU rather than in the UK. Regardless, the Irish rebels continued to focus their ire on Britain. They completely ignored the sinister nature of imperial Europe. The rebel Irish love of Europe was about to become a love of pain – a pain they embrace today.

If the Sinn Féin party could’ve taken its eyes off Britain around 2000 – if it looked at the big European picture – it would’ve seen the writing on the EU Wall. The Single European Act (1987), the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the European Central Bank (1998), the Euro (1999) and the Lisbon Treaty (2007) all pointed to a Europe hostile towards social and international justice.

Considering the fact that the “EU” was, from the get go, a right wing unification of Germany and France – the imperialist nature of contemporary Europe should not be news to anyone. But unfortunately it is – even to left wing Irish rebels. The thought that the EU represents a more menacing threat to Ireland than the UK, seems to be a thought too far for Sinn Féin.

Facts, such as the following, don’t seem to register in the Sinn Féin view of Europe: the EU is a neoliberal nightmare (the primacy of the market is written into the EU constitution), the EU is a bank robber (the bailout of Germany), the EU is a wage robber (the austerity), the EU hates Africa (fortress Europe), the EU is anti-Venezuela, anti-Palestine, and anti-Russia (pro CIA/Zionist/Latin fascism), the EU’s military industrial complex is determined by EUCOM, etc..

But does Sinn Féin know the meaning of EUCOM? Does anyone in Europe know the meaning of EUCOM? The United States European Command and its attack dogs -NATO and AFRICOM – are embedded deep within the EU.

Its time Irish nationalism updated its understanding of Europe. Ireland is no longer living in the 17th, 18th or 19th centuries: Europe isn't automatically the gateway to freedom. Although the EU is trying to turn the clock back to the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Radical inequality is bolstering Europe's monarchies, aristocracies and crusading armies. Does 21st century Sinn Féin really think that this retrograde monster is reformable?

Just when Britain is redefining itself for the better, "rebel" Ireland has the gall to lecture the British on the goodness of EU backwardness. It is blind to the fact that Brexit plus Jeremy Corbyn equals the best chance for "socialism" right now in Europe. Corbyn will thrive in an independent Britain, whereas in the EU he will be in a free market straitjacket. All of which begs the question: does Ireland's "rebels" really want anything to do with socialism?

Brexit is exposing the poverty of the rebel Irish vision. Knee jerk worship of Europe, and knee jerk hatred of Britain, has today turned the great Irish rebellion on its head. The Empire has changed its position. A more sophisticated vision would see that the imperialism south of today's Irish border is more virulent than the traditional kind north of the border.

The Irish border must go. First and foremost, however, the Irish fight is against foreign rule. And that comes in many guises. If Brussels gets its way, Ireland is facing another century or two of foreign rule or just simply foreign annihilation. On the other hand, if Brexit gets its way, there's a real chance that foreign rule in Ireland may unravel. A weaker EU and a more inward looking Britain (not forgetting the real possibility of a more socialist Britain) would give most meaning to the Irish words "sinn féin".