

IRISH NEUTRALITY 2018

Wolfe Tone's most famous pamphlet was *An Argument on behalf of the Catholics in Ireland*, published in 1791, in which he argued in favour of equal rights between Catholics and Protestants. A year earlier, he had published *Spanish War* in which he made the case for Irish Neutrality. In it, he wrote: "Then we should have what under the present system we shall never see, a NATIONAL FLAG and the spirit to maintain it."

Thus, in talking about Irish Neutrality today, we should remember that there is a tradition and a set of values advocating Irish equality, democracy, independence and neutrality that stretches back nearly 230 years.

I would like to start with a quote from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

"When I use a word", Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more or less". "The question is" said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many things." "The question is", said Humpty Dumpty Dumpty, "which is master, that's all."

For example, the six counties of Northern Ireland are part of the UK, which has been in NATO since its foundation; so a large part of Ireland has never been neutral.

In the Irish Republic, Irish Governments never refer to Ireland as being neutral, but use the term "military neutrality". The actual meaning of this has been the transformation of that part of Ireland into a US Air Force base, in which nearly 3 million US troops, and a completely unknown amount of military equipment, have landed in Ireland on their way to take part in perpetual wars - wars in which thousands upon thousands of men, women and children have been killed or injured. Now the Irish Army is being transformed into a regiment of the emerging EU Army.

The cornerstone of international law on neutrality is the Hague Convention, V, Article Two, which states: "Belligerents are forbidden to move troops or convoys of either munitions of war or supplies across the territory of a neutral Power"

When the Ambassador of Switzerland visited Ireland in 2003, she stated that, because of the Hague Convention, no US planes were allowed to land in Switzerland.

When Ed Horgan brought a case against the State for allowing US planes land in Shannon Airport, Judge Kearns in his judgement said: “It is not in dispute that a portion of troops and munitions passed through Shannon Airport” and that the “1917 Hague Convention V is asserted to be declaratory of customary international law” Judge Kearns also said it was not part of Irish domestic law. In short, if the government decided to terminate neutrality and to make Ireland a US air force base, they could do so.

So “military neutrality” is in fact Humpty Dumpty speak and should be treated as such.

More recently, four FG MEPs advocated a massive increase in Irish military expenditure and deeper integration into an EU Defence Union. But, at the same time, they are not in favour of an EU Army, which is of course yet more Humpty Dumpty speak. They also called for a debate on Irish neutrality.

When the first referendum on the Nice Treaty was defeated in 2001, the government were forced to establish the National Forum on Europe. This forum greatly facilitated a debate on Ireland’s relationship with Europe, including its military relationship. When the government lost the Lisbon Treaty they abolished it. A decision which along with millions of Euros spent for a ‘yes’ vote, allowed them to win second time round. The very last thing the government or its corporate media, especially RTÉ wants, is an actual debate and the FG MEPs know it.

A real example of this ‘debate’ is that PANA ¹ is registered with SIPO, because it campaigns for neutrality and the IIEA ², which has a budget of a million Euros and campaigns against it, is not registered with SIPO ³. It’s just more Humpty Dumpty speak. If they were actually serious, they would re-establish the National Forum on Europe and require all groups to be registered with SIPO.

The military agenda of the Lisbon Treaty included the creation of an EU Ministry for Foreign and Security policy with its own EU Department of Foreign Affairs, the legalisation of the European Defence Agency and the EU Battle Groups, and allowed the formation of EU armies via PESCO ⁴, and mutual defence clauses.

¹ Peace and Neutrality Alliance

² Institute of International and European Affairs

³ Standards in Public Office Commission

⁴ Permanent Structured Co-operation

Under PESCO, for example, the Germans are already well on the way to creating a German-dominated EU Army. The Czech Republic and Romania are integrating their 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade and their 81 Mechanised Brigade into the German 1st Army Brigade under German Command, so that by 2021 there should be a 200,000 strong German-led EU Army. Other States like Ireland are joining other EU permanent military formations, but there can be little doubt that the objective is eventually to merge them and create a single EU Army under a single EU Military HQ that has now been established. We should also be aware that the German Parliament commissioned a report in July 2017 that determined that Germany could legally finance the British or French nuclear weapons programmes in exchange for their protection, as could the EU itself. After all, there is little point in having an EU Army and an EU Navy unless they are armed with nuclear weapons.

All of this means cuts in expenditure in health and education to pay for the massive increase in military spending up to 2% of GDP. Even if Ireland increased its current expenditure of nearly 0.3% of GDP according to *Eurostat*, the EU statistical office, to the current EU average of 1.3% of GDP, Irish military expenditure would go up from €946 million to €4 billion (*Phoenix*, 23 March 2018).

Of course to be truly European, the Irish should increase its military expenditure to 2% of GDP, which is the goal of the EU state.

There is little doubt that the demonization of Russia is crucial to ensuring the willingness of people to accept the related massive cuts in the social welfare system.

However, despite the very best efforts of government and the corporate media, public opinion polls show that those who advocate the termination of Irish neutrality are not supported by a clear majority of the Irish people. In a Red C poll in February 2016, 57% agreed that Irish neutrality should be part of the Irish Constitution (39% said 'no') and 55% were opposed to the use of Shannon Airport by US troops (41% 'agreed').

Those who support Irish neutrality should make opposition to the EU Army and the use of Shannon Airport central issues in the next EU elections and seek to gain a majority in the EU Parliament.

For Ireland not to have any role whatsoever in EU militarisation is a perfectly viable option, since the Danes have a Protocol that excluded

them from paying for, or involvement with, the march towards an EU Army, and yet still remained a member of the EU without any problem.

Casement, in his book *The Crime Against Europe*, a powerful critique of the imperialist 1914-18 war, called for a neutral Ireland within a Congress of Europe that included all European states including Russia, Switzerland, Norway, the UK and what are now other non-EU states. It is a vision for the future of Europe that is continued by PANA.

Finally, John Redmond wanted Home Rule within the British Union. He urged the Irish people to join the Army of the British Union, to sacrifice their lives, to give their blood for the British Union. With the virtually total support of the corporate media, over 200,000 volunteered to do so.

Now, the Taoiseach has stated: “a Europe worth building is a Europe worth defending” (17 Jan, 2018). Like Redmond before him, he has the total support of the corporate media. The enemy is no longer the German Hun, but the Russian Bear. Maybe the Taoiseach wants to be better than his idol, Redmond. Maybe he wants to outdo Redmond and expects 300,000 to volunteer and to sacrifice their lives this time.

But, like Humpty Dumpty, after World War III, we will not be able to put the world back together again and the entire human species could come to an end.

To stop the Taoiseach and his allies in the EU, and in the US where Bolton, Pompeo and Gina Haspel now dominate, we need to restore Irish neutrality, not as an end in itself, but as part of a European movement, a global movement to restore sanity and to survive.

Roger Cole
Chair
Peace & Neutrality Alliance (PANA)
18/4/18, The Mansion House, Dublin