

# Tara Foundation

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## Editorial

*The most serious escalation in the dispute over the Corrib gas refinery occurred on 10th November 2006, when Gardaí moved to dispel protestors with batons. This action was designed to achieve the defeat of the protest by force, to break the will of the opposition, a fact which received confirmation when Taoiseach Bertie Ahern referred to the violence as the “rule of law”, and with regard to whether alternatives to the current scheme could be considered, that “everything is now over”. The Government, which has shown the Shell corporation and its partners in the project that it is willing to do whatever is needed to force the project through.*

*The media, having orchestrated an all-out propaganda assault on the opposition in the lead-up to 10th November, have moderated their approach a little: in the case of RTE, this took the form of a “Prime Time” broadcast which prevented most of the real issues from being discussed, and treated the situation not only as a local dispute between Shell and local residents, but as a matter of differing interpretations. Such duplicity is inevitable from a broadcaster which*

*receives corporate financing for almost all of its programmes. But RTE also receives large taxpayer subventions, and to that extent is responsible, not only that it be “fair and balanced” (which is also the mantra of the Fox Network), but that it be concerned with basic issues such as factual accuracy. Portraying the issue in PR terms, and concocting an “opinion poll” in conjunction with the Irish Independent, a paper which has displayed blatant bias in its coverage, does not serve this end.*

*The Government’s complicity with a corporation with a notoriously bad safety and human rights record has been well documented; this complicity extends to changing the law to delegate to private companies the right to have Compulsory Purchase Orders enforced in court, and exempting the pipeline from both planning permission and any required safety standard. Shell’s statement that the pipeline will “meet existing standards” is worthless in this light: it is up to sovereign governments to specify these standards and ensure they are enforced. The Government has indicated that it is willing, first of all, to put state force at the disposal of the consortium, yet to abdicate its jurisdiction over the project. There can be no doubt that prior assurances were given to Shell and partners that Irish law, whether regarding human rights, health and safety or environmental, would not be allowed to obstruct the cheapest, least responsible proposal they put forward for the project.*

*Another aspect of the events of 10th November has come to light. It appears that orders came from the Department of Justice to the Superintendent in charge at Ballinaboy that the march was to be banned. It is doubtful that this is in accord with the Constitution, as the only violence that occurred that might justify the ban was that from the Gardaí. But let us suppose that the ban was justified on health and safety grounds. The ban was, from first to last, never communicated either to the protestors or to the Gardaí themselves on the ground. This indicates that the plan was to use the pseudo-legal justification of an illegal assembly to justify the heavy-handed tactics of the Gardaí.*

## **The Ogoni** by

*Britain’s abandonment of the slave trade in 1807 was moved less by moral objections than by the fact that increasing competition by other countries had undermined its monopoly. Indeed, Britain used the need to end the slave trade as a pretext for direct intervention in Africa: as a result of British military action there to secure trade against French and native influence, Britain laid claim to Southern Nigeria at the Conference of Berlin in 1884-5. But as the Royal Niger Company, given a royal charter to control the Niger and N. Nigeria, was unable to do so, necessitating further military intervention, until in 1906 Britain gained control and divided Nigeria into the Colony (Lagos) and Protectorate of*

*Northern Nigeria, and the Southern. Via the tried and trusted method of indirect rule, the British ran the country for the production of cash crops such as palm nuts and kernels, peanuts, cotton, and cocoa.*

*Corporations like Shell are today as much state agents as was the royally-mandated Niger Company. The corporations' political clout enables Britain and other former colonial powers continue to wield influence through the veil of private sector involvement. This has been the case with Nigeria since it gained independence in 1960. Ever since its arrival in Nigeria, Shell has been despoiling the Niger Delta with impunity, under the protection of a corrupt government, and with the Nigerian army and police at their disposal. The conviction in 1995 by a kangaroo court of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People), was the outcome of a collaboration between a corporation which had no scruples about importing weapons and engaging in surveillance, and a brutal dictatorship which attacked its own people, and instead of using its profits from native oil and gas resources to benefit the population, engaged in the expropriation of vast sums of money to overseas accounts. This situation has not changed much for the better with a change of government, indicating that the real problem lies less with the nature of that government than the purposes it is set up (and kept in power) to achieve. In 2004, Nigeria's Finance Minister Nedadi Usman was quoted by the *New Internationalist* as saying, "If we hadn't discovered oil, we would have been better off today." One might go further and say: if oil had never been discovered in Nigeria, the political evolution of that country would have been entirely different.*

*It is not so much that such corporations take advantage of political weakness for their own benefit, as that, in their role as state corporations, they help to encourage and prop up politically weak administrations for the benefit of publicly-funded "private enterprise". This system, in its turn, is the bedrock for global political power. The terms of energy exploration in Ireland are a reliable index of the health of Irish democracy: elected representatives have shown total willingness to tie their own hands in matters of national sovereignty. It is no accident that Shell and other corporations have taken advantage of the political weakness of the Irish state, so far as to dictate the terms of their involvement in exploration and production in Ireland. The terms allow oil and gas multinationals to declare the size of their own discoveries, without State monitoring of any kind, and to have their expenses reimbursed by the taxpayer for up to 25 years. These terms are a declaration by the Irish government that it heads a client state, to be run in the political and financial interests of America and Britain, interests with which no constitutional right is to be allowed to compete. With this in mind, the fact that Ireland is nominally a democracy is only convenience of inheritance. The State as presently operated is fundamentally anti-democratic.*

## ***Grianán of Aileach – the OPW strikes again*** by

*Since 2001, the Office of Public Works has been engaged in a major reconstruction of the fort of Grianan of Aileach in Co. Donegal. According to an OPW spokesperson, "Local repairs were carried out [in 1904, when the monument was placed in the care of the British state] ...but, due to the unsatisfactory nature of the restored external masonry works and rubble/earth centre fill, sectional collapse continued at regular intervals. ...A specialist structural engineering and archaeological survey undertaken by OPW in 2001 revealed the lower 'original' sections of wall and confirmed the reasons for the monument's instability. The original inward leaning and stable profile and line of the Grianan wall was established and the monument is now being restored to that design. The present intervention should considerably improve the future stability of the monument and ensure safe public access to the site."*

*Much the same pretexts were offered by the OPW for the programme of massive reconstruction underway at Skellig Michael. As in that case, on the basis of sheer conjecture ("the original inward leaning and stable profile"), the Grianan is being altered beyond recognition because the OPW conforms to a general State ideology that dictates its policy with regard to heritage. This ideology holds that conservation is not about preserving the monument as received, respecting each historical addition and layer as themselves of historical importance, and, where preservation work is deemed to be necessary, ensuring that it interferes with the existing structure as little as possible, preserving a clear distinction between the original and what is added. On the contrary: "conservation" is about deciding how a monument *should* look, *should* have been built, and actively reconstructing the monument to fit that judgement. Such an approach is not preservation at all, but destruction of the entire history of a structure - which by definition includes all the stages in that history, including past renovations. To decide, for instance, that the restoration works carried out in 1904 should simply be swept aside, even if they were inadequate, is an act of gross irresponsibility, as it shows no real interest in preserving the monument as a historic building.*

*As a result, not just the shape but the very nature of the Grianan is being changed: the curved dry-stone corbelling which has endured 2000 years, is being pulled down and rebuilt flat and straight, directed by, of all people, an architect employed by the OPW. But worse still is the fact that, while the foundations were perfectly adequate for a dry-stone structure, it is not adequate to support what it is being changed into. Owing to "the instability of the underlying surviving stonework", reinforced concrete supports have been placed at the base of the rebuilt sections over the lintels of the internal passageways, and the platform and the top of the wall. The original dry stone structure was flexible enough to adjust to settling of the foundation, but now that the exterior*

*wall has been “reinforced” with concrete, it is in principle (and by design) inflexible, so that, so far from reinforcing the structure, the rebuilding works have made a collapse much more likely. Stones which were removed from the wall of the Grianan during reconstruction, and formed a considerable pile at the south-west side, have disappeared from the site; likewise, quantities of stone which were displaced during the reconstruction of the monastic settlement on Skellig Michael have also mysteriously vanished from the island.*

*One might be forgiven for thinking that the ultimate destruction of these sites is the intention: the OPW is part of a State bureaucracy which thinks nothing of ploughing a motorway through the Tara-Skryne Valley, or through a medieval castle, to force the rezoning of valuable land for bloated shopping centres, such as Blanchardstown or Liffey Valley, or industrial wastelands like Park West in Ballyfermot. To this bureaucracy, heritage is something to be either swept aside entirely when there is a profitable pretext, or else created anew in accord with totalitarian cultural values. The differences of the past are to be eliminated, so that there will be no alternative to the sameness of the present.*

## ***The Significance of Casement’s Putumayo Journal, 1910*** by turoe

*The concept of land rights remains fundamental to the future stability of all Latin American countries, but the crucial flashpoint areas are Brazil, Peru, Venezuela and Columbia. In Brazil, the Movimento Sem-Terra (MST), which demands fundamental agrarian reforms, has much in common with Casement’s analysis of land rights back in 1910. Casement’s Putumayo Journal, with its forthright defence of the culture and assertion of the true history of Amerindian tribal culture in its continuing struggle for its land, resources, history and identity, has enduring value as a first hand account of the crimes committed against indigenous peoples in the Putumayo region of Columbia/Peru. [1]*

*Roger Casement’s Journal, coupled with the oral testimonies he recorded during his interviews with the Barbadian overseers, serve as important evidence in the analysis of Europe’s imperial “Heart of Darkness”. There is no chapter in the whole process of extermination of South America’s Pre-Columbian tribal life recorded in so much depth of detail, and is a fitting continuation of the writings of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish monk Bartolome de las Casas. The Putumayo voyage marked a definite turning-point in Casement’s political outlook, and the tone in the journal marks this shift. Instead of being the standard account of an imperial adventurer, it becomes the sustained record of an anti-imperial investigator. At the outset of the voyage Casement spends time comparing the superiority of British imperial methods to those of the Spanish*

and Portuguese; by the time of his return downriver, he is moving toward the insight that commerce and international trade are in themselves the instruments of imperialism. [2]

Casement exposed the propaganda of the rubber industry, with its self-serving argument that commerce was a vehicle for “civilizing” indigenous peoples. As Casement had previously worked to reveal the genocide committed in the Congo “Free State” and expose the barbarism set in motion by Stanley’s exploration of the African interior, so in his Putumayo investigation he set out to expose the brutal excesses wrought by four centuries of Spanish and Portuguese conquest. The Amazon Journal is one of the most important indictments ever made against perpetrators of atrocities and imperial system-building, and the genocide which international business sustains. The continued struggle of the indigenous people of the Putumayo underlines this reality.

**Outline of the Putumayo Region:** The Putumayo is now a department of the Colombian state. It borders Ecuador and Peru, and is in the south-west of Columbia. The area is 24,885km<sup>2</sup>. It has long been an area where some of the worst atrocities in South American history have taken place. [3] [4] [5] [6]

**Plan Columbia** – 2001: <http://www.colombiajournal.org/plancolumbia.htm>

*Plan Columbia*, was conceived by the Colombian and U.S. governments, and is the latest phase of the Latin American conquest that began with Christopher Columbus.

In order to implement the \$7.5 billion Plan, Colombia is asking for \$3.5 billion in international aid to supplement \$4 billion of its own funding. Little of this international aid has been realized, however, and it is still unclear just how the debt-ridden Colombian Government is going to raise the remaining \$4 billion.

According to the Plan, the initial objective is for the state to gain control of the entire country, some 40 % of which is currently controlled by guerrilla forces. It intends to achieve this goal by launching a military offensive against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in southern Colombia, while at the same time eradicating the coca crops that are grown in that region.

Following the military phase, peasant farmers whose coca crops have been eradicated will be offered funding for alternative crops and aid will be made available to those campesinos forced to flee their homes and their land. [6]

[7]

**Bolivia has the second largest reserves of natural gas in South America, after Venezuela. In 2005, widespread protests, on one occasion paralyzing the capital La Paz, greeted the passing of a hydrocarbons law that, while increasing taxes on the multinationals that have controlled the country’s oil and gas reserves since privatization in 1996, fell short of a demand for complete nationalization. IMF and World Bank demands that the country export its gas via a proposed pipeline through long-time enemy Chile resulted in the “Gas War”: when 500,000 citizens marched to demand the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada because**

**of the deaths of 60 people at the hands of the military, the President boarded a plane to Miami. In May 2006, new president Evo Morales sent troops to seize gas fields, though whether his actions will live up to his promises waits to be seen. The privatization, like that in Ireland, was on terms highly favourable to (in other words virtually dictated by) the multinationals. In the years following, the companies discovered massive deposits of natural gas.**

**However, in the case of Ireland, the privatization, or hand-over, took place despite real alternatives for partnership with oil-producing states (Norway and Iraq), and awareness of considerable hydrocarbon potential in Irish waters.**

- (1) *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, Ed. Angus Mitchell, Lilliput Press (Dublin, 1997), p. 52
- (2) *Ibid*, p.53.
- (3) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Putumayo\\_Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Putumayo_Department)
- (4) <http://columbia.thefreedictionary.com/Putumayo+Department>
- (5) [http://209.15.138.224/colombia\\_maps/m\\_Putumayox.htm](http://209.15.138.224/colombia_maps/m_Putumayox.htm)
- (6) <http://www.cs.org/publications/CSQ/csq-article.cfm?id=1354>
- (7) <http://eatthestate.org/05-23/PlanColumbiaAndean.htm>