

## **Solidarity against colonial rule: The unique relationship between Palestine and Ireland:**

**By Matilda Cathcart**

Two countries 4,000km apart are brought much closer together by a shared fight against colonial rule.

Even though the two could not be more different in location or culture, Ireland and Palestine have harboured a close relationship for many years. Throughout the current atrocities unfolding in Palestine, Ireland has remained a close ally. Ireland and the people of Ireland have always been very outspoken about the injustices occurring in Palestine. Ireland was the first European Union member to endorse the idea of a Palestinian state and has been a close supporter throughout the occupation of Gaza by Israel. Even after the attack on October 7th, Ireland has remained strong and steadfast in its backing. What underpins this relationship? What brings these two unique places together? To answer that, a brief history of Ireland's own fight against occupying forces must be given.

While the first known source for the conflict that would turn into modern troubles is said to be in 1169 during the Norman conquest of Ireland, for the time being, we will focus towards slightly more current events. Perhaps one of the most defining moments in the feud between England and Ireland happened in the 16th century. During the protestant reformation, the majority of the English population turned protestant and the Irish remained Catholic.

There was a rebellion towards the end of the 16th century as England sent protestants from Scotland and England to convert and assimilate Ireland. It was a partial success as the Northern part of Ireland, formally known as Ulster, converted however the rest of Ireland stayed Catholic. Moving forward in history to the late 19th century due to the mismanagement of the British with food resources the event called the 'Potatoe Famine' resulted in the deaths of 1 million Irish people. The 'Home Rule Act' was passed soon after which meant that although Ireland was still a part of the British Empire it was mostly self-governed and had a separate government. However, this was met with much dispute from the protestant Ulster loyalists, which would be a common recurrence in the future. Throughout much of the 1920s after WWI, civil war and unrest against colonial rule would occur. This resulted in the group we know today as the IRA.

These tensions only grew as the years passed and the divide between the northern and southern parts of Ireland only became more prominent. With the fight for independence from England the country became divided; Protestant loyalists and Catholic nationalists. Bloody Sunday or Bogside Massacre on January 30th 1972 marked history as a tragic event where British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians in a protest in Derry.

With the current atrocities unfolding in Gaza at this moment, it's not hard to find similarities between the two situations—a relationship forged out of shared experience of conflict and oppressive forces. The people of Palestine are being forced to feed their children animal feed out of desperation to keep them alive. This parallels the Irish historical event ironically named 'The Potato Famine'. Even though it came about under the tyrannical thumb of the English rule, it's a famine in the sense of being without food rather than by natural occurrence.

It is noteworthy to discuss that both Ireland and Palestine had groups that rebelled via the use of violence. While one was classed as guerilla warfare and the other seen as terrorists, whether this description is because of racial bias could be debated, however, both groups share similarities as they both use brutality to extend their message. It needs to be said that while both Hamas and the IRA have both as groups done horrific acts in the past and in Hamas's case currently, the reasons behind their actions and why they have to go to these lengths are important to know and understand. It is unfair to ask the oppressed to stand by and take abuse. Neutrality only helps the oppressor.

It was Martin Luther King, Jr who once said

*“Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”*

While I do not defend the actions of these groups by any means, to sum them down to violent terrorists takes away the significance of the abuse and oppression each respective group faced and the reasons why they are fighting. The connection between Palestine and Ireland is beautiful. Their mutual understanding gained through shared experience overcomes differences in language, culture and religion. Ireland remains a faithful support through all; including rises and falls in media attention.



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