

# Irish support for tyranny

**Higgins' condolences for Castro follow in a long tradition of Irish support for tyranny.**

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This week, President Michael D. Higgins travelled to Cuba, the island whose freedom was crushed for 50 years by the communist dictator Fidel Castro. Last year Higgins expressed **condolences to Cuba** on Castro's death. He said: *"Castro will be remembered as a giant among global leaders whose view was not only one of freedom for his people but for all of the oppressed and excluded peoples on the planet."*

This week was equally hideous, when he opened **his speech** in Spanish: *"Let me begin by expressing my deepest condolences to President Castro, his family, and the people of Cuba, on the death of Comandante Fidel Castro."* His speech then praised the Cuban dictatorship's achievements and approvingly quoted Castro.

Higgins' condolences strongly bring to mind the episode in 1945 when both the Taoiseach Eamon de Valera and the President Douglas Hyde offered **condolences to Germany** on the death of Adolf Hitler. In some ways Higgins was worse. At least Dev just offered condolences and did not wax lyrical about Hitler supporting freedom for oppressed peoples.

It is in fact remarkable how many times Irish intellectuals and public figures have praised foreign tyrants of all sorts. Living in a reasonably free and liberal democracy, with unbroken elections since 1922, Irish thinkers nevertheless often feel the urge to praise foreign strongmen and thugs who despise democracy and individual freedom. Here are some more examples:

- Irish feminist and republican **Charlotte Despard** praised the Soviet Union in 1930: *"the stories .. that people are persecuted for their religious opinions .. are absolutely false."*
- Irish feminist and republican **Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington** praised the Soviet Union in 1932: *"She said that children were happy and women were free"*.

- **The IRA** in 1940 praised Nazi Germany and said it was working towards *"the freedom of civilised nations ... and the reconstruction of a free and progressive Europe"*.
- The IRA in 1940 even printed a **poem in tribute to Hitler**: *"Oh here's to Adolph Hitler, Who made the Britons squeal"*.
- **Cumann na mBan** in 1940 said the Nazis *"are fighting Ireland's battle, and the battle of all oppressed nations within the Empire"*.
- **Dan Breen TD** in 1943 sent birthday greetings to Hitler: *"Congratulations to the Führer on his birthday. May he live long [and] lead Europe on the road to peace, security and happiness."*
- **Oliver J. Flanagan TD** praised Nazi Germany in the Dail in 1943: *"There is one thing that Germany did, and that was to rout the Jews out of their country."*
- **George Bernard Shaw** welcomed the rise of dictators and incredibly supported *all four* of Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler. He defended the Soviet purges. In 1938 he said: *"we ought to tackle the Jewish question by admitting the right of the State to make eugenic experiments by weeding out any strains they think undesirable."* In 1945 he denied there was a deliberate Holocaust. He said the Nazis running concentration camps *"were not fiends in human form; but they did not know what to do with the thousands thrown on their care."*
- **Brendan Behan** in 1956 applauded the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. *"Long live the USSR"*, he declared.
- **Proinsias De Rossa** in 1984 defended the Soviet Union: *"I have here some figures from an official Soviet source which to some extent at least refutes the assertion that all Jews in the Soviet Union are oppressed. ... Religion in the Soviet Union is a private matter ... we have to accept there are two sides to every story."*
- **Gerry Adams** in 1987 toasted the birthday of North Korean monster Kim Il Sung.
- The Taoiseach **Bertie Ahern** said to terrorist godfather Yasser Arafat in 1999: *"We will continue to support your just cause in every way we can."*
- **Bertie Ahern** in 2004 paid tribute to Yasser Arafat at his death: *"a great leader and a great man. ... It is perhaps the most tragic aspect of President Arafat's death that he did not live to see the fruition of his ambition ... He will be greatly missed"*.
- The President **Mary McAleese** in 2004 absurdly described Arafat's death as *"a tragic loss to the Palestinian people"*.
- **Michael D. Higgins** in 2004 paid tribute to Arafat and even attended a candlelit vigil for him.
- **Rory Hearn** of the Irish Anti-War Movement defended the Sunni and Shia jihadis in Iraq in 2005. He praised: *"the defiant resistance in Iraq ... It is only through the continued growth and resistance of these movements that we can end the bloody occupation of Iraq"*.
- **The UCD Anti-War Group** said in 2006: *"We express our solidarity with all democratic, secular and progressive opposition forces in Iraq fighting for US-UK defeat."*
- **The Socialist Workers Party** in 2006 said: *"We support Hamas and Hizbollah in their courageous stand against imperialism"*.

- **Eamonn McCann** in 2006 said: *"Socialist Worker makes no bones about it. We are on the same side as Hezbollah and Hamas."*
- **The Irish Anti-War Movement** said in 2006 that: *"Iran is a modern country ... It is one of the more democratic states in the Middle East. Iran has democratic elections and a powerful reform movement, ... It is the US and its allies that are undemocratic."*
- **Finian McGrath TD** in 2006 denied that Cuba was a repressive dictatorship: *"It's a different kind of democracy to Ireland"*.
- **Tom McGurk** in 2008 praised Cuba: *"Castro has left Cuba with real status among Latin American countries. ... this is a society where, with food, housing and transport so cheap, and education and health free, material wealth is largely irrelevant. ... the tyranny of consumerism does not exist."*
- **Raymond Deane** in 2008 said: *"President Ahmedinejad" [of Iran] "has repeatedly expressed hopes for an end to the Zionist regime, a hope shared worldwide ... "The provision of training and logistical support to Hamas" ... is to be welcomed"*.
- The President **Mary McAleese** in 2010 laid a wreath at the tomb of Ataturk, the butcher of Turkey's Christians.
- **Galway City Council** resolved in 2011 to erect a memorial to communist executioner Che Guevara.
- **Emer Costello MEP** in 2013 laid a wreath at the tomb of Yasser Arafat.
- **Mick Wallace TD** in 2013 defended Hezbollah: *"Hezbollah will retain its legitimacy as long as the Israeli occupation of Arab peoples and lands continues."*
- **Irish government buildings** flew their flags at half mast in 2015 at the death of the King of Saudi Arabia.

There are plenty more such horrors in the future, I am sure. Why exactly free and prosperous Westerners feel the need to praise foreign tyrants under whom they could never live is a mystery. Nor is it unique to Ireland. An extraordinary number of intellectuals and public figures in the UK, France and US have praised foreign fascists, dictators, communists and jihadists over the years. For some intellectuals, tyrants are appealing the further away you are from them.

In Ireland, it is not just a fringe. The very top of the Irish state is implicated in this kind of thinking. The idea that Ireland has an "ethical" foreign policy, where we clearly support democrats abroad, and oppose tyrants and authoritarians, is nonsense. The fact is that President Higgins is following in a long and shameful Irish tradition of support for foreign, faraway tyranny. If it is to ever end, this tradition must be confronted.

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