

# Britain a 'United' Kingdom How Much Longer?

The EU elections raise questions about the territorial integrity of the U.K., writes Johanna Ross.

By **Johanna Ross**

in **Edinburgh, Scotland**

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They were the elections that weren't supposed to take place, but wound up proving highly significant for British politics. By now the U.K. should have divorced itself from the EU under Prime Minister Theresa May's promise of "Brexit means Brexit." But with her leadership turning out to be not so "strong and stable," Britain finds itself still part of Europe. As a result, on May 23, voters in the European Parliament election seized the chance to send a resounding message to traditional centrist parties that the duopoly that has dominated U.K. politics since World War II – Conservative and Labour – is no more. Change is afoot.

Despite two years of disastrous Brexit negotiations with deal after deal blocked by Westminster politicians and considerable attempts by Remain (in EU) supporters, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair, to lobby for a second referendum on Brexit, the indefatigable Nigel Farage led his Brexit Party to decisive victory, claiming 32 percent of the vote. Taken at face value this result has reinforced the 2016 EU referendum result with a clear message: the U.K. wants out of Europe.

## Scotland Always More Pro-Europe

But a map of the voting ratio tells a different story in Scotland. As predicted, it was a historic result for the governing Scottish National Party, which stood on a Remain platform, advocating a second referendum. Their 38 percent vote rose from 29 percent in the last EU election five years ago. The Brexit Party by contrast secured just under 15 percent. As Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon concluded, Scotland has reinforced its pro-EU stance.

From the days of the Auld Alliance with France, long before the 1707 unification with England, Scotland has had its own relationship with the Continent. Links with universities such as Leiden in the Netherlands and trade links with Bruges, Belgium, and Gdansk, Poland, were in place long before similar connections were made with England.

Scotland has always been more pro-Europe and this election result emphasized that. It's already being hailed as the necessary catalyst for a second referendum on Scottish independence or "IndyRef2" as it's known closer to home. Nationalists have been calling for this since they were defeated 45 percent to 55 percent in the 2014 vote. But Sturgeon stuck to her guns, saying that the time was not right; as polls confirmed. However, less than a week after the EU election, the SNP has already published a new independence bill, declaring the EU election result a "fresh start" for Indyref2. A deadline has been set for May 2021.

Westminster can of course try to block any second referendum. At least three of the candidates to replace May have said they would. But that could court a serious

backlash. More and more Scots believe that London is no longer interested in their views on anything, with the Brexit negotiations amply demonstrating this. As Scottish historian Tom Devine has commented, the Brexit talks demonstrated that any idea of a union based on “partnership and mutual respect” is “fraud and myth.” Under the circumstances, it is not far-fetched to envisage a Catalonia-style situation in which Scotland forges ahead with a second referendum in spite of Westminster.

In such an instance Scotland may get more support from EU allies than Catalonia did. Britain’s reputation in Europe, after all, has been severely damaged over Brexit, and the EU is, arguably, more likely to back a country interested in joining Europe, than one that has rejected it. In any case, it wouldn’t be the first time Scotland made such a move. In 1320 the Declaration of Arbroath was sent to the Pope, signed by 50 Scottish nobles and proclaimed Scotland’s independence.

Then there is the question of leadership. Sturgeon, in contrast to her Westminster counterpart, is widely trusted and respected in Scotland. Unlike May, she has provided the one thing that citizens value in a leader: consistency. Despite criticism for not calling another referendum to date, she stuck to her strategy – and it has paid off. The next campaign for independence is sure to be more effective this time around. It was widely agreed that the economic arguments for independence were the weakest link in the Yes campaign back in 2014. Aware of this, the Nationalists are publishing a guide on the subject, to be delivered to 2.4 million Scottish households this summer.

All indicators now are pointing to a no-deal Brexit, which will only boost the nationalists' case. It could also potentially create chaos in another part of the United Kingdom—the island of Ireland.

## **Ireland's Borders**

Leaving without a deal would be the worst-case scenario for anyone who has any memory of the Northern Ireland Troubles. It's feared that a hard border between north and south – which would occur if Northern Ireland, as part of the U.K., left the EU – with all the strict control and customs checks that the EU requires on its borders – could trigger a return to the days of bombings and shootings and jeopardise everything achieved under the Good Friday Agreement. It would be the ultimate provocation to Irish nationalist paramilitary groups who believe in a United Ireland.

A hard border, therefore, would be deemed a step back into the dark days of conflict, which no-one wants given all the lives that were lost to it throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, times have changed and so has the political landscape on the Emerald Isle. The Irish Republic has benefited from EU and Eurozone membership and for many in the north has seemed like a beacon of economic prosperity. By contrast, Northern Ireland doesn't even have a government – as the power-sharing agreement between the nationalists and unionists broke down two years ago – and the economic outlook is clouded by Brexit.

These factors – together with a majority of Northern Irish voting to remain in the EU in the 2016 referendum – have therefore raised an idea that would have seemed unthinkable

just a few years ago: that of Irish reunification. Earlier this year several U.K. cabinet ministers cited a “very real” prospect that a no-deal Brexit would lead to a vote on Irish reunification. Polls both north and south of the border have indicated increasing desire on both sides for this to happen. Granted, a united Ireland naturally brings its own set of obstacles and it’s not something to count on happening tomorrow. It is remarkable, nonetheless, that it is even being discussed.

All this raises the real possibility of the dissolution of the United Kingdom. Poor, inconsistent leadership from May, and a Westminster parliament that has put party politics and self-interest before the delivery of Brexit, has created the current crisis, which in turn has been a gift to Scottish and Irish nationalists.

What previously may have been considered a risky, unstable option for some voters – independence – no doubt now looks like a safer bet given the quagmire of Brexit. Voters now have to weigh up if it is in their interest to remain inside a union that no longer serves the Scottish people (some would argue never did).

As Robert Burns, Scotland’s 18<sup>th</sup> century bard, put it: “I have long said to myself, what are the advantages Scotland reaps from this so called Union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence and her very name?” More than 200 years later, Scots are still pondering the same question.

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# Ignoring Today's 'Great Hungers'

The U.S. government presents itself as the beneficent superpower, but the reality of Washington's endless wars and lavish spending on bombs – while millions face starvation and disease – suggest a different reality, as Kathy Kelly notes.

By Kathy Kelly

Earlier this year, the Sisters of St. Brigid invited me to speak at their Feile Bride celebration in Kildare, Ireland. The theme of the gathering was: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak."

The Sisters have embraced numerous projects to protect the environment, welcome refugees, and nonviolently resist wars. I felt grateful to reconnect with people who so vigorously opposed any Irish support for U.S. military wars in Iraq. They had also campaigned to end the economic sanctions against Iraq, knowing that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children suffered and died for lack of food, medicine and clean water.

This year, the Sisters asked me to first meet with local teenagers who would commemorate another time of starvation imposed by an imperial power. Joe Murray, who heads Action from Ireland (Afri), arranged for a class from Dublin's Beneavin De La Salle College to join an Irish historian in a field adjacent to the Dunshaughlin work house on the outskirts of Dublin.

Such workhouses dot the landscape of Ireland and England. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, during the famine years, they were dreaded places. People who went there knew they were near the brink of death due to hunger, disease, and dire poverty. Ominously, behind the workhouse lay the graveyard.

The young men couldn't help poking a bit of fun, at first; what in the world were they doing out in a field next to an imposing building, their feet already soaked in the wet grass as a light rain fell? They soon became quite attentive.

We learned that the Dunshaughlin workhouse had opened in May of 1841. It could accommodate 400 inmates. During the famine years, many hundreds of people were crowded in the stone building in dreadful conditions.

An estimated one million people died during a famine that began because of blighted potato crops but became an "artificial famine" because Ireland's British occupiers lacked the political will to justly distribute resources and food. Approximately one million Irish people who could no longer feed themselves

and subsist on the land emigrated to places like the U.S. But seeking refuge wasn't an option for those who couldn't afford the passage.

Evicted by landowners, desperate people arrived at workhouses like the one we were visiting. Our guide read us the names of people from the surrounding area who had been buried in a mass grave behind the workhouse, their bodies unidentified. They were victims of what the Irish call "Greta Mor"—"The Great Hunger." It was recently, as I tried to better understand the migration of desperate and starving people now crossing from East Africa into Yemen, that I began to realize how great the hunger was.

## **A Global Holocaust**

During that same period as the Irish famine – in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century – there were 30 million people, possibly 50 million, dying of famine in northern China, India, Brazil and the Maghreb. The terrible suffering of these unknown people, whose plight never made it into the history books, was a sharp reminder to me of Western exceptionalism.

As researched and described in Mike Davis's book, *The Late Victorian Holocaust*, El Nino and La Nina climate changes caused massive crop failures. What food could be harvested was often sent abroad. Railroad infrastructure could have been used to send food to people dying of hunger, but wealthier people chose to ignore the plight of the starving. The Great Hunger, fueled by bigotry and greed, had been greater than any of its victims knew.

And now, few in the prosperous West are aware of the terror faced by people in South Sudan, Somalia, northeast Nigeria, northern Kenya and Yemen. Millions of people cannot feed themselves or find potable water.

Countries in Africa, which the U.S. has helped destabilize such as Somalia, are convulsed in fighting which exacerbates effects of drought and drives helpless civilians toward points of hoped-for refuge. Many have chosen a path of escape through the famine-torn country of Yemen.

But the U.S. has been helping a Saudi-led coalition to blockade and bomb Yemen since March of 2015. Sudanese fighters aligned with Saudi Arabia have been taking over cities along the Yemeni coast, heading northward. People trying to escape famine find themselves trapped amid vicious air and ground attacks.

In March 2017, Stephen O'Brien, head of the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, traveled to Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Northern Kenya. Since that trip, he has repeatedly begged the U.N. Security Council to help end the fighting and prevent conflict-driven famine conditions.

Regarding Yemen, he wrote, in a July 12, 2017 statement to the U.N. Security Council that: “Seven million people, including 2.3 million malnourished (500,000 severely malnourished) children under the age of five, are on the cusp of famine, vulnerable to disease and ultimately at risk of a slow and painful death. Nearly 16 million people do not have access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene, and more than 320,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported in all of the country’s governorates bar one.” This number has since risen to 850,000.

## **Spreading Famine**

Ben Ehrenreich describes famine conditions along what the Israeli theorist Eyal Weizman calls the “conflict shoreline,” an expanding band of climate change-induced desertification that stretches through the Sahel and across the African continent before leaping the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. He notes that this vast territory, once the site of fierce resistance to colonial incursions, is now paying the heaviest price, in disastrous climate conditions, for the wealth of the industrialized north. As the deserts spread south, ever more dire conflicts can be expected to erupt, causing more people to flee.

Of a drought-stricken area of Somaliland, Ehrenreich writes: “People were calling this drought *sima*, ‘the leveller,’ because it affected all of the clans stretching across Somaliland and into Ethiopia to the west and Kenya to the south.”

“The women’s stories were almost all the same,” writes Ehrenreich, “differing only in the age and number of children sick, the number of animals they had lost and the number that survived. Hodan Ismail had lost everything. She left her husband’s village to bring her children here, where her mother lived, ‘to save them,’ she said. ‘When I got there, I saw that she had nothing either.’ The river and streams, their usual source of drinking water, had gone dry and they had no option but to drink from a shallow well at the edge of town. The water was making all the children sick.”

In 1993, at the Rio de Janeiro “Earth Summit,” delegates conveying the views of then-President George H.W. Bush, voiced a refrain of the statement, “the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation.” U.S. demands of the summit incalculably restricted the changes to which it might have led.

Representing President Bill Clinton six years later, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defended planned bombardment of Iraq, saying “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.”

## A Downward Spiral

There is danger that must be recognized. The danger is real and the danger is spreading. Violence spreads the famine, and the famine will spread violence.

I find myself repulsed by assertions voicing U.S. exceptionalism, yet my own study and focus often omits histories and present realities which simply must be understood if we are to recognize the traumas our world faces.

In relation to conflict-driven famines, it becomes even more imperative to resist the U.S. government's allocation of \$700 billion to the Department of Defense. In the U.S., our violence, and our delusions of being indispensable stem from accepting a belief that our "way of life" is non-negotiable.

Growing inequality, protected by menacing arsenals, paves a path to the graveyard: It is not a "way of life." We still could acquire a great hunger: a transforming hunger to share justice with our planetary neighbors. We could shed familiar privileges and search for communal tools to preserve us from indifferent wealth and voracious imperial power.

We could embrace the theme of the Irish sisters at their Feile Bride gathering: "Allow the Voice of the Suffering to Speak" and then choose action-based initiatives to share our abundance and lay aside, forever, the futility of war.

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## A Modest Proposal: An Irish AIPAC

Noting the remarkable success of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in influencing U.S. government policies, Daniel C. Maguire offers up this tongue-in-cheek plan for an Irish AIPAC to do the same for Ireland.

By Daniel C. Maguire

This is to announce the formation of the Irish AIPAC – American Irish Public Affairs Committee. The purpose of this Committee will be (borrowing from the Israeli AIPAC) to make sure that "there is no daylight between" Ireland's perceived needs and American policies.

Irish Americans, all 35 million of them, should be ashamed of themselves. They

sing the songs of Ireland and dance its dances but their bibulous love of Ireland has never been organized to help Ireland in its hours of need.

Poor Ireland suffered years of foreign occupation – with part of their Island-state still tied to Britain. In the artificially imposed “famine” in 1845-1852, a million Irish people died and 25 percent of the population went into exile, many dying on the way, and the remainder all suffering from malnutrition.

It was not just the potato blight: England was actually exporting food from Ireland during this pseudo-famine. This was the Irish Holocaust. And now deceptive Irish bankers have hamstrung the “Celtic tiger,” the boom went bust, and Ireland is linked to a tottering European Union. Now is the time for all Irish-Americans to come to the aid of poor Ireland.

Irish organizing skills are unfairly disparaged. One foreign diplomat said cynically that if the Dutch took over Ireland, they would turn it into a garden; if the Irish took over Holland, they would drown.

Be that as it may, help is available. The Israeli AIPAC, formed in 1954, shows the way. With only five million American Jews to work on it, Israel has become the equivalent of “the fifty-first state of the union.” In fact, Israel is the luckiest of the states since it pays no taxes but has received from the U.S. Treasury at least \$130 billion since 1949.

Israel is still the prime recipient of American foreign aid, over \$10 million a day. George Ball estimated that when all aid is calculated, U.S. support of Israel comes to \$11 billion a year. So, Ireland gets only \$2 million a year in U.S. aid, while Israel gets \$10 million a day. That is a disgrace and it is the fault of Irish-Americans who must now set out to correct that by making Ireland the equivalent of the 52<sup>nd</sup> state.

### **Learning from the Best**

Here is the Action Plan for the Irish AIPAC:

#### **Target One: Congress:**

As soon as someone is elected to Congress, he/she will immediately be visited by members of the Irish lobby. Generous monies will be promised to them (funneled through wealthy Irish-American groups to keep it looking legal). The Irish lobby, like the Israeli lobby, must not be stinting in their generosity.

The *Foreign Policy Journal* reports that in the 2015-2016 U.S. presidential race, Israeli-related monies gushed forth. Hillary Clinton reportedly got \$212,927; Sen. Ted Cruz, \$203,552; Sen. Lindsey Graham, \$74,200, and of course all of

these politicians promised full and fervid support for whatever Israel says it wants along with a red carpet into the White House.

Surely big-hearted Irish groups can match this. Without saying it out loud, the Irish goal must be to make Congress the best Congress that Irish money can buy. Again, without saying it out loud, the Irish lobby must set out to make Congress Irish-occupied territory. History shows this can be done.

Of course, it also must be made clear to members of Congress that pro-Ireland monies will go to their opponents if they do not faithfully support all of Ireland's alleged needs. On an incessant basis, the Irish lobby will tell the members exactly what those needs are.

The Irish lobby can point to foolish politicians like Paul Findley, Earl Hilliard and Cynthia McKinney who dared to resist the Israeli AIPAC. They were ousted from Congress as AIPAC arranged crucial financial support for their political opponents. The concerns of Israel trumped whatever petty concerns their American constituents had.

The ghosts of these ousted members hover over Congress whenever Israel-related votes come up. The Irish lobby must match this kind of muscular zeal. Ireland deserves no less.

Efforts will be made to get Irish loyalists appointed to all the congressional staffs so that it will be clear to members of Congress that the Irish AIPAC is watching their every move. Should the Executive Branch ever waver in its support of Ireland, Congress will be pressed to invite the Prime Minister of Ireland to address a joint session of Congress to upbraid the American president for his disloyalty to Ireland.

And when the Irish Prime Minister speaks to Congress, the Irish AIPAC will be in the galleries recording how many times various members leaped to their feet to applaud the Irish leader.

Again, the Israeli lobby shows the way: former Jewish member of the Israeli Knesset Uri Avnery said that when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to Congress, members vie with one another to applaud "jumping up and down like yo-yos." (This is actually good exercise for the all too sedentary members of Congress.)

When the Irish AIPAC has its annual meeting, attendance and unctuous obeisance by members of Congress and the administration will be *de rigueur*.

## **Countering Turbulence**

Now all of this Irish political power might be resented by small-minded bigots. Such people must be sharply labeled as “anti-Irish.” They must be portrayed as the residue of ugly historical anti-Irish prejudice, as the hateful echoes of an era when signs were posted on American factories: “IRISH NEED NOT APPLY.”

The mantle of victimhood – *there is no suffering like Irish suffering* – must veil the rise of Irish power. If dissident Irish-Americans groups form – sort of an *Irish Voice For Peace* – to protest Irish abuses of power here and in Ireland, they must be labeled “self-hating Irish” and dismissed.

### **Target Two: The Press**

Anyone who joins the editorial staff of any news media will never be lonely. Members of the Irish AIPAC will visit them before they have arranged the furniture in their new office. They will be taken to lunch, put on Irish AIPAC mailing lists, and gently reminded of the strength of Irish influence in the zone in which they work and seek advertising.

We should be grateful to the Israeli AIPAC for showing how effective this can be in muting criticism of any mischief or criminality going on in Israel. Even the liberals at MSNBC know where not to tread when it touches on Israel. Palestinian travails are *terra incognita* for them and for the mainstream American media.

(Sadly, the Israelis have not been as successful at quelling the liberal press in Israel which dares at times to speak boldly to Zionist criminal use of power. Ironically it is easier to criticize Israeli occupation policy in Israel than it is in “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Kudos to the Israeli AIPAC!)

The Irish AIPAC must never forget: *a subservient press is an AIPAC’s best friend.*

### **Goal Three: ‘Wink and a Nod’ Privileges:**

It has been said that all nations are brigands, sinning boldly as they pursue their tribal interests. If their sins get noticed, this could turn off the faucets of aid. Jewish writer Tony Judt called the United States “Israel’s paymaster.” Suppose the paymaster got really mad at something you are doing, like violating international law, for example, by doing a little ethnic cleansing and land theft – things like that. This is where the special relationship has to get really, really special. So special that your crimes are ignored by the donor state.

This is a case of “love means never having to say you’re sorry” raised to the level of statecraft. This is the “wink and a nod” privilege that wipes out

guilt and punishment.

Now holy Ireland is a very Catholic state. The Preamble of its Constitution begins: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority..." It goes on to "humbly" acknowledge all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ..."

Now suppose this Catholic state decided that only Catholics are full-fledged citizens and that Jews, Muslims and Protestants are second-class citizens with very limited voting, traveling, land-purchasing and water-using rights. That would be so un-American it would surely turn off the flow of American cash and political support to Ireland – thus defeating the whole purpose of the Irish AIPAC!

Again, Israel comes to the rescue. In the warm and exonerating American embrace that Israel enjoys – and Ireland aspires to – its sins, be they scarlet, will be made white as snow. The donor looks away and the donations proceed without abatement.

The Israeli success in this regard must be applauded. You will search history in vain to find an example of so many offenses being ignored, forgiven, and systematically and insistently forgotten. Why would the Irish Catholics worry if all they did was crack down on the civil and human rights of a few Jews and Protestants?

After all, on June 8, 1967, during the Six Days War, to prevent surveillance of their huge military land seizure, Israel attacked an American intelligence-gathering ship, the USS Liberty, killing 34 American sailors and wounding 171 of them. The record is clear: it was not, as claimed, a "mistake." Former CIA officer Ray McGovern reports the following recorded exchange between a horrified Israeli pilot and Israeli headquarters:

*Israeli pilot to ground control:* "This is an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?"

*Ground Control:* "Yes, follow orders."

*Pilot:* "But, sir, it's an American ship; I can see the flag."

*Ground Control.* "Never mind. Hit it."

Nothing like it had happened since Pearl Harbor, but the American response was a wink and a nod to Israel's government. As former Undersecretary of State George Ball said: "If American leaders did not have the courage to punish Israel for the blatant murder of American citizens, it seems clear that their America

friends would let them get away with almost anything.”

And so indeed it has come to pass. On March 16, 2003 a 23-year old American citizen, Rachel Corrie, as part of a nonviolent group working in Gaza trying to prevent Israeli forces from destroying water wells and homes ... yes, water wells and homes. Corrie saw an American-made Israeli bulldozer moving to destroy the home of the Nasrallah family, consisting of two brothers, their wives and five children.

Corrie was wearing an orange flak jacket and speaking through a bull horn. She mounted a pile of dirt, looking right into the cabin at the two drivers of the Caterpillar bulldozer. Her companions surrounded her screaming. The Caterpillar bulldozer, with an Israeli armed car in attendance, ran over her. Twice. She died in the arms of Alice Coy, a Jewish member of her group from England.

Again, a wink and a nod from the cowed American government.

Another American citizen was murdered on the high seas on May 30, 2010, by the Israelis on an unarmed flotilla trying to bring medical aid to a Gaza under siege. Eight Turkish citizens were killed, too, and Turkey responded appropriately and vigorously. From the U.S., another wee wink and another wee nod.

So, if in this special relationship the murder of Americans does not compute morally why would Americans be upset by the Agricultural Settlement Law of 1967 that banned non-Jewish Israelis from working on Jewish National Fund lands, i.e. on over 80 percent of the land in Israel? Why take note of laws that prohibit the sale or leasing of state-owned land to non-Jews, or keeping 80 percent of drinking water for Jews in the West Bank and allowing polluted water to much of Gaza – or arresting Palestinian children to keep their parents from protesting the ongoing theft of land, called euphemistically “settlements”? To all of this, a wink and a nod and the never-ending flow of American aid.

And then, of course, there is the United Nations and its pesky Security Council Resolutions. One of the reasons cited to launch a war against Iraq was Saddam Hussein’s resistance to a Security Council resolution. Israel is the world record holder in violating Security Council Resolutions having done so nearly 40 times. No other country is close. (Two other U.S. allies – Turkey and Morocco – hold down second and third place, respectively.)

That is a bit of an embarrassment for the United States but our loyalty is made of stern stuff and so we can tut-tuttingly ignore this bad habit of our Israeli “ally.” We can also ignore the thousand Americans who volunteer to fight in the Israeli army in violation of the Neutrality Act which forbids citizens engaging

in military action against nations with whom we are at peace. That also violates Article One, Section Eight of the Constitution which says only Congress can send Americans off to war. But what are such petty scruples among friends.

But, hold on! Preferential status imports still other privileges. When enemies like Saddam Hussein and ISIS pose a direct or proximate threat to Israel, the United States will send forces thousands of miles to fight and die, but will graciously allow Israel not to join the "coalition of the willing."

Puny-minded critics call this unfair since Israel is the number one recipient of American aid, with the fourth strongest military force in the world and the sixth in nuclear power. Such carping critics are guilty of underestimating American generosity to its beneficiaries and of being naive about Israel's need to use its military power to enforce the occupation and siege in Palestine. Occupied people are notoriously uncooperative. It's enough to keep an army busy.

### **The Missing 'Irish Vote'**

A question: Is it unfair and even "anti-Semitic" to say that there is a reliable pro-Israel "Jewish vote" that is the underbelly of AIPAC's political power? Some people think there is such a Jewish voting bloc. Golda Meir thought so. In 1956, Meir insisted that a planned war of expansion should occur *before* the American November election. President Eisenhower, she said, would probably do nothing "because of the Jewish vote." She was right.

Eisenhower noted that "there are 5 million Jewish voters in the U.S. and very few Arabs." He assumed those Jewish American voters would vote Israel's interests. Eisenhower thought of using force to stop the Israeli advances in Sinai but concluded, "Then I'd lose the election. There would go New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, at least." He definitely thought there was a Jewish vote firmly bonded to Israel's warring interests.

Even earlier, when President Truman was asked why he was alienating Arabs by supporting the Zionist takeover of Palestine he replied: "I am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents." He did not doubt there was an American Jewish vote in lock-step with the Zionist project in Palestine.

Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles resented Israeli pressure in Washington but succumbed to "the paid advertisements, the mass meetings, the resolutions, the demands of Zionist organizations, the veiled threat of domestic political reprisal", i.e., the American Jewish vote.

This concern over "the Jewish vote" has not evanesced in contemporary American

politics. Try to get concern for the human and civil rights of occupied Palestinians into the Democratic Party Platform and you will feel its full force.

### **Irish-American Neglect**

Here is where Irish-Americans are again in scandalous default. Irish-American voting

patterns can indeed be tracked, but, appallingly, they have nothing to do with Ireland. Irish-American voters seem distracted by American economic and political issues and are utterly indifferent to the needs of Ireland. As a result, presidents and Congress need never worry about an “Irish vote” when they discuss issues relating to Ireland.

Irish eyes should not be smiling at that lack of loyalty. The Irish AIPAC must change all that.

Let’s admit it: the Israeli AIPAC is the most effective and efficient lobby in modern political history. Never has control been extended over so many by so few. Still, it is not perfect. It is ignoring one resource that could make Israel more Jewish, more peaceful, more accepted and even admired by the world at large. That resource is Judaism, which, in my view, houses the most magnificent moral vision found in any world religion.

Early Israel sowed the seeds of modern democratic theory, envisioning a move away from one-percent Egyptian rule to the sharing society of Sinai, where there “shall be no poor among you” (Deut. 15:4) and where swords will be turned into plowshares. This thinking challenged the primacy of state kill-power. That’s the Judaism to which we are all in debt.

The demonic error that grips many Jews and non-Jews as well is to conflate Judaism with Zionism. Judaism is a 3,000-year-old moral treasure. Zionism is a Nineteenth Century form of hallucinatory theology.

Yes, Zionism is theology, not political science. It holds that the deity, believed to be the creator of heaven and earth including everything from fruit flies to quasars, was also into real estate redistribution. This deity insisted that Palestine is destined for Jews only, but, unfortunately, failed to define what makes you a Jew – and that remains a vexed and open question.

Of Palestine, David Ben Gurion (a man of no known theological expertise) said: “God promised it to us.” Yitzhak Baer, the German-Israeli historian, wrote: “God gave to every nation its place, and to the Jews he gave Palestine.” All other residents of Palestine, even if they were there as a people for millennia, must

be ousted with the remainder crushed by occupation and siege. That is Zionism. Sorry, Mr. Ben Gurion and Professor Baer; don't you dare pin that Zionist rap on "God."

Nothing could be less Jewish than Zionism. A truly Jewish Israel could be a paradigm for all nations as old Isaiah insisted it could be.

### **How Ireland Can Help Israel**

Ireland is Catholic, right down to its Constitutional core, but it does not claim to be "a Catholic democracy" because that is as much an oxymoron as a Lutheran democracy or a Jewish democracy. Catholicism is at the center of Irish culture. It can be practiced, studied and celebrated, or rejected freely. But so too can Judaism, and Protestantism, and Islam.

Whatever frictions have occurred among religion groups – and sadly such frictions always do occur – Catholicism is not required for full-fledged Irish citizenship with all the rights thereunto appertaining.

When Yogi Berra heard that Robert Briscoe, a Jew, was twice elected Lord Mayor of Dublin (in 1956 and again in 1961) he famously replied: "Only in America!" No, Mr. Berra. Also in Ireland. Mr. Briscoe's Jewishness did not deprive him of first-class citizenship in Ireland and the voters in Dublin knew that. At their core, neither Catholicism nor Judaism is inimical to a pluralistic democracy.

The Irish democracy where religion does not qualify you for citizenship can speak to the Israeli identity problem. *Israel does not know what it is*. It wants to be an oxymoronic "Jewish democracy" but it can't be and it isn't.

The distinguished Israeli Jewish professor Shlomo Sand, in a book first published in Hebrew, states it clearly: "Israel cannot be described as a democratic state while it sees itself as the state of the 'Jewish people.'" That leaves out all the other people.

A former Israeli Brigadier General, writing in the *Jerusalem Post* puts it this way: "Is Israel a democracy? Maybe it is an oligarchy or an aristocracy or some sort of anarchistic monarchy." Many see it as a theocracy. No surprise, given all the Zionist God-talk.

Catholicism is part of the Irish national identity but Ireland is still a bona fide democracy. Israel could be the place where Judaism could be practiced freely, studied, and revered. Scholars from other religions could see it as the best place to study Judaism and to look for the shared moral ground of all religions.

But they could also see Israel as a perfect place to study their own religions and to practice them freely without any diminution of their rights as citizens or as visitors in Israel. That is not the Israel of today.

The Great Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel understood the Jewish impulse to find a safe place to live but he worried that Israel would become alienated from Judaism. That, I aver, is precisely what has happened. The victims have become the victimizers. Gaza is the Warsaw ghetto, the West Bank, Golan Heights and Jerusalem are subdued and occupied by a Jewish Israeli *Reich*.

### **The Israeli AIPAC Converted to Judaism?**

Realists would say that the Israeli AIPAC is inexorably wedded to an eternal war against Palestinians seeking relief from occupation and siege. This is senseless, and in an age where there are suitcase-size atomic weapons, it is also suicidal.

What a dream it would be if the highly skilled Israeli AIPAC could be converted to a force for peace. All it would have to do is to urge Israel to stop forgetting March 2002. That is when all 22 members of the Arab League offered to recognize Israel's right to exist and have normal relations with Israel. This offer has since been repeatedly reconfirmed.

In April 2002, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which includes 57 nations, concurred with the Arab League offer, and the Iranian delegation expressed its full approval. The prerequisite was not to drive Israel into the sea. The only condition was Israel's compliance with the United Nations Resolutions 194, 242, 338 and the return to the pre-1967 borders. They conceded the right for Israel to exist. Hamas has said it will acknowledge Israel's right to live in peace within its pre-1967 borders.

Israel can have peace or expansion; it is currently choosing expansion. And that, in the words of the poet Yeats, is "a pity beyond all telling."

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# Can Greece and EU Make Amends?

**Exclusive:** The after-shocks from the Wall Street crash of 2007-08 continue to rattle international stability, with Greece now rejecting never-ending demands for more belt-tightening and raising the specter of a splintered European Union, as ex-U.S. diplomat William R. Polk explains.

By William R. Polk

The Greek people have not only spoken; they have shouted. More than six in ten voters said “no.” So what does that mean and what will happen next?

What it means is twofold: Domestically, it means that the Greek people in vast numbers refuse to accept the verdict of the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the creditor nations. That verdict would have amounted to a generation or more of continued suffering for the Greeks in pursuit of the receding goal of repaying the creditors for their loans.

As German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said, loans must be repaid. In principle, of course, she is right, but there are extenuating circumstances, including that the lenders baited the trap in which the Greeks have fallen. The lenders offered loans when they should have known that the borrowers had little chance of repaying them.

Sometimes in Greece as, for example, in Latin America bank officers encouraged borrowing because they got bonuses for generating business, a common banking practice. Other loans were made for political purposes. Some also had “security” aspects.

Collectively, the Greeks are “guilty” of accepting the loans. They should have known how hard it would be to repay them. Some, prudently, refused, but when the loans temporarily created a minor boom, almost everyone was swept up in the euphoria.

After years of warfare, poverty and turmoil, it seemed that a new day was dawning. A “bubble” of expectation seemed to have changed the rules of the game. So both the government and the people plunged into the financial trap.

And the Greeks were not alone. Other heavy borrowers included the governments and peoples of Spain, Portugal, Italy and Ireland. This is what makes the current crisis more than just a Greek problem.

Internationally, there are already signs that lenders are reacting to the Greek vote in panic. If one country that borrowed heavily is defaulting, they ask, which other heavily-borrowing country is likely to be next? Many have suggested

it will be Spain. Apparently a number of lenders believe that popular Spanish movements resemble the coalition of groups supporting Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's Syriza. The bankers may not particularly care about the politics or ideology, but they fear the turmoil.

Bankers are usually noted for their prudence (especially when the risks of non-payment are readily apparent). And prudence argues for either making no new loans or even calling in those already made. This could dramatically harm the Spanish economy where already in this year nearly one in four workers could not find a job.

So, it's clear that the time of danger is here. What about the time for statesmanship? Ironically, the lenders do not seem to have yet understood that the "No" vote could save the Euro, save Greece and potentially save Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland. Why is that so?

It is so because having secured his support at home, Prime Minister Tsipras can now afford to negotiate a sensible deal. And, having seen that Tsipras survived what amounted to a vote-of-no-confidence and would have meant his political removal if he had lost, Chancellor Merkel and French President Francois Hollande now realize that they must negotiate a sensible deal with Tsipras if they are to save the Euro and potentially the European Union.

What would be the basis of a compromise? While there are details of considerable complexity, the heart of the matter is reasonably simple:

First, Greece cannot repay the huge debt in the foreseeable future. That would have been true even if the Greeks had voted "yes." Put starkly, the IMF, the European Central Bank and other creditors must forgive a large part of the Greek debt. They probably will choose to disguise "forgiveness" by calling it an extension into the remote future.

This is essentially what the Greeks and particularly Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis have demanded. However, to make such a deal more acceptable to the Merkel-Hollande bloc, Varoufakis recognized that his presence was divisive and resigned, but his move will not change the terms of the possible compromise. It must be along the lines that he had marked out.

Second, if Greece is to survive in some acceptable manner and possibly even avoid a civil war the country will need additional emergency financing. Tsipras's electoral victory will make it possible for him to bend slightly but not much on such issues as welfare payments.

At the same time, public desperation as funds dry up and even food becomes scarce will impel him to compromise as much as he can to stay in office.

Meanwhile, the lenders will find strong incentives to help because a total collapse of the Greek economy raises the specter of collapse in other European Union economies and the ultimate danger of the splintering of the European Union and the collapse of the Euro.

Let us hope that in the days and weeks ahead true statesmen (or stateswomen) will take the lead.

**William R. Polk is a veteran foreign policy consultant, author and professor who taught Middle Eastern studies at Harvard. President John F. Kennedy appointed Polk to the State Department's Policy Planning Council where he served during the Cuban Missile Crisis. His books include: *Violent Politics: Insurgency and Terrorism*; *Understanding Iraq*; *Understanding Iran*; *Personal History: Living in Interesting Times*; *Distant Thunder: Reflections on the Dangers of Our Times*; and *Humpty Dumpty: The Fate of Regime Change*.**

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## Greek 'No' Vote Spurs Wider Resistance

**Exclusive:** Greek voters rebelled against Germany and the dominant powers of Europe by rejecting demands for more austerity, but the Greek resistance also is resonating across the Continent, emboldening other hard-pressed countries tired of Depression-like conditions, says Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

Despite an unprecedented fear campaign, brave Greeks plunged the European Union into a moment of reckoning with a deafening “no” to “bullying,” “terrorism,” and “humiliation” or more precisely, 61 percent voted against and 39 percent for creditors’ terms that would have condemned not just Greeks, but millions of other Europeans to another decade of austerity and hardship.

“You made a very brave choice,” Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said in a televised address after the referendum on Sunday. He called the mandate one that will “strengthen our negotiating position to seek a viable solution,” not a “rupture with Europe.”

But whatever Tsipras’s hopes and intent, the Greek referendum already has reverberated across the Continent inspiring many other Europeans tired of the German-led austerity policies that followed the financial crash of 2007-2008. Already the people of struggling economies, such as Spain and Portugal, are seeing the Greek resistance as an example to follow.

Emboldened, too, are the people of France and Italy, who are not in as desperate shape as Spain and Portugal, but are also chafing under the rigid spending constraints imposed by Germany and other leaders of northern European countries. Across the so-called periphery of Europe from Greece through Spain and Portugal to Ireland more and more voters are defying establishment leaders who accept austerity as the only economic recipe.

And like Greece, this new wave of voters will likely make itself heard in upcoming elections, transforming the next year or so into a “do or die” moment for the European project. It’s not that the European Union will split up entirely, but it risks becoming a club where countries increasingly opt out to seek their own well-being.

While disintegration is a possibility, Greece’s left-wing Syriza party and other southern European political newcomers don’t want the EU to shatter or the euro zone to shrink. But they are demanding a different future than the current upstairs-downstairs arrangement with a relatively well-to-do north and a down-in-the-mouth south.

In that sense, the Greek vote was a cry of anger and frustration over Europe’s economic disparities, which were smoothed over during the easy-money days before 2007 but reemerged with sharp, ragged edges during the global recession that followed the Wall Street crash.

### **Neoliberal Technocrats**

The response of the EU’s neoliberal technocrats was harsh austerity to pay down debt, a policy that tended to benefit the stronger economies, such as Germany, at the expense of weaker ones, like Greece. Across Europe, the new divide put creditor nations on one side and debtor nations on the other.

Indeed, today’s emerging existential question for the EU was essentially German engineered. It was Berlin that insisted on the austerity-heavy response to protect its national interests. Periphery countries were coerced to accept unenviable and unviable terms, which slowed economic growth by forcing countries to cut their deficits at the expense of public spending, dismantling welfare states, and sending unemployment to record highs unprecedented since the Second World War.

With no spare money or jobs, southern European economies entered a vicious cycle of economic contraction and more debt, without any reprieve for the hardest-hit people. It wasn’t, as Germany proposed, a matter of tightening the belt temporarily.

Instead, even as economic growth returned through headline macroeconomic

figures, the situation for the majority of Europeans has worsened. Unemployment has become a structural problem that the Continent will have to deal with for generations, further eroding public finances and tax revenue, all while corporate profits improve.

The Greek example, while perhaps the most extreme, spoke for much of the Continent. For five years the country has signed onto austerity-based agreements with Europe and the International Monetary Fund. But those schemes have not worked. In the process, Greece lost a quarter of its economy, a quarter of its population is unemployed (including half of young Greeks), and its debt has only climbed to about 180 percent of its gross domestic product.

As austerity failed to heal the sick economies of Europe, establishment leaders of the weaker nations who had agreed to swallow the harsh medicine of austerity lost credibility and support. The suffering populations began looking to more radical alternatives, such as Tsipras's new Syriza party in Greece.

The latest showdown started in January when Syriza came to power with a democratic mandate to defy the austerity imposed by the "troika" composed of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The "troika" refused multiple offers made by the Greek government that involved restructuring the debt and providing access to fresh money to slowly spur economic growth, enabling the country to pay back its debts over time, albeit a long time.

Instead, the troika insisted that Greece honor conditions that would involve ultimately more austerity. Syriza's government said the plan was not viable in part because it would expire in five months and the cycle of negotiations would have to be resumed. Greek counteroffers involved concessions as well but mostly targeting the wealthy, while sparing the already drained population.

### **Austerity v. Growth**

Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis explained, "Greeks want to pay back our debts. But we can't if the debt just keeps increasing while income keeps shrinking. To pay we first need to fix the economy and the way to do it is to end austerity, for the simple reasons that austerity reduces our income, which is not just ineffective but detrimental. That's why we need to restructure our debt."

Varoufakis added, "We can't accept what's related to financing and debt for the simple reason that it's not supported mathematically. If we accepted it, in a few weeks that program would prove itself absolutely unviable."

Ironically, an IMF assessment, which European powers had sought to delay, was

published last week confirming Syriza's assessment of the Greek predicament. Since the 2010 package, which Greece was seeking to renegotiate, the country has been in recession with the economy contracting three times more than the IMF had expected.

The Greek debt is "unsustainable," the IMF acknowledged, adding that Greece would need 50 billion euros (or about \$55 billion) in fresh funds over the next three years, on top of restructuring its debt. That was pretty much in line with Greek government demands.

Still, Germany and the EU bureaucrats thought they could crush the upstarts by virtually shutting down Greek banks and pressuring the Greek voters to repudiate Tsipras and Syriza in Sunday's referendum. The German axis backed by business and other mainstream media unleashed a propaganda campaign to paint the Greek government as radical and irresponsible.

But the Greek voters instead voted overwhelmingly to support Tsipras and Syriza, shaking the EU structure to its foundation.

"The campaign of bullying, the attempt to terrify Greeks by cutting off bank financing and threatening general chaos, all with the almost open goal of pushing the current leftist government out of office, was a shameful moment in a Europe that claims to believe in democratic principles," wrote Nobel economy laureate and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman. "It would have set a terrible precedent if that campaign had succeeded, even if the creditors were making sense."

He went on to describe "Europe's self-styled technocrats" as "medieval doctors who insisted on bleeding their patients, and when their treatment made the patients sicker, demanded even more bleeding." The European answer would not have worked, he said, because "austerity probably shrinks the economy faster than it reduces debt, so that all the suffering serves no purpose."

## **A Growing Resistance**

The troika's hardball strategy with Greece may have emboldened other struggling European countries to follow the Greek example. Spain and Portugal are up next with Italy and France to eventually follow along with Ireland and Eastern European countries. Russia and China may get into the game, too, by offering more favorable economic terms and cooperating on major infrastructure projects.

But there is little sign that Germany, as Europe's principal creditor nation, will accept write-downs that would cost its own taxpayers money. Though Tsipras is presenting a new offer to the 19-member euro-zone leaders on Tuesday, Germany has already refused to restructure the debt or support a new rescue.

As for Greece, in the near term at least, the economic situation is bound to worsen. Greek banks, which imposed capital controls after the ECB last week cut their emergency funding, will run out of cash within days without a new deal. While a compromise is still possible, a painful “Grexit” or Greek exit from the use of the euro currency could be just days away if Greece’s European partners choose to ignore the democratic will of the Greek voters.

Without emergency ECB support, Greece will have no choice but to fall back on another currency, the previous drachma presumably. “Grexit” will then be complete. The currency will be devalued and the economy will suffer for years, but at least under its own terms.

“There is now a strong argument that Greek exit from the euro is the best of bad options,” wrote Krugman. “If they can’t make a go of Europe’s common currency, it’s because that common currency offers no respite for countries in trouble.”

Varoufakis, who resigned as Finance Minister on Monday to remove himself as an irritation to the EU technocrats and thus improve chances for a compromise, said there is no choice but to broker a deal, adding: “There is too much at stake, for Greece and Europe, that’s why I’m certain.” Many in Europe agree, including French and Italian leaders, but without Germany there is little that can be done.

Meanwhile, the political fallout in Europe is just beginning. The Syriza-like party in Spain has become a serious contender, tied in third place with the two other traditional parties. No formal anti-establishment party has risen in Portugal, but the Socialist opposition, which is almost sure to win the upcoming election, promises to stand against austerity.

And it will not stop there. If Germany and its northern European allies don’t offer a respite, the anti-austerity political contagion will spread across the Continent because a new generation is slowly taking over and it wants a brighter future than the drab predictability of never-ending sacrifice. Old technocrats will eventually be replaced.

Greeks have defied the attempts to repress their democratic will. Welcome to the new Europe, for better or worse.

**Andrés Cala is an award-winning Colombian journalist, columnist and analyst specializing in geopolitics and energy. He is the lead author of *America’s Blind Spot: Chávez, Energy, and US Security.***

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# What Syriza's Victory Means for Europe

**Exclusive:** The Greek election of the left-wing Syriza party sent shock waves across Europe with establishment parties fearing more populist resistance to years of austerity and to putting bankers first. The question now is whether European voters will follow Syriza's lead, says Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

Traditionally "democracy" has meant government by the people, particularly their ability through voting to make their societies bend to their needs and interests. However, in recent decades, the word has undergone a significant redefinition, made to mean the right of business elites to operate with relative freedom.

That is why "democratic reform" in Eastern Europe has referred to the opening of former communist societies to "market forces," even if that means the demise of popular safety-net programs. The same has held true across Europe during the Great Recession. What the powers-that-be have insisted on is repayment of debts owed to banks, even if that requires painful austerity and unemployment for average citizens.

What happened in last week's elections in Greece was, in many ways, a reclaiming of the old definition of democracy, which, of course, the Greeks are credited with inventing around the Fifth Century B.C.

Tired of an economy crippled by austerity – and frustrated by moral lectures about the responsibility to pay creditors – the Greek voters threw out the old political establishment and elected the leftist Syriza party which had highlighted popular demands for more economic stimulus and fewer cuts to government spending.

In effect, what the people of Greece were saying was that they want their political system to work for them, not for the banks and other elites. It is a message with strong appeal across other parts of Europe where the Wall Street collapse in 2008 and the ensuing Great Recession have caused years of suffering and despair.

The ruling elites and their supporters now worry that Syriza's ascent is the inflexion point that may usher in popular resistance to the European Union's austerity programs that will spread through Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and other countries tired of joblessness.

"The winds of change are blowing in Europe," Pablo Iglesias, leader of the

Podemos told Syriza supporters in Greece ahead of the election. "In Greece it's called Syriza. In Spain it's called Podemos" – "We can" in English.

Though Greece itself is small with a modest-sized economy and limited political influence, the message that Syriza is sending is potentially Continent-shaking. Syriza's leaders are determined to renegotiate Greece's credit terms, but they also are at pains to show they can govern responsibly and avoid radical moves that would do more damage to the Greeks than to the Continent's elites.

### **A Continent-wide Revolt?**

Yet, while Syriza may have many sympathizers especially around Europe's long-suffering periphery, the populist anti-austerity drive has many powerful opponents, too. Germany, with its strong economy, has been most insistent on the poorer countries repaying their debts but Germany's position is also supported by conservative governments ruling Spain, Portugal and Ireland that have humbly accepted austerity.

Those governments, which are facing their own challenges from Syriza-like movements, were the first to deny Athens any flexibility. These conservative parties are worried less about Greece than empowering their own anti-austerity challengers by admitting mistakes.

Other European leaders, along with most of the media and international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, are resorting to fear-mongering by grouping this new, still undefined Left in the same basket with extreme-right, ultranationalist, anti-immigrant political movements, creating a frightening image of these populist parties.

Such tactics have worked in the past with many Europeans cautious about appeals for radical change because of the Continent's troubled history with extremist movements over the centuries. The European establishment offers a comforting sense of order but that appeal has eroded along with the living standards of millions of citizens and popular patience is growing thin.

And, though Syriza is regarded as a leftist party outside of Europe's recent mainstream, it represents an anti-austerity bloc that is actually rather moderate, pro-European and inclusive. What this bloc is demanding is serious reform in how the Continent's economy is managed to concentrate on making life better for average people rather than comfier for the rich and powerful.

Europe's Right has exploited the economic pain in another way, by focusing on how immigration from the Middle East and poorer parts of Europe has taken jobs from the white traditional citizens of European countries. But those messages from extreme-right parties, like UKIP in the U.K. and the National Front in

France, represent a lesser threat to Europe's establishment because most Europeans don't favor these extremist appeals.

The European establishment is more worried about the anti-austerity bloc. Germany and northern European countries along with the Continent's business elites are alarmed that the anti-austerity parties will unite into a bloc able to disrupt first the politics in various nations and then elections in the European Union.

These anti-austerity forces could appeal to centrist voters as Syriza's victory in Greece and polls in other countries have shown. The internal politics in Spain, Italy and France much larger countries than Greece could lead to an alliance that, given their economic weight and population, could push back on austerity in the 19-member Eurozone.

### **How Radical?**

Parties like Syriza and Podemos have surged in popularity by siphoning off votes from traditional center-left, social-democratic parties, which have generally accepted the austerity demands. To a lesser extent, some center-right fence-straddlers have also switched to these new populist movements.

In Spain, Podemos is edging ahead in a three-way sprint with the ruling conservative Popular Party and the Socialist Party, with municipal, regional and national elections starting in March and ending in December. The Podemos base is young, including activists who ignited the global "Occupy" movement in May 2011 when protesters spontaneously took over Madrid's most important squares.

The party was started less than a year ago by a group of university professors who were involved as advisers in Latin America's Bolivarian movement, especially in Venezuela. Traditional parties, even those to its left, accuse Podemos of being Chavista, i.e., inspired by Venezuela's late President Hugo Chavez.

But Podemos's broad proposals (details are still pending) are not so radical. They reject the notion of a Chavista-like regime in Spain and don't intend to flout the country's financial obligations. But they do want an overhaul of economic policies. And despite mounting attacks from Spain's establishment, Podemos appears to be gaining momentum after Syriza's victory.

The Irish cousin of Syriza and Podemos is Sinn Féin, which has recently taken the lead in opinion polls. In Italy, the center-left government, which until now has been the most vocal in the EU against German-imposed austerity, is facing an internal rebellion from those who want it to take an even harder line.

The situations in France and Portugal are more fluid with the Socialists

discredited and the Left splintered but increasingly anti-austerity. Perhaps the biggest uncertainty is France. It won't hold elections any time soon, but the Parti de Gauche is rising. If Podemos gets enough leverage in Spain and Italy's government moves further to the left, there might just be enough political muscle to confront Germany and offer an alternative to its austerity policies.

"The German risk is a new form of conservatism which is the fetishism of budget balance, the fascination for debt reduction, which is also the symptom of an aging country," French Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron said, signaling the French Socialists might climb on the anti-austerity bandwagon.

But Berlin and northern European capitals are going through opposite political realities, with their constituents demanding more austerity from the rest of Europe. This bloc remains the most powerful when it comes to decision-making, among other things because it has the support of the conservative governments in Spain, Portugal and Ireland.

### **A Edge to the Populists**

Over the next year or so, the electoral cycles also favor the anti-austerity parties, though perhaps not enough to oust the ruling elites and replace the current mindset but still enough to force greater flexibility on debt and budget issues.

This idea of making governments serve the people's needs rather than the interests of the creditor class is spreading outside the Eurozone as well, including the U.K., the Democratic Party in the U.S., and even in the EU Parliament and among some IMF economists.

The democratic sea change that appears to be sweeping across Europe is also the result of an ongoing generational change as well as a sign of deep divisions in the establishment that have been exposed by the Great Recession. In essence, this movement is calling for Europe's democracy to be more populist, more direct, more in the service of the people, less obedient to the ruling elites.

While the resistance to austerity arguably started from isolated flickers across the Continent resentment toward the harsh cuts in the welfare state and the stubborn levels of record unemployment it has grown into a political firestorm across southern Europe.

But the demands of this nascent anti-austerity bloc are not revolutionary. In short, it seeks to reboot the system, not to replace it. The leaders don't pitch an alternative order, but rather ways to correct how policies under the existing framework are implemented, with the ultimate goal of rebuilding a system in

which governments care more for the common citizens than the banks and the well-to-do.

The movement favors paying back debts, but not at the cost of economic growth, suggesting that payments be stretched out so more public monies can be spent on stimulus to get Western economies out of the prolonged slump that followed the Crash of 2008.

Or as Thomas Piketty, the star economist and best-selling author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, said in an interview: “It’s an act of historical amnesia to tell southern European countries that they have to pay all their debt, down to the last cent, with zero inflation.”

Of course, Europe’s establishment is hoping Syriza’s victory and the burst of enthusiasm for similar movements is just a fad and that the long-awaited economic recovery will finally arrive and begin to trickle down to average Europeans with everything going back to normal. But these elites may be underestimating just how deeply rooted this democratic awakening is.

When one of the top Podemos leaders was asked about the durability of this movement, he said: “If we disappear tomorrow, we will have taught the elite a good lesson. They will be afraid. Just by existing, Podemos has demonstrated the peoples’ desire for a democratic regeneration, it has unearthed like never before the need for rulers to be held accountable.”

**Andrés Cala is an award-winning Colombian journalist, columnist and analyst specializing in geopolitics and energy. He is the lead author of *America’s Blind Spot: Chávez, Energy, and US Security.***

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## Gaza and Thoughts of a Starving Ireland

**Exclusive:** Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern has joined with other humanitarians in a small flotilla determined to sail from Athens to Gaza in a challenge to Israel’s embargo of 1.5 million Palestinians trapped on that narrow strip of land. Awaiting departure, McGovern contemplates the forces of past and present that brought him to his decision.

By Ray McGovern

June 28, 2011

Thinking further here in Athens about how it came to be that I joined

the passengers on “The Audacity of Hope” and why I feel so strongly about the oppression in Gaza, it struck me that my Irish genes (as well as my theology) may be playing a role.

During the mid-19th Century potato famine, when the starving Irish were being treated in much the same way as Gazans are today, how much my ancestors must have wished for some sign that someone abroad actually cared about them.

Did no one know how the Irish were being deliberately left to starve to death, while the English were making a killing by exporting Irish meat and produce? Did no one care?

How much in need of support, if only moral support, were they? How few had the money to sail from Queenstown (Kobh) or Belfast in the hope of living, and perhaps even coming to live well, in America?

How they must have longed to see sails of a different spelling or flags of a people committed to Justice voyaging to show the emaciated Irish that someone from abroad cared about their plight. Lacking then was any meaningful expression of international solidarity.

A century and a half later, Israeli officials have actually bragged about “putting Gazans on a strict diet” – in other words, condemning them to a subsistence living just barely above the point where they would starve and perhaps subject Israel to charges of ethnic cleansing by starvation. But this attitude must not stand today in Gaza.

## **Letter Carriers**

Thankfully, four of my great-grandfathers survived the Irish famine. And both my grandfathers – as well as my grandmothers – had the audacity of hope, so to speak, to leave Ireland for America. My grandfathers found work in the U.S. Post Office – both of them.

My mother’s father, Lawrence Gough, eventually became a supervisor in one of the branches in the Bronx. My father’s father, Philip McGovern, became a proud letter carrier in the central Bronx neighborhood into which my father, my five siblings, and I were eventually born – and where I spent my first 22 years.

Phil McGovern, the letter carrier. It struck me that, in carrying letters of support to Gaza, I am trying to be faithful not only to a faith tradition with the inescapable mandate that we “Do Justice,” but also to the Post Office and letter-carrier tradition that I inherited from my grandfathers.

As our Irish cousins like to say: “Yes, I do believe so.”

My theology can be summed up in the words of Dean Brackley, S.J., now in El Salvador:

“Everything depends on who you think God is, and how God feels when little people are pushed around.”

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army officer and intelligence analyst for 30 years, and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).**

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