

# Hands off Seán Russell

There will be few in the Fairview area that are not aware that recently the Seán Russell Monument in Fairview Park, had once again been defaced. Painted with the colours of an LGBTQ flag, it has certainly confused republicans given that Russell and his comrades were not known for the targeting of homosexuals. The use then of a form of the Gay Pride colours in the attack is nonsensical, displaying the apparent ignorance of the perpetrators who do not speak on behalf of the LGBTQ community. The reality is that this stunt has provided a useful gift to the right and far-right in Ireland that seeks influence through dividing the working classes and questions remain over whether it were these forces that are responsible. Supporting this suspicion is the fact that the rainbow flag in question was painted upside down.

The location itself is something of a puzzle given that Fairview Park was the scene of a brutal homophobic attack, in 1982, upon Declan Flynn that resulted in his death. It is regrettable in itself then that so far this murder, given its importance in providing the catalyst for what became Ireland's LGBTQ Pride Movement, does not have its own commemorative monument within the park.

The attack upon the Russell monument however, came on the heels of a Fine Gael initiated smear campaign in which An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar stated *"We have a few of our own statues we may need to take down"*. This was a disgraceful attempt to use the anti-racist protests in the US and across Europe that had led to campaigns for the removal of statues of slave owners and traders there. Against the backdrop of the toppling of statues to the worst examples of humanity, Leo tried to push his own spite-ridden little agenda. Where crowds in these countries, incensed by the celebration of such people dragged



them from the pedestal, Leo expressed an opinion that no-one was clamouring to hear.

This however ignored the very real far-right history of Fine Gael, actual descendants of the genuine self-proclaimed fascists of the Blueshirt Movement with their ideological links to Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Blueshirt leader, Eoin O Duffy himself travelled with his followers, "beneath the swastika to Spain" to fight for Franco's fascists against the Republicans. It is also historical fact that Fine Gael is a party and movement that had used British supplied weapons to attack those, Seán Russell among them that had remained faithful to the Irish Republic and in opposition to the Free State. No surprise then that Varadkar's administration attempted recently to commemorate the Black and Tans, Varadkar himself frequently quoting Churchill, the man that inflicted these brutal forces upon Ireland. Churchill however also said, *"One may dislike Hitler's system yet admire his patriotic achievement. If our country were defeated, I hope we should find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations."*

Over the years the Seán Russell monument has been attacked by Anti-Republican Elements on

several occasions. The first was after it's unveiling in the 1950s by Blueshirt elements due to its depiction of Seán Russell giving a raised fist salute, which the far-right perceived as communist.

Seán Russell was born in Fairview in 1893, going on to fight in the 1916 Rising and to serve as a member of the GHQ Staff of the IRA throughout the Tan and Civil War period. In 1926, Russell travelled to the Soviet Union on an arms-buying mission and in the 1930s was elected IRA Chief of Staff. Russell, as a soldier whose objective was the freedom of Ireland considered his missions to the Soviet Union and later to Germany as reaching out abroad for any help that was available, as had Casement in 1916 or Tone and Emmet in the 1790s. Russell expressed his viewpoint when he told one German official: *"I am not a Nazi. I'm not even pro-German. I am an Irishman fighting for the independence of Ireland. The British have been our enemies for hundreds of years. They are the enemy of Germany today. If it suits Germany to give us help to achieve independence, I am willing to accept it, but no more, and there must be no strings attached."* When Russell died in 1940, it was in the company of his comrade Frank Ryan, who himself had gone to Spain to fight fascism.

Taking their cue from Varadkar, members of Ireland's disparate fascist movement have, in recent months, been posing at monuments to Ireland's patriot dead for photo opportunities to put up on social media. Two of the fascist leaders, Justin Barrett and James Reynolds however have always been openly hostile to the Republican Struggle and the war to remove British Imperialism from Ireland, the former himself being a one-time member of Fine Gael.

This hostility is quite logical as Republicans have a long and honourable history of fighting the fascists off our streets. The far-right would here like to construct an image of themselves as defenders of monuments such as Russell's against their notion of 'Ireland's enemies,' currently anti-fascism and Black Lives Matter who, they pretend to believe, 'want to tear down Irish heritage,' for reasons that they do not share. Despite this, the far-right wisely did not show up to a recent Republican rally to defend the Russell Monument, which included many Republicans that are active anti-fascists.

The Seán Russell monument after all, is one that is dedicated to the IRA in the dark days of the 30s and 40s and requires some respect. Naturally then, Irish Republicans will not allow the current crop of Irish fascists to claim our monuments or our patriot dead, or indeed to associate themselves with the revolutionary struggle for national liberation and an All-Ireland Socialist Republic. It was the Black Panther Party member Assata Shakur who once warned,

*"It's got to be one of the most basic principles of living: always decide who your enemies are for yourself, and never let your enemies choose your enemies for you."*

Anti-Imperialist Action would urge people not to fall for the lies of fascists who are now using this attack as an excuse to push their far-right agenda and blame incomers to our country as the cause of our very real problems. Just so, the anti-republican, Leo Varadkar and his party would seek to exercise their Free State spite upon a monument that represents those that kicked his Blueshirt forebears off Ireland's streets so long ago.

#### About AIA

Anti-Imperialist Action Ireland is an All-Ireland Socialist Republican mass-organisation dedicated to combat and resist British, EU and US imperialism on the island of Ireland. AIA owes its allegiance to the All-Ireland People's Republic, Proclaimed in Arms in Dublin in 1916 and established on January 21st 1919. Campaigning since 2017, AIA is building the People's Resistance and bringing all progressive forces into a united front against fascism, capitalism and imperialism. As a revolutionary socialist republican organisation, AIA continues in the best traditions of Irish Republicanism and the International Communist movement. As an All-Ireland body the organisation has coisti, events and actions all across the country. If there isn't a coiste in your area, get in touch and start to form one!

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**Title:** Hands Off Seán Russell

**Organisation:** Anti-Imperialist Action Ireland

**Date:** 2020

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