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Ireland: Resisting the Empire

By Robert Fantina
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ShannonWatch is an organization based in Shannon, Ireland, that monitors foreign use of Irish airspace. Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, ShannonWatch members have held monthly vigils at the entrance of Shannon airport, to protest the Irish government's granting permission for U.S. military aircraft to refuel there.

To commemorate the tragic, fifteenth anniversary of that invasion, ShannonWatch scheduled a conference, to which this writer was invited to speak.

Initially, the Park Inn was selected as the venue for the conference. ShannonWatch discussed the date, audio-visual needs, etc., with hotel personnel, providing credit card information for payment, and made the reservation. The location was posted on the ShannonWatch website. Several weeks prior to the scheduled date, the hotel contacted ShannonWatch to say that it could not honor the date, sorry, good-bye.

Well, a booking error could happen; the manager simply makes a mistake and double-books a room, but in most such cases, the hotel makes every effort to somehow accommodate the disappointed customer, perhaps by offering a different room, suggesting an alternate date, or even contacting another hotel to try to somehow satisfy the customer.

However, no such thing happened in this case.

Shannon is not a large city, but there are other hotels. So, ShannonWatch next contracted with the Oakwood Arms Hotel. Same arrangements made; same date; credit card information provided, and reservation made. The new information was now posted on the ShannonWatch site.

A few weeks before the scheduled conference, hotel personnel contacted ShannonWatch to advise that the reserved room was scheduled for renovation on that date, and the reservation couldn't be honored. End of story; no effort made to satisfy the customer.

Coincidence? Well, one could say so, but future events belie that thought.

A third reservation was made. The location was convenient; the Bunratty Castle Hotel is close enough to where the monthly vigil is held, so would be easy for conference participants to find. This new location was announced on the ShannonWatch site.

Three days before the conference, hotel personnel contacted ShannonWatch, to say that the reservation would not be honored. No reason was provided, and no effort made to satisfy the customer.

One can only surmise that ShannonWatch is being successful; someone in authority did not want the conference to take place, and so instructed three hotels to break faith with a customer.

With only three days left, it might have seemed to whoever it was that wanted to prevent the conference that they had succeeded. It was too late, he/she might have happily thought, for ShannonWatch to possibly reserve another hotel room.

However, he or she underestimated ShannonWatch. A large tent was procured and set up on the grounds immediately outside the entrance of the airport, just off airport property, where everyone entering or leaving the airport could plainly see the large sign posted: 'Peace not War: U.S. out of Shannon Airport'.

Additionally, at least one local paper reported on the hotel reservation fiasco.

On Saturday, by 2:00, the scheduled start of the conference, the large, blue and white sign was posted, so anyone entering or leaving the airport could see it. Other signs with related topics were also prominently displayed. The weather was favorable; the cool temperature meant that the people who crowded into the tent were not uncomfortable, and those standing outside could hear the speaker, and not be concerned about any rain. Approximately 60 people were in attendance.

The event went well, with this writer speaking for about 40 minutes, and then facilitating a 90-minute 'Questions and Comments' session immediately thereafter.

This was a two-day event, and on the second day, the numbers exceeded organizers' expectations, with an estimated 200 people participating, including at least four members of the Irish Parliament.

There are two important lessons to be learned from all this:

First, it is impossible to stop a peoples' movement. Every hotel in Shannon could have refused to host the event, and the conference would still have been held. The fact that three hotels did refuse to honor reservations for it, provided ShannonWatch with positive publicity it would not have otherwise had.

In many countries, governments are attempting to outlaw another peoples' movement, the Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) movement, which supports Palestine, yet that is not slowing the movement at all.

Second, even when it may appear that the efforts of dedicated people are not having any impact, they often are. Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." ShannonWatch started small, but it is noteworthy that participation reached 200 people, in a city of less than 10,000.

ShannonWatch has been monitoring Irish airspace for 15 years, since Ireland compromised its stated neutrality and allowed U.S. war planes to refuel there. (See Harry Browne's *Hammered by the Irish*.) It is also likely that U.S. jets transporting political prisoners to so-called 'rendition' sites, where the prisoners have been tortured, have refueled there. This is the first time it has become apparent that someone, most likely connected with the government, is, indeed, taking note of ShannonWatch activities.

It is evident that people in Ireland are not buying into the U.S. lie that Shannon Airport is needed in the fight against terrorism; rather, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Ireland is complicit in U.S. terrorism around the world. How much longer the Irish government will defy the will of the people remains to be seen, but if events such as the one held last weekend in Shannon are any indication, it won't be too much longer.