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British Queen's Dublin Castle banquet protested by a few hundred as Garda harass activists

Andrew Flood

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About 250 people took part in the éirígí organised march on the banquet for the British Queen staged in Dublin castle Wednesday night. WSM members joined the demonstration but Garda had intercepted the person transporting our flags and banner to the protest leaving us somewhat invisible. This was part of a pattern of suppression of visible protest that occurred throughout the visit of the British Queen despite Garda claims that they would “*facilitate protest*” in advance of the visit.

It turns out the unnamed Garda source quoted by the Irish Examiner in advanced of the city who claimed “*reasonable protest will be allowed — a peaceful protest — but up to a point*” had about as much value as unnamed Garda sources making vague statements ever do. This despite éirígí making major efforts to ensure their protests remained peaceful. At least two of the speakers, including Breandán Mac Cionnaith and Louise

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Minihan, from the platform before the march said that anyone not willing to be peaceful should leave the demonstration. Stewards removed a couple of people they judged to have become too rowdy. But far from facilitating such peaceful protest the reality has been that Garda have been tearing down posters, removing stickers, confiscating banners, flags and leaflets at every opportunity. Yesterday as well as the WSM losing a banner and four flags, éirígí lost two banners and a stack of posters in the ongoing campaign of Garda intimidation. One of the confiscated éirígí banners which the Garda deemed offensive actually read "*fund communities not royal visits.*" Some of the posters were ripped down by Garda on Marrowbone despite the activists putting them up not only producing the DCC permission but actually getting a council official to come down from the nearby office and tell the Garda they were permitted.

Last night demonstrators were out numbered by two or three to one by visible Garda who formed solid lines a few ranks thick blocking the route to the castle. A Shell to Sea campaigners who happened to be on Fishamble street told us there were 20 van loads of riot police waiting there and that "*some of them are chomping at the bit.*" Our photographer was ordered not to take pictures by the leader of a bus load of helmet equipped Garda descending on the side of the demonstration (pictured above). Earlier in the week Garda had been videoed violently knocking local women to the ground in Summerhill before arresting them, apparently simply for verbally protesting the level of force they were using in arresting protesters they had chased into the area. Garda told a women who hung a protest banner from her flat in Dublin South West that they would kick her door in if she did not remove it.

The Dublin castle banquet was where the Irish and British elites were meeting up to symbolically bury the hatchet in the interests of a common program of screwing the working class

of both islands. Much of the visit has been built around 'moving on' from the colonial relationship that has dominated history between the islands. The WSM banner emphasized that aspect of the visit proclaiming "*Old Ruler, New Rulers: Class War Continues..*" Unfortunately as has been the case since the crisis began the Class War is coming almost completely from their side, the tiny size of the protests during the visit underlining this fact.

Image: The Old Ruler, New Rulers Class War Continues.. banner being prepared the evening before the protest

The visit itself has proved a huge PR coup for the 'normalization of relations' between the ruling elites with an ever obedient media very successfully establishing the idea that anyone protesting must be a backward looking 'terrorist' neanderthal. Virtually no civil rights voices have dared protest the repressive policing operation and last night's operation included, we think for the first time, the importation of the 'kettling' tactic from the London police. This is where a section of a crowd is surrounded in a square of police and people are not allowed leave that square for hours. A second smaller demonstration organised by the 32 Country Sovereignty Movement in the same area was kettled for several hours after some fireworks were let off. Media reports which claimed that elements of that group of protesters threw "*bottles, firewords and rubbish*" indicated that Garda also drew batons and there were at least eight arrests. However the eight were released this morning without being charged despite being held overnight.

In most countries you would expect the liberal end of the legal establishment to not only protest such abuse of police powers but to actively send legal observers to demonstrations where such abuse is likely. In Ireland this almost never happens, allowing Garda to operate with considerable impunity. The confidence shown by the Garda in abusing their powers over the last few days suggests they have been assured by

their superiors that they need not fear repercussions providing they don't go 'too far.' This continues the pattern now long established in the policing of the Shell's Corrib project in Rosspoint where there has been repeated violence from the Garda towards protesters.

The Garda repression is of course part of that story for the low numbers protesting but it is not a complete explanation, there was probably more overt repression in the run up to the Mayday 2004 EU Summit protests. But that resulted in greater numbers turning out with as many as 5,000 taking part in the main banned demonstration organised by the libertarian Dublin Grassroots Network. Counting both demonstrations there were no more than 400 on the streets last night and perhaps as few as 300. The aftermath of the royal visit should be a time for some frank discussion as to why no one outside of fringe republican circles and a handful from the equally fringe far left took part in the protests.