

Letter from Ireland: Queen Lizzy's Tour of Shame

February 15, 2012

HERE'S ANOTHER ONE for the Irish history books: Queen Elizabeth II making a state visit to the Republic of Ireland, the first British monarch to do so since 1911. The visit began on May 18, and massive security made sure that most of the island was experiencing a lock down. She and her husband, Phillip, made Dublin their first port of call. The buildup to the royal visit was intense: Dublin, Kildare, Tipperary, and Cork — the locations where she was due to visit — all felt the wrath of severe security checks in the weeks leading up to the state visit by the Queen. But weeks of worry seemed to ebb away as the five day visit gradually turned into a five day buddy fest: once enemies now the best of friends, and maybe the books have now been closed on what was once a very volatile relationship with our nearest neighbor, Britain.

Maturity is the key to making peace. In 1998 when the Good Friday agreement was signed and the foundations of the Northern Ireland peace process were finally put in place, the island of Ireland with those of the orange and green traditions decided to mature and accept that no matter what, this little island on the fringe of Europe will always have two peoples of separate traditions. Yet the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II had been hailed in the mainstream media as historic, and no doubt it was, but we must not fall into that media-driven trap and come out with short memories.

A British monarch is more than welcome as a visitor to these shores. We are after all the island of a thousand welcomes, but with the last thirty years of trouble in the north of Ireland still fresh in many minds, a groundbreaking speech was highly anticipated with an apology for many centuries of colonial harassment. But when the time came for that speech in Dublin Castle at a state dinner it left many people surprised, surprised that no such apology was given to the people of Ireland and surprise that the queen began her speech with a few words in Irish. She even called us all *chaired*, the Irish word for friends. In the speech she declared her deep sympathy for all those who had suffered in centuries of conflict between Britain and Ireland; it was as near an apology as we could get.

The royal visit in 1911 brought many Irish citizens to the streets declaring their loyalty to the crown. Just ten years later the Irish came back out on the streets declaring their hatred of the crown! Yes we can be a back-stabbing bunch of bastards when we want to! My tip: never trust a Union Jack-waving Irish man, he may rebel when your back is turned! But not this time though. We have parted ways with our rebellious streak and are now much more concentrated on getting our capitalist machine back working again, the same capitalist way of life which was broken by those who made it — the banks, the government, and the great greed. So fast forward one hundred years from 1911 which was a very impoverished place for ordinary Irish people and King George V, who rode by in his fine carriage along the Union Jack-laden streets of Dublin while the incredibly poor were eking out a living in the filthy slums where a high infant mortality rate was rampant. But some did protest at the royal visit in 1911, and James Connolly was one of those who protested at the visit of a royal to the impoverished streets of Dublin. In 2011, fortunately, the slums are gone. Unfortunately maybe even the revolutionary minds are gone too, but we are still somewhat poor, a little advanced yes, advanced to the point where we can determine our financial woes with a Facebook status, but nonetheless we have come full circle, back to being poor in pocket but rich in hypocrisy.

The last royal visit in 1911 created a surge in loyal support among the vast public, except for the

rebellious few who were to go on and make their mark a decade later. This time around I doubt if we will ever return to our roots as troublesome cabbage-eating, dynamite-loving outlaws as the British had so often times painted us. So now Queen Elizabeth has come and seen for herself how we've done since we left the royal fold in 1922. And what better way than to bring her to places such as Croke Park, where in 1921 British troops entered onto the pitch in the middle of a Gaelic football match between Dublin and Tipperary and opened fire on the players and spectators, and to the garden of remembrance which honors our leaders of 1916 who were executed on the orders of the British government. Yes, she was brought to these sights on what I jokingly coined "the tour of shame!"

The glamorous grime that is the royal family attracts people as a car crash does. The monarchy is a tired establishment and I find it rather bizarre that even in this day and age royalty is still around, and what is worse, they are getting away with it! The royal visit did draw interest from some slack-jawed natives who came out to see the royal visitors, but high security became a great deterrent to many others who stayed at home and watched the visit on TV. The royal visit had been dressed up as a boost for tourism in Ireland even though the dogs on the street know that such a thing is absurd. The English tourist has always been a stable entity of Irish tourism; the arrival of Queen Elizabeth will not change that; she didn't send a postcard back to her subjects in England saying "wish you were 'ere!" So while she was in Ireland, the Queen could have taken the opportunity and followed in the footsteps of many of her fellow country men to the hotspots in the capital, most notably Temple Bar which transforms into British stag party central most weekends. Ah, yes, can you not just see herself and Phillip knocking back shots in The Quays pub, then upchucking their guts on the cobble stones, then getting picked up in a paddy wagon. "One will have a bastard of a hangover after one's adventure to Ireland!"

So considering how much of a financial fuck-up we are currently in as a nation, the visit was nothing more than a symbolic gesture, and more than likely the state will be a long time afterwards paying for that symbolic gesture, but can a price be paid on reconciliation? I guess not. So now that the Queen's visit to Ireland is done and dusted, pro-monarchy media have jizzed themselves at the excitement of the royal visit by declaring "how far" we have come as a nation since 1922, and singing of the progress which will be made from the royal visit. But I say progress is all very well and good, but sometimes Progress can also be a royal pain in the arse.

Footnotes