

Famine Walk 2009

Power Concedes Nothing without Demand



Walk Leaders

Willie Corduff & Mary Corduff (Erris)

Philip Ikurisi (Niger Delta)

Gary Whitedeer (Choctaw)

with

Donal O Kelly and Sorcha Fox, performing a short extract
from the writings of Frederick Douglass.



Introduction

Power concedes Nothing Without Demand

Frederick Douglass' statement 'power concedes nothing without demand' is a perennial truth. Douglass discovered this as a slave in the southern United States. The Choctaw discovered it as they endured the 'trail of tears,' having been forcibly removed from their ancestral lands in Oklahoma in 1831. The communities in Erris, County Mayo, and the Niger Delta discover it daily in their battle with corporate giant Shell and its acolytes.

Douglass' connection with the Great Famine arises from his visit to Ireland in 1845, when reports of the famine were first beginning to appear. Despite spending what he described as 'some of the happiest moments of his life' in Ireland, where he was "regarded and treated at every turn with the same kindness and deference paid to white people", he was obviously affected by the Famine. Moved by the starvation which he witnessed, he wrote: 'I cannot allow myself to be insensible to the wrongs and sufferings of any part of the great family of man'.

The fact that political change is possible is demonstrated by the abolition of slavery, achieved with great hardship and at great cost. The greatest scorn was heaped on abolitionists at the time, and slaves who attempted escape or resistance were regarded in the mainstream press as morally depraved, and their brutal punishment seen as justified. The need for continuing the struggle for change is clear from the many other forms of slavery that persist today: enslavement by famine, by poverty, by

debt and by the ruthlessness of corporate greed.

This famine walk is a walk of remembrance and resistance. It remembers those who died as a result of famine in Ireland in the 1840s and those who are condemned to lives of indebtedness and poverty in today's world. It remembers Frederick Douglass and the countless numbers of his brothers and sisters who suffered the obscenity and inhumanity of slavery. It remembers the Choctaw, their trail of tears and the genocide of indigenous peoples who have been decimated in the name of 'progress.' It remembers those who are killed or injured in resource conflicts, from Ken-Saro Wiwa executed by the state with Shell collusion in Nigeria in 1995, to Willie Corduff, beaten by Shell security with state collusion in Ireland in 2009. In the spirit of Frederick Douglass, the Famine Walk will again issue its compelling and just demands of the forces of power – locally and globally

'Power concedes nothing without demand – it never did and it never will'.

Joe Murray

Andy Storey



Willie Corduff, in hospital, after his encounter with Shell 'security'



Ken Saro Wiwa executed by the Nigerian State, with Shell collusion

Biographies

Willie Corduff was jailed for three months in 2005 for his opposition to Shell's inland gas refinery at Bellanaboy and high-pressure pipeline through his farm. He was awarded the Goldman Environmental Award in 2006, which is often referred to as the Nobel Prize for the Environment. He has endured imprisonment, beatings and insults because of his opposition to Shell's project in Corrib.

Mary Corduff was born in Knocknalower in the parish of Kilcommon in Erris, County Mayo. She married Willie in 1980 and moved across the bay to Rossport. They have six children and four grandchildren. Her main ambition for her children was to be well behaved and to have respect for other people. She and her family lived a peaceful life until the arrival of Shell. Their opposition to the project going ahead in its present form has 'taken over their lives'.

Philip Ikurisi is from Basyelsa State in Nigeria, one of the major oil-producing states of the Niger Delta Area. He has established and worked with different organisations in the Niger Delta seeking justice, environmental regeneration and greater control of natural resources. He has also helped establish Niger Delta Awareness in Ireland.

Gary Whitedeer, Choctaw, is an internationally known painter, tribal chanter and dance leader who has represented the Irish-Choctaw Famine link on many occasions. The link originated when the Choctaw, despite their meagre resources, sent \$170 to Ireland for Famine Relief in 1847. The second Choctaw donation to Ireland was presented by Gary Whitedeer to the community resisting Shell's activities in Erris, Co Mayo in 2008. Gary has made documentary film appearances on RTE, BBC and National Geographic Explorer.

Donal O'Kelly is a writer and actor. His play *The Cambria*, about Frederick Douglass' voyage to Ireland in 1845, has toured Ireland, as well as playing in the UK and the US.

Sorcha Fox is from Ballinteer in Dublin. She trained in the Samuel Beckett Centre in Trinity. She plays the part of Vanessa Barrett in TG4's *Ros na Rún* and works as chief storyliner for the series. She co-stars with Donal O' Kelly in *The Cambria*.

Hunger and the Millennium Development Goals

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme there are more than 850 million people suffering from hunger in the world today, while at the same time there is enough food to feed 12 billion people. This means enough food to feed double the world's current population!! In September 2000, in light of such official reports, world leaders agreed a set of goals for the international community, to bring about a world in which sustaining development and eliminating poverty would have the highest priority. These are known as the 'Millennium Development Goals'. The first of these eight goals is to 'Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty'. 191 UN members have pledged to reduce by half the number of people suffering hunger by 2015. Despite these pledges, since 2000 the number of hungry people in the world has not stopped growing.

The Death Walk at Doolough-March 1849

Anyone who goes on the Famine Walk along Doolough Lake from Louisburgh to Delphi Lodge is retracing a journey of horror which the local people made on the night and morning of 30-31 March 1849. Although that 'death march' has been given little publicity until recent times, it has remained fresh in the mind of the people of the area. The place has been well named 'A Road to Remember'.

The year 1849 was probably the worst of those famine years in the Louisburgh area. The immediate cause of the death march was the expected arrival in Louisburgh on Friday 30 March of two 'commissioners', Colonel Hogrove and Captain Primrose. They were to inspect the poorer people and certify them as paupers, so entitling them to a ration of three pounds of meal each. For some reason the inspection was not made, and the hundreds of people were told that they must appear at Delphi Lodge (ten miles away) at 7am the following morning if they were to be certified. They set out on foot along the mountain road and pathway. The night and morning snowed. A writer ('Ratepayer') to the Mayo Constitution on April 10th 1849 complained that seven people died on that journey, nine more never reached their homes and several of those who did 'in a short time ceased to live'. He identifies nine victims: three members of a Dillon family, Catherine Grady, Mary McHale, James Flynn, Mrs Dalton, her son and daughter. According to this account the total number of deaths was no more than twenty on the road and an uncounted number in their homes.

There is, however, a strong folk tradition in the local Louisburgh community that the numbers who died that snowy night on the Doolough Road should be count-

ed in hundreds. So there is quite a divergence of opinion. In favour of the smaller numbers it can be said that contemporary newspaper accounts establish only these. Further, in her major work, 'The Great Hunger', Mrs Cecil Woodham-Smyth (1961) has no account of hundreds of lives being lost in such a march. The folk tradition can hardly, however, be discarded out of hand. In view of the remoteness of the area and the lack of communications at the time, it is possible that the full extent of the tragedy was not reported. An editorial comment in the Mayo Constitution of 24 April, 1849 states that reports from the locality say that descriptions have fallen far short of the frightful scenes that were witnessed.

That the people of the parish were starving there can be no doubt. The Church of Ireland incumbent at Louisburgh, Rev. P.J. Callinan, had written to the Evening Packet on 10 February, 1849 to say '... I am hourly beset with crawling skeletons begging for food'. Against such a background one must allow the real possibility, if not indeed the probability, of hundreds of deaths on the fatal journey less than two months later.

One further point is worthy of mention: the only written source which favours the theory of hundreds of deaths on the 'Doolough March' is that of James Berry in 'Tales of the West' (Ed. Gertrude Horgan). Reputable historians would look askance at his writings as embellished social history. There are, then, two conflicting lines of opinion about the numbers who died on the fateful journey on a snowy March night in 1849. Written contemporary accounts mention twenty or more deaths. Local folklore often speaks of hundreds. Perhaps the truth lies between.

Leon O Morchain.

Famine Walk 2009

Transport

Shuttle buses will leave Louisburgh from 1pm, taking walkers to the start point at Doolough.

If there is sufficient demand for seats, a bus will be organized to leave from Parnell Square in Dublin at 8.30am on the morning of May 30th, returning the same night.

Please confirm this on the week before the walk

Bus seats must be booked and paid for in advance.

Details available from Afri at 01 8827563.

Afri is a justice, peace and human rights organisation, which was founded in 1975. Afri's first 'Famine Walk' took place in 1988, with the aim of linking the experience of Ireland in the 1840s with contemporary issues of famine, hunger, food insecurity and human rights abuses. Since our first famine walk, we have taken up themes of injustice in the Philippines; in Central America; South Africa and East Timor; the exploitation of the Maya people in Guatemala and of banana Workers in Belize; the legacy of colonialism; Ireland's 'Welcome to the Stranger'; 'War is Terror is War'; the rights of Migrant Workers; 'Land for People not for Profit'; 'Erris, Gas and global Warming'; 'Water, Oil, Weapons: resources and conflict at home and abroad'; and, this year, 'Power Concedes Nothing without Demand'.

Louisburgh Community Project is located in Louisburgh on the west coast of Mayo. The Project works from an anti-poverty perspective and seeks to support and promote community activity. It has a strong focus on community arts and human rights and has been involved in organising the annual Famine Walk since 2001.

Louisburgh Community Project would like to invite all to an open evening on the theme of Hunger and Sustainability on Friday, 29th May in Louisburgh Parochial Hall from 7.30 pm

**Céilí on Saturday May 30th night in the Derrylahan, Louisburgh
from 9pm – 11pm. Fáilte roimh gach duine.**

Louisburgh Community Project, Long Street, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo Tel. 098 66218
Email louisburghproject@eircom.net www.louisburghproject.org



**IN THE INTEREST OF HEALTH AND SAFETY, PLEASE WALK ON THE RIGHT
HAND SIDE OF THE ROAD FOR THE DURATION OF THE WALK.**

Please help Afri to continue its work by getting sponsorship and taking part in this walk.



Afri gratefully acknowledges the support of Trócaire and The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.
Afri has signed the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

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