

The Pipe

Fr Frank Nally

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-pipe/episode-guide/series-1/episode-1>

Ristead O'Domhnall's acclaimed documentary 'The Pipe' shown on More4 television (14 June 2011) depicts the experience of a community struggling to maintain their culture, rights and environment in the face of what many of them see as an indifferent government and a transnational corporation that overlooks human rights and environmental protection.

The Pipe of the title is a high pressure pipeline bringing gas ashore in County Mayo from Shell's offshore Corrib gas field.

According to the film, it is 'Shell Law' that is being implemented. Many of the people in Rossport believe that their rights as Irish citizens under the Irish Constitution have been undermined and suspended as work proceeds to route the Pipe past their homes and farms to the onshore refinery.

It is regrettable that the Irish Government has historically sided with the 'big boys', in this instance against the concerns of many in the local community, including decent men working in the local small-scale fisheries industry, which provides good local incomes. All of that, plus the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – a European designation for this pristine but well populated area - is at risk, despite much talk about sustainable development.

The film shows heavy handed policing and the emergence of bitter disagreements within the once harmonious community. The social investment initiatives of Shell (supporting local Gaelic Athletic Association football clubs and offering scholar sponsorships to schools) are a form of corporate social responsibility that cannot in my view recompense for the social divisions caused. (See Shell's account at www.shell.ie/home/content/irl/aboutshell/our_business_tpkg/e_and_p/corrib/about/overview)

The issue of monetary benefits for the Irish people, so critical at this time of hardship and financial collapse, is crucial. The Corrib gas partners are known collectively as Shell E&P Ireland Ltd, which operates as a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell plc and comprises Shell as project operator (45% project share), Statoil Exploration (Ireland) Ltd (Shell's Norwegian partner) (36.5% project share) and Vermilion Energy (18.5% project share). Currently profits from the Corrib gas field are due to go to these three companies, with little or no share of the profits going to the Irish people.

Justice would require that the government urgently renegotiate the contract with Shell E&P Ireland Ltd and indeed review all recent contracts for oil and gas and mineral exploration, offshore and onshore, so that the Irish nation gets a fair share of return from its natural resource development. The people of Erris, Rossport, of Pobail Cill Comain, of County Mayo deserve this. Indeed the people of Ireland, in justice, are entitled to it.

The Norwegian Pension Fund will continue to grow even bigger with its investment in the west of Ireland project while the Irish Treasury will get next to zero. What a tragedy. A renegotiation and breaking of the contract may cost €700 million, according to a Green Irish Senator I spoke with last year. That is pittance in comparison to the revenue that would accrue to Ireland at this time of crisis if it got what I believe would be a just share in the profits.

<http://www.thepipethefilm.com/> ; <http://www.shelltosea.com/> ; <http://www.indymedia.ie> ; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/29/shell-ireland-corrib-gas-project>