

Turbines - A Single Chapter in a Complex Story of Rural Neglect

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On Tuesday, 14 April I marched in Dublin protesting against Industrial Turbines going into rural Ireland. The numbers were smaller than expected, probably because the government issued press releases over the weekend to say the project for the midlands had been shelved.

The taxi drivers on O Connell Street were sweet and they honked their horns in support, while groups involved in the protest walked among the marchers handing out their leaflets. Then we arrived into Molesworth Street, where Fine Gael and Labour could easily count our numbers from the upper windows of the Irish Parliament building Leinster House. The speakers told us what we already knew: we do not want industrial turbines and pylons.

Rural Ireland has been neglected. Tourism and agriculture need immediate attention. The companies behind the Industrial Windfarms and supported by Fine Gael and Labour targeted this area because it is so neglected, so bereft of opportunity, so desperate to survive on a day-to-day basis, that it was ripe for exploitation and destruction. That is still the case.

The people handing out flyers should have taken to the pavements and the city dwellers, who bar the taxi drivers, were uninterested in the march.

Their leaflets should have said- "People of Dublin, this is your issue, this is your countryside- we are only its custodians. The caretakers who send our school kids and scouts to clean rubbish from its ditches when An Taisce sends out the free white plastic bags, who protest when they try to run roads through ancient sites, frack and threaten the water supply, mine and try to fill her green fields with concrete and giant turbines. But it is your countryside.

We should have gone into every hotel and B&B and said your tourists, bringing €4.3 billion annually into this country are not here to see Dublin, they want to see Ireland's famous unspoilt forty shades of green. When the Industrial turbines and pylons go in, you can kiss that goodbye.

The speakers should have turned their truck around and addressed Leinster House and its occupants: It is they that need to hear that we are calling for change.

The people who marched already knew that. But this is where it becomes complex. To protect our communities we need to fill the glaring gap that will be left now that the Industrial Turbines have been shelved for the moment. The rural economy must be made strong so that it is not living in the shadow of this threat.

Rural Ireland needs immediate investment into practical support for its communities and policies that address the crisis of poverty, neglect and abandonment. The government has been choosy where it elevated into the tourism circuit that needs to stop and more done for Mullingar and north Westmeath. We want a slice of that €4.3 billion. We also want the IDA to put more than less than 1 percent of its investment money into Westmeath.

Public transport is a necessity for rural Ireland. It should not be expected to make a profit. Poverty is an economic outcome caused by crappy, useless policy. One of the elements that is always identified as a cause of poverty is peripherality, in other words, being at the outer boundary of where everything else is happening. If the government is not going to address peripherality by bringing things into rural communities then they have to address it by restoring public transport, so people can travel in to the centre.

Successive governments has done neither and so a crisis is already in our rural communities. No access to employment, no access to health services, no access to amenities, no access to education, training, no quality of life.

Industrialisation of rural Ireland will be inevitable if proper policies to protect this valuable asset is not put into place. So we need an action plan for our communities and we need everyone to realise this is their issue.