

An Open Letter to the American Conference of Irish Studies

ACIS president-elect Aidan Beatty and the Zionist libel against Irish history

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From February 23-26, members of the American Conference of Irish Studies (ACIS) will gather in Savannah, Georgia, for their annual conference. There, ACIS vice president Aidan Beatty, who lectures and works as a graduate advisor at Carnegie Mellon University, is slated to assume the organization's presidency.

Beatty's ascension to the ACIS presidency is a most peculiar story. Beatty completed his PhD at the University of Chicago in 2013, where not a single historian of Ireland served on his dissertation committee. He had previously completed an MA in Jewish history, not Irish history. And for years, Beatty publicly identified himself primarily as a historian of Israel and Zionism.

As for Irish history, the major thrust of Beatty's work, stretching back to his dissertation, has been to equate Israeli Zionism with Irish republicanism—that is, a comparison of the ideology of a colonizer (Zionist settlers) to a colonized people (the Irish). Both movements, Beatty argues, are equally focused on achieving "national sovereignty."

Beatty has developed this defamation of Irish history in books, articles, essays, and interviews under titles such as "Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture," "Sexual Fantasy and Antisemitism," "Zionism and Irish Nationalism: Ideology and Identity on the Borders of Europe," "'Belfast is Not Here': The Israeli Press and the Good Friday Agreement," and "A Long and Intertwined History: Irish Nationalism and Zionism."

It is a comparison most welcomed by Zionists. For his "intellectual project" Beatty has been repeatedly rewarded by Zionist and Israeli-state sources, receiving grants or other career opportunities from ten separate pro-Zionist or Israeli organizations thirteen times over the space of 12 years prior to his elevation to vice president of the ACIS organization in 2023, including from such out-and-out Zionist organizations as the Azrieli Institute of Montreal, the Ben-Gurion Research Institute at the University of the Negev, Israel, and the Max and Hilde Kochmann Summer School in England, funded by Lord George Weidenfeld, called by the *Jewish Chronicle* "the greatest Zionist of his generation."

That such a figure should assume the presidency of ACIS, even as a war of genocide is being waged against the Palestinian people, should be a matter of concern to all scholars in the organization—especially in view of the Irish people's special place in modern world history.

The very fabric of Irish history is composed of the long and

bloody struggle against British imperialism. It textures all aspects of Ireland's culture and society—its world-historic literature, unrivaled for a country of its size; the folkways and oral traditions of its people; its historic economic backwardness and its more recent role as a site of American capital flight; the struggle to preserve the Irish language; the island's volatile politics, etc.

Ireland, after all, was the first modern colony, with all that that entailed, from the shattering experience of Cromwell's armies in the 1600s, to the Great Hunger of the 1840s, to the vicious Black and Tan War of 1919-1921, to the bloody violence of the British state in Northern Ireland and its ongoing partition of Ulster.

The history and the memory of those experiences have long made the Irish — both in Ireland and in its sprawling diaspora in North America, Britain and Australia — a people traditionally sympathetic to the plight of the colonial oppressed. That is expressed today in Irish support for the Palestinians, now suffering the greatest colonial crime in recent history—dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and genocide—crimes carried out by Israel with the full backing of Washington and London.

This Irish sympathy for Palestine is a major source of concern for Israel's backers in Washington and London, as expressed in numerous media accounts with headlines such as "Why Ireland is one of the most pro-Palestinian nations in the world" (NPR); "Tracing the Deep Roots of Ireland's Support for Palestinians" (NY Times); "Irish support for Palestinians stands firm, despite Israeli anger" (Al Jazeera); and "Why Ireland is the most pro-Palestinian nation in Europe" (CNN).

Now, in Aidan Beatty, ACIS elevates to its presidency a scholar whose central preoccupation over the course of his career has been to overturn this sympathy. As Beatty put it in a talk to a Zionist organization in 2013:

...[T]here's a sort of a long literature of this, which I think can be a very selective kind of literature of saying, you know, Israel is just like Northern Ireland. Israelis are just like Northern Irish Protestants, but they're kind of besieged. They feel that they're besieged by, are surrounded by a hostile, broader world, whether it's Irish Catholics or Arabs. *And I'm very interested in kind of flipping that around and saying, well, actually, Zionists are*

very like Irish nationalists. [1]

This is a libel against Irish history. As Prof. Kerby Miller, the preeminent historian of the Irish in North America put it in an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*:

[T]he analogy between Irish nationalist resistance to British imperialism and the Palestinian resistance to Zionism is much more valid, much more historically accurate than Beatty's analogy between Irish nationalism and Zionism itself. Both the Irish and the Palestinians have been victims of "settler colonialism"—including genocidal methods—the former imposed by the British, especially in Ulster, the latter imposed by Zionism with British and now American complicity. So, to me, the analogy that Beatty is making seems quite false. It seems bizarre. It seems almost obscene.

Curiously, it is not the first time in the history of ACIS that a young scholar has had such a meteoric, and dubious, rise. In the 1980s, Raymond J. Raymond, who taught at the University of Connecticut until he was discovered to be a plagiarist, was en route to the head of ACIS (then the American Committee of Irish Studies), having assumed the presidency of the organization's New England region.

Raymond, like Beatty today, was a revisionist, an intellectual tendency that seeks to minimize the crimes of British imperialism in Ireland (in Beatty's case, by comparing the Zionist colonizers of Palestine not to the British, but to the Irish!).

Specifically, Raymond argued that several "nationalist myths" had to be overturned among Irish Americans: that "the history of Ireland is a history of British oppression," that "the British presence in Ireland has been disastrous for the Irish people;" and that "Irish freedom had to be achieved through violence."

After Raymond's fall from academic grace, he was hired by the British Foreign Ministry, rising through the ranks of its propaganda bureaucracy, the British Information Services, and ultimately achieving the status of Vice Consul of the British Consulate in New York, and "adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair." [2]

Beatty shares with Raymond a quick rise in ACIS and the promotion of a revisionist scholarship that maligns Irish nationalism. And though Beatty has not been accused of plagiarism, like Raymond he has played fast and loose with scholarly standards.

Beatty's most recent book, *The Party Is Always Right*, is a slanderous attack composed of the crudest fabrications targeting longtime British Trotskyist leader Gerry Healy (1913-1989). It would seem an odd choice for a book subject, given Beatty's background as a historian of Zionism and Irish nationalism. In fact, the only connections to Beatty's "areas of expertise" are these: First, that Healy was a lifelong advocate of the Palestinian people and the oppressed Arab masses. And second, that Healy

was born in Ireland, emigrating to Wales in 1926 at the age of 12 or 13.

Amazingly, Aidan Beatty, the self-styled Irish historian, deals with Irish history in all of *two pages* in his book attacking Healy. Yet in that mere handful of paragraphs Beatty falsifies references, fails to cite a single archival source, and manages to completely misunderstand Irish history by portraying the Galway of Healy's youth in 1916-1922—the period of uprising, revolution, occupation, and civil war,—as a bucolic paradise.

In fact, Beatty conducted no original research on Ireland whatsoever for *The Party Is Always Right*. An investigation of his sources revealed that his only primary source on Irish history is the curator of an ancestry.com page named Marie Monaghan, with whom he had an e-mail exchange! As for Beatty's minimization of the violence in Galway, this has been thoroughly exposed on the WSWS.

It is our understanding that Aidan Beatty's elevation to the ACIS presidency is a mechanical matter, his present office of vice president having functioned as president-elect. Yet it is our earnest hope that, even in this late hour, members of your organization will find the courage to protest and oppose the appointment of this dubious and unqualified candidate to the presidency.

For the further edification of ACIS members on Beatty and his work, we recommend the following articles published on the *World Socialist Web Site*:

- Aidan Beatty's hackwork: The Israel-Zionist connection
- Slander vs. biography: Aidan Beatty's falsification of Gerry Healy's family and childhood in a decade of rebellion and civil war
- Historian Kerby Miller discusses Aidan Beatty and the writing of Irish history
- The fabrication of a slander: Aidan Beatty's forgery of Gerry Healy's youth—and Irish history

[1] "Aidan Beatty - 'Belfast in Not Here': Israel's Perspective on the Northern Irish Peace Process - YouTube." Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsT1EoXv48M>.

[2] Meehan, Niall, and Kerby A. Miller. "For God and the Empire: An Irish Historian's Rapid Rise, Strange Fall, and Remarkable Resurrection." *Field Day Review* 7 (2011): 150-69.



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