

The Point Festival 2013

Following the success of last year's Point Festival 2012, the Green European Foundation Carnsore Summer School returned to the same venue in Co. Wexford, Ireland. The Summer School took place from Friday 23rd August until Sunday 25th August 2013. The theme for this year's event was *"Jobs, Democracy and Europe – The Failure of Politics?"*.

The venue in Carnsore was the site of many large anti-nuclear protest events in the late 1970s and 80s. It is seen by many as the birthplace of the environmental movement in Ireland.

It was fitting therefore that Summer School opened by commemorating the 35th anniversary of the first anti-nuclear demonstration in 1979. Nuala Ahern (Chair of Green Foundation Ireland) officially opened the Summer School and chaired the first session held in the festival marquee. Guest speaker was Seán McDonagh who spoke about his recent publication *"Fukushima – The Death Knell for Nuclear Energy?"*. A Question and Answer session then followed and most of the debate focused on nuclear energy issues in Europe. One memorable quote from Seán was: "It takes 200,000 years for plutonium to stabilise.....with no permanent repository for nuclear waste". After the first session, delegates were entertained by comedian Abie Philbin Bowman who presented his new routine *"Terrorist Weather"*. Abie treated the crowd to many new ideas on how to win the Climate Change debate. The evening concluded with live music from The Submersibles.

The theme for Saturday was "Why employment isn't working?". The morning opened in the festival marquee with an address by Marina Barbalata, GEF Project Manager, who talked about the work and operations of Green European Foundation. The main session of the day was chaired by Mar Garcia (EGP) with Dirk Holemans (OIKOS), Jean Lambert MEP (UK), Eamon Ryan (Irish Green Party) and Peter Scallan (local businessman) making up the panel. This proved to be a lively session and delegates engaged strongly during the Question and Answer session. Peter Scallan suggested that Irish students were leaving school without basic business skills. Dirk Holemans focused on the emerging move from 'throw-away' to a zero-waste 'circular' economy and that this requires change at product design stage. He predicted that: "the biggest gain in employment will be in 'repair and re-use'". Jean Lambert and Eamon Ryan provided the political perspectives from national and European levels.

Tommy Simpson (Director of GFI) facilitated a workshop after lunch focused on "Jobs". At the same time, Pat McCusker gave a talk about his book *"Planet Dancing"*, which focused on the importance of the natural world to humanity. Bill Kelly (Meitheal Mid-West), Mar Garcia and Dirk Holemans participated in the Jobs Workshop. This was followed by a showing of a film on the Mondragón Co-Operative in Spain's Basque country. While this film was shown, delegates had an alternative outdoor option. Naturalist Jim Hurley conducted a nature walk around the nearby Lady's Island Pilgrimage Route. Memorably he began his talk by mentioning the library in Alexandria in Egypt.....

Delegates who remained in the Carne Centre then attended a workshop titled "Renewable Energy for Employment", which was co-hosted by Brian Hurley and Dan Boyle. This was followed by a well attended bilingual workshop (English and Gaelic) on "Using Irish Music for Campaigning", which was facilitated by Seán Ó Donaile. He was ably supported by American folk legend Jim Page and Irish traditional musician Úna O'Boyle.

The Festival Barbeque was held in the marquee with The Ocelots providing live music for the guests who had much to discuss after the first full day's activities. Jim Page then opened the evening's entertainment. He included a rendition of his famous anti-nuclear song *"Hiroshima Nagasaki Russian Roulette"*. The Cáca Milis Cabaret then followed with an eclectic mix of entertainment including poetry, film, dance and much music. Artists included Eleanor McEvoy (an internationally renowned singer/songwriter), Leni Morrison, The Motives and The Ocelots. An amazing night of entertainment was completed by Corner Boy who brought the house down.

A beautifully sunny morning saw Sunday's main session "New Europe / Old Europe" open in the marquee. As one of the expected panellists Vinay Gupta was unable to attend through ill health, Dirk Holemans kindly joined the panel of Mar Garcia, Eamon Ryan and Jean Lambert. Nuala Ahern chaired.

The panel explored the current social and financial challenges facing Europe. Each panellist spoke about how the situation was affecting their particular country. Mar Garcia spoke about the Catalan relationship with Spain. Eamon Ryan stated that Europe needed higher levels of inter-state co-operation. He cited an example where European funding had been agreed between The Netherlands and Denmark for a transnational energy project, but that the project had not progressed due to failure of the relevant state agencies to act beyond their respective borders. Jean Lambert talked about the apparent disconnect between people in the UK and the EU. She stated that "a recent UK poll found 66% couldn't name a single EU institution".

This year's Summer School concluded with a guided walking tour, led by Michael Bermingham, of the nearby Carnsore Wind Farm. After the tour the delegates headed for home under a bright blue sky with much to ponder and a pep in their step.

Stiofán Nutty
Festival Co-Ordinator

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