The Fuel Price Blockades in Ireland

A Union of Fossil Capital and Racial Capital

Suryapratim Roy

04.05.2026 doi: 10.59704/d6d4974600519ebf

April 2026 has been the most politically charged month in Ireland in recent memory. Irish roads, ports and refineries across the country were blocked with tractors and heavy agricultural and haulage vehicles over the course of the week starting April 7. Essential services were compromised, and several parts of the country came to a halt. The blockade eased on April 13, when the coalition government headed by the Fianna Fáil party agreed to a € 505 million package after meeting with representatives of the blockade. Contrary to media commentary, I argue that the blockade enabled a union of fossil capital and racial capital.

The government initially refused to meet with the representatives. Parties in the opposition, including on the Left such as the Sinn Féin and Social Democrats, as well as parties on the Right, including Aontú and Independent Ireland, found the government to be "disdainful and dismissive" towards the representatives of the blockade.

After the package was announced and the blockade eased, the opposition parties tabled a no-confidence motion. The government survived this motion, which is not a surprise as the government has survived all no-confidence motions to date. Nonetheless, there was discontent within the party, and an important resignation. One of the representatives of the blockade, James Geoghegan, has declared that the government will suffer embarrassment in July when Dublin hosts the commencement of Ireland's stint of EU presidency. Less reported in mainstream media is the hate speech and racism that both characterised the protests as well as the fallout. Patron saint of the far-right, boxer and friend of Donald Trump, Conor McGregor posted a video that the "protests" signal a "return to fairness", where he critiqued the government for "their disastrous handling of immigration", among others. McGregor declared the Irish are at war with all foreigners shortly before the Dublin riots in 2023. The only representative of any minority group in Ireland, Senator Eileen Flynn of the Traveller Community, has received more abuse and hate this month than at any time in her career because of her unwillingness to support the blockades where "hatred, division, and anti-migrant" sentiment was being spread.

Climate Obstruction and Fossil Capital

The blockades centred on the price of fuel, and the role of carbon tax in particular. Fuel tax in Ireland is higher than the European average, and with the invasion of Iran, the US has caused an international increase in fuel prices everywhere. The newly-formed Irish Haulage Farming Construction Contractors Amalgamation (IHFCCA) and The People of Ireland Against Fuel Prices called for an abolition of carbon tax, excise duty cuts, and a price cap on fuel. In March, the government had introduced temporary excise duty cuts and diesel rebates for hauliers, but did not suspend the carbon tax. In the € 505 million package announced by the government, there is fuel subsidy support on agricultural diesel, other supports for transport and haulage, a carbon tax increase suspension, and extension of temporary excise duty cuts. Suspension of the carbon tax increase was not straightforward. It serves an important distributive function, in addition to compliance with European targets (on which Ireland is substantially behind). The carbon tax in Ireland is indeed comparatively higher than in several European states. Ireland's primary emissions are from agriculture, which is not taxed directly, and road and farm fuel picks up that burden. Ireland's 2021 Climate Action Plan required sectoral targets – this included a 75% reduction in electricity

from 2018 emissions levels and 25% for agriculture. The carbon tax is an important scheme that likely benefits those protesting directly – it leads to ringfenced revenue for home retrofitting and supports for farmers to become greener, and fuel allowances. The carbon tax, therefore, has the potential to benefit low-income farms and households. There needs to be nuanced inquiry as to whether the utilisation of carbon tax revenue is indeed beneficial, and for whom. But to scrap it outright is hasty, not only from an emissions point of view, but a suspension may benefit only rich farmers and transporters.

The move against the carbon tax is the latest move of climate obstruction in Ireland by the agricultural and transport sectors' lobbies. Rural Ireland is characterised by an export-oriented agri-food sector, with 85 – 90% of the food and dairy produced in Ireland exported. Such production involves substantial intensive meat and dairy production, which has led to a steady decline in the growing of fruits, vegetables, and grains, as well as forest cover. Road transport by contractors is an important element of this export process. While other agriculture-heavy European states have seen a drop in pollution, Ireland has seen an increase in emissions from agriculture and transport, along with a rise in agri-food exports.

In their study of climate obstruction in Ireland, Kelly, McNally, and Stephens demonstrate that "Ireland's beef and dairy farmers and their corporate partners have had disproportionate influence on the nation's agricultural policymaking." The demands of the blockade mirror lobbying priorities that have been around well before Trump's invasion of Iran. While the blockade had fragmented participants, it would be remiss to see it as anything other than the perpetuation and accumulation of fossil capital by a fossil elite. The concept of a fossil elite is found in Dario Kenner's *Carbon Inequality*: the elite are agents who "seek to obtain political influence over the state to ensure the profitability of their shareholdings which are the basis of their personal net worth." The aforementioned representative James Geoghegan has €548,804 of revenue default judgements against him. The aforementioned resignation was by Minister Michael Healy-Rae, the wealthiest member of the Irish Parliament, with significant landholdings of farmland and forestry. In a letter to the Irish Times, one observer noticed the "sparkling and shiny tractors" of the blockade. The network of land-owning people who produce, facilitate and provide transport for the beef and dairy sector in Ireland enjoys the same position as oil companies or data centres do in other countries. Thus the blockade should not be characterised as a protest which has a public interest objective. It was a lobbying strategy by the fossil elite that held essential services captive. Despite claims of how the blockade was a return to Irish democracy, it was a restriction of movement by rent-extracting agents. Imagine if Wall Street blocked all economic activity, and called themselves protesters. It has to be asked – why did this elite obstructive lobbying become popular, with an appropriation of the Left? This brings us to the marriage of fossil capital and racial capital.

Racial Capital and a "Return to Fairness"

Chris Duffy, IHFCCA representative, made his views on climate change known on social media; he could not "care less if she [Greta Thunberg] got raped or beaten". Trump has a milder version of this opinion; he believes climate change is a con-job. Much like Trump, Duffy is also of the opinion that Muslims want to take over the world. Kildare county councillor Tom McDonnell, who spoke during the first day of the blockade in Dublin, asked for international protection centres to be shut down, and the money given to farmers. Once the government stops spending on immigrants, then there would be the money to cut taxes, he observed. US and UK social media influencers who have previously instigated violence towards foreigners have weighed in. When the government used defence vehicles to remove trucks blocking ports, Tommy Robinson (who is funded by US, Russian, and Australian sources) accused the "globalist" Irish government of using the army to crush the Irish people. Elon Musk has reposted claims of how "Ireland for the Irish" has manifested in these "grassroots protests". "Make Ireland Great Again", vilifying foreigners, and gender and racial slurs defined the mood of the blockade. Take the issue of refresh-

ments. The Muslim Sisters of Ireland, who run a regular soup kitchen, received abuse by participants of the blockade. At the same time, Michael McCarthy, a social media agitator who relentlessly advocates the race replacement theory, set up a GoFundMe for refreshments for the fuel protesters and raised €153,000. Crowdfunded agitators often based in the US support of "indigenous blood" in Ireland, and this is an appropriate occasion to strengthen this influence. Ireland has some of the most lenient hate speech and incitement laws in Europe, with the European Commission notifying Ireland in 2024 for incorrectly transposing the Council Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia.

Commentators have suggested that the blockade was a legitimate protest that was hijacked by the far-right. One *Guardian* commentator suggested that, "But to ignore the genuine concerns of so many workers afraid of losing everything because of agitators trying to profit off the momentum is to play into the hands of those who want to achieve power through division." While there is merit in such a suggestion, there are concerns that point to a structural problem. The first is how Trump gets a free pass. If this was a protest against issues that led to fuel price increase, then why not protest in front of the US embassy? Or block the Trump Hotel and Golf Resort in County Clare? Would that not be preferable to restricting mobility for emergency services? The second is how political parties on the Left seem to have no issue in getting into bed with the Right in recognising the representatives of the blockade. With the exception of a couple of stray parliamentarians (one of whom received abuse as pointed out earlier), no reference was made by the opposition to the hate speech of the representatives of the blockade, or their entrenchment in fossil capital. This seems to be an admission that there is no genuine Left in Ireland where minorities play a part. The third is the puzzle of why the "genuine concerns of so many workers" finds voice now in the incoherent claims of fossil capital, without any real consideration of whether a carbon tax might be good for retrofitting rural homes, or without inquiring if the package offered speaks only to the demands of rich representatives of the farming and transport sectors. The government package, for instance, does not address the price of home heating oil. Here one might argue that there is a general disenchantment with the state, which surfaced now. But why does the disenchantment take a racist form for the participants? I suggest that the denigration of minorities and non-whites in the name of Ireland has value in itself – it is compensation for inadequate supply of public goods, as well as a message to the government and transnational racial capital. The chief architect of the Irish constitution, Éamon de Valera, sought to gain financial and political support from American conservatives for his new political party Fianna Fáil in 1920 with a campaign of: 'Ireland is the only white nation on earth still in the bonds of political slavery.' The participants of the blockade in denigrating Greta Thunberg, globalist Europe, Muslims, and foreigners were protesting the move away from the nation's most valuable resource – an equal whiteness of its people, reflected in Conor McGregor's plea of a 'return to fairness'. Much like de Valera's attempt at winning over conservative American capital by offering the white identity of Ireland as a valuable resource, the participants of the blockade seek to signal to the likes of Trump, Musk, and social media agitators that the grassroots whiteness of Irish identity is available as a platform for racial capital.

A 2008 Irish Times article made a case for Ireland being the 51st US state: 'the evidence suggests that Ireland would be located more comfortably in the conservative midwestern heartland, and might even spill over a bit into the Bible Belt.' With the union of fossil capital and racial capital receiving the moral stamp of being grassroots and succeeding in appropriating the Left, Ireland is poised to remain within the American Midwest for a while.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suryapratim Roy
Suryapratim Roy is an Assistant Professor at the School of Law, Trinity College Dublin.Suryapratim Roy is an Assistant Professor at the School of Law, Trinity College Dublin.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Roy, Suryapratim: The Fuel Price Blockades in Ireland: A Union of Fossil Capital and Racial Capital, Verfassungsblog, 04.05.2026, doi: 10.59704/d6d4974600519ebf.

Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Langzeitarchiviert bei IntRechtDok unter: doi.org/10.17176/20260505-173517-0.