NEW MASSES: IRELAND AND ARMENIA

In this number, NLR*'s 'New Masses, New Media' series examines the character of the recent protests in Armenia and Ireland, both sparked by price hikes for basic goods: electricity in one case, water in the other. Comparable in population—4.5m and 3m, respectively—Ireland as a whole is three times the size of Armenia. Historically, both have been shaped by their location between two imperial powers: Britain and America, Turkey and Russia. If there is an eerie parallel in the numbers estimated to have perished in the Irish Famine and the Armenian Genocide—between 800,000 and a million—the deliberately exterminationist policies of the Young Turks are of a different order of political and moral malignity to the laissez-faire arrogance of English colonialism. A mark of these dark pasts, in both cases the diaspora significantly outweighs the domestic population. In recent times, both countries have figured on the margin of larger economic unions, the* EU *and* CIS*; as a result, their trajectories in the 1990s were diametrically opposed. Armenia had been a high-end industrial hub within the Soviet Union, specializing in machine goods and electronic products. Already hit by the 1988 earthquake, its economy suffered one of the sharpest contractions of the former* USSR *as industrial disruption was exacerbated by war and blockade. From $2.25bn in 1990, Armenian* GDP *dropped to $1.2bn in 1993; it did not recover to its Soviet-era level until 2002. By that time, the population had fallen by 15 per cent, from 3.54m in 1990 to barely 3m; by 2013 it was down to 2.97m. The construction sector, chiefly driven by foreign investment and remittances from the diaspora—conservative estimates put this at 7m, the largest contingent in Russia, the wealthiest and best-organized in Los Angeles—has since become the main engine of growth, also nourishing a large shadow economy; privatizations have put key assets, including electricity generation and* R&D*, in Russian hands. Since 2014, Armenian exports to Russia have been hit by the tumbling rouble, which in turn has weakened the dram. Ireland, meanwhile, which had benefited from European Community structural and agricultural funds from 1973, saw its economy take off in the early 1990s as the Republic became the low-tax destination of choice in the* EU *for American multinationals. Irish* GDP *doubled from 1990–99, then tripled again from 2000–07, as the credit-fuelled construction boom took hold. Since the crash, its citizens have been forced to shoulder a bank bailout worth around 37 per cent of* GDP *through sharp public-spending cuts. Below, Zhanna Andreasyan, Georgi Derluguian and Daniel Finn discuss the nature of the protests and their potential outcomes.*