

AFFAIRS OF THE NATION



CRUELLA VON DER LEYEN BACKS BIG AG

FRESH FROM giving Israel *carte blanche* to commit murder and mayhem in Gaza with the EU's unconditional backing, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen did her own Cruella de Ville impression last month by scrapping plans to cut pesticide usage across the EU.

Under the EU's much-vaunted Farm To Fork plan, pesticide usage was to drop 50% by 2030 in a move to ease the extreme pressure on nature from the huge quantities of highly toxic chemicals being sprayed every year by farmers across the EU.

Now, apparently, these critical moves to avert ecological disaster and so help protect both nature and agriculture had, according to von der Leyen, become "a symbol of polarisation". This is code for a complete capitulation to the agri-chemical lobby, which has been working flat out to undermine EU environmental regulations.

"Our farmers deserve to be listened to. I know they are worried about the future of agriculture and their future as farmers," was von der Leyen's flaccid cover story.

Her decision was in no way influenced by the sway of agri-chemical giants in her home country, Germany, including Bayer and BASF.

Waves of noisy protests by farmers across Europe in recent weeks, using heavy machinery to block motorways and break through police barricades, have led to almost total political capitulation. The European Commission's roadmap on cutting emissions by 90% by 2040 is now dead in the water, with almost all references to agriculture having been quietly scrapped.

Even more worryingly, the roadmap dumped recommendations on how citizens could help cut their own carbon footprints,



Ursula von der Leyen

which had included advice on reducing meat consumption. The fact that it is an election year in Europe goes some way towards explaining the sheer spinelessness of the commission and the political cynicism of Cruella, a member of the European People's Party, the group to which Fine Gael is affiliated in Europe.

A notable feature of the farmers' protests was the degree of property damage and destruction involved, including cars crashing into piles of manure dumped on motorways, trees being cut down and burned, slurry being sprayed and police being intimidated by protestors using heavy equipment.

These protests were cheered across Europe's right-wing media, who applauded the plucky farmers expressing their right to disrupt traffic, block emergency vehicles, smash things up and violently confront the police in pursuit of their aims.

Oddly, the same media outlets have demanded that the police crack down hard and criminalise entirely peaceful climate protestors acting in the wider public interest for doing no more than walking on the street. The hypocrisy on display by politicians and press alike is, even by today's low standards, breath taking.

The extent to which Big Ag has been successful in undermining political action on climate was underlined with the recent publication of a scientific report highlighting how the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN-FAO) roadmap had issued a total of 120 recommendations on dietary change needed to cut carbon emissions. Astonishingly, nowhere were cuts in



"It gets worse - the wheels just came off our share price."

consumption of meat or dairy mentioned.

The UN-FAO report uses the term "dietary change" eight times, yet fails to once refer to reducing meat or dairy consumption, the key drivers of agri emissions. This was described as "bewildering" by the scientists.

It is further evidence of the intensive work being undertaken by livestock interests to shield their sector from scrutiny over its huge and expanding carbon and ecological footprint.

Goldhawk previously reported (see *The Phoenix* 2/11/2022) on the so-called Dublin Declaration, supported by state agri research agency Teagasc and launched at an event opened by junior minister Martin Heydon, decrying how the livestock sector had been the victim of "zealotry". The whole project was developed by international meat industry interests, some with ties to organised climate denial. The Dublin Declaration website lists 27 named Irish individuals as signatories, including 16 Teagasc staff.

JOY WAS unconfined in environmental circles with the revelation earlier this week that Coillte, the state-owned forestry agency, was to turn over a new leaf and switch its focus towards biodiversity protection. "Now is the time for us to hold up our hands and admit that we've been part of the problem for too long," Coillte director Sakinah Brennan was quoted in an article in the business section of the Irish Times. "This marks the start of a new chapter where we focus on restoring native biodiversity and move away from extraction". But the joy was short-lived.

The first indication that something was amiss was when the online version of the article suddenly disappeared from the IT website. Several hours later, the newspaper published a correction, stating that the article "attributes an incorrect policy to Coillte and was published in error". No explanation for the 'error' was proffered.

Goldhawk understands that an email was sent to the IT business desk over the bank holiday weekend purporting to be from Coillte's PR agency, Q4, and including the above quote. It was entirely fictitious and the embarrassing error was not spotted until well after the article had been printed. To add to the IT's discomfort, a report about the fake news story was carried on the RTÉ website, which took the opportunity to rub it in by recalling that the paper had, only last May, also been duped, this time into running a bogus article on, ahem, fake tan and cultural appropriation.

