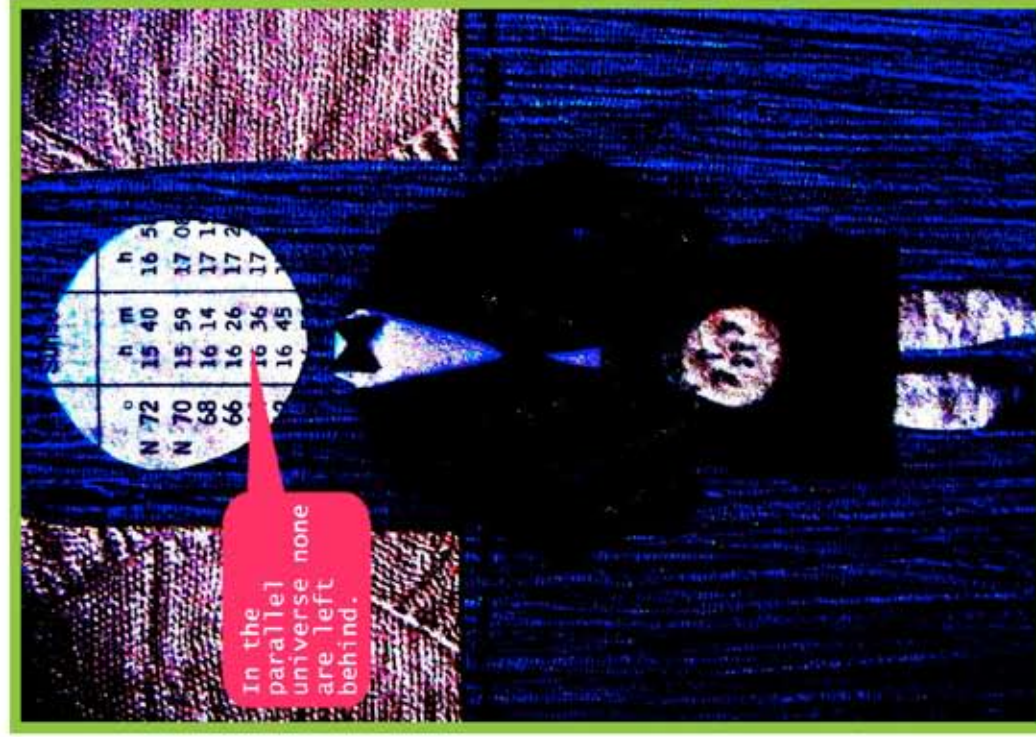


The Irish Anarchist Review

free!



imagining the future

summer 2011 issue ●●●●●●

inside!

What kind of democracy for the Arab world?/

Project 2013 - Rebuilding a trade union movement from below

BACK to the FUTURE: Imagining the Future in a post-revolutionary world/

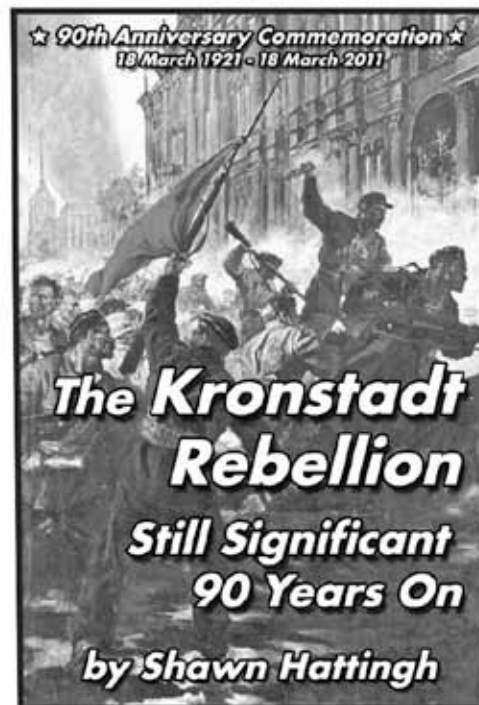
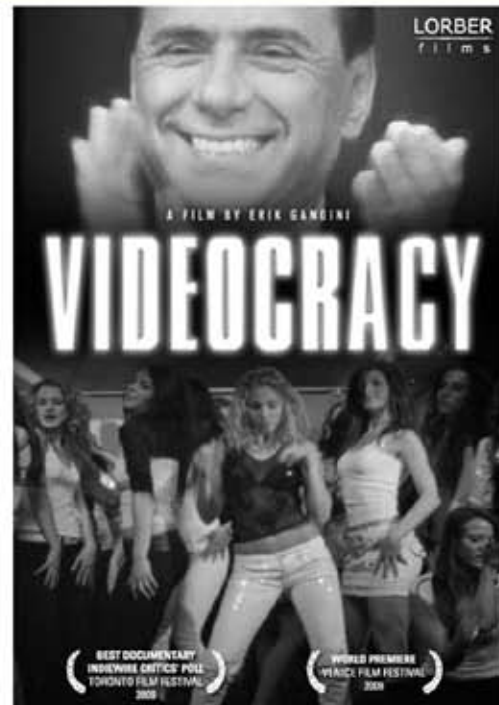
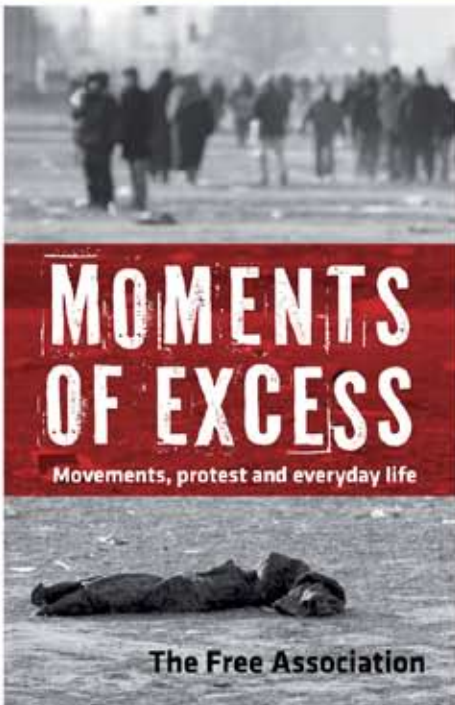
OBAMA - Change you can't believe in/

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Irish anarchist review



workers solidarity movement
summer 2011 issue ●●●●●●

welcome to/

Welcome to Issue 3 of The **Irish Anarchist Review**, produced by the Workers Solidarity Movement. This magazine aims to provide a forum for the exploration and discussion of theories, thoughts and ideas about where we are and where we would like to be in terms of political struggles today.

The task of building a revolutionary movement based on principles of freedom and democracy was never going to be an easy one. As we as a society have faced into probably the greatest ever financial crisis, that challenge appears in many ways to be even bigger. The singular lack of any real fightback by the Irish working class as international capital in the guise of the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund systematically dismantles our social services and slashes our living conditions could well prove dispiriting and demoralising.

But demoralisation or discouragement cannot be options for revolutionaries. What we have to do is to continue to look for sparks of fightback and to continue to try to develop ideas and theories which might give people hope.

In this context, Dermot Sreenan's article 'Imagining The Future' is an attempt to look into a post-revolutionary future and imagine what such a society might look like. It is hoped that this will be the first in a series of articles that will try to sketch out the possibilities in terms of a new world where people's needs would be placed before the rights of financiers to continue to stockpile wealth.

It is in the context of seeking out hope for the future that Kevin Doyle analyses what has happened in the U.S. since the election of Barack Obama. He looks at the reality behind the 'Yes We Can' slogan and the supposed 'grass-roots mobilisation' that his election campaign involved and details the litany of broken promises left in its wake.

In an article re-produced from anarkismo.net, José Antonio Gutiérrez D. looks at the fight for democracy that has broken out across the Arab world and asks how these struggles can be "more than a sporadic episode" and how they can be developed into real "alternative social projects".

Looking back as well as forward is important in terms of building for the future. In 'Project 2013 - Re-building a Trade Union Movement from Below' Gregor Kerr issues the challenge that "if trade unions didn't exist we certainly wouldn't invent SIPTU". In asking whether trade unions as they exist are fit for purpose, the article invites us to use the forthcoming centenary of the 1913 lockout to reclaim the spirit of Larkin and seek to re-establish a trade union movement which puts its members' interests to the fore.

The economic crisis in Ireland has presented us with many challenges, none more so than that of making real links with workers in other countries facing similar difficulties. Paul Bowman's look at the anarchist and opposition movements across the 'PIGS' countries is an attempt to draw those common links.

We also publish a number of reviews which we hope will stimulate our readers to further reading, viewing and discussing.

We don't simply want the ideas in this magazine to be consumed but would hope that they will challenge their readers to develop on them and react to them - whether positively or negatively. In that way the magazine can make a real contribution to the development of new ideas. So read, enjoy and respond. We welcome contributions to future issues of this magazine and hope that at least some of the content of this issue will stimulate thought and debate among you, the readers.

WORDS: GREGOR KERR

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about the wsm/

The Workers Solidarity Movement was founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1984 following discussions by a number of local anarchist groups on the need for a national anarchist organisation. At that time with unemployment and inequality on the rise, there seemed every reason to argue for anarchism and for a revolutionary change in Irish society. This has not changed.

Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. But, just as importantly, we see this struggle against capitalism as also being a struggle for freedom. We believe that socialism and freedom must go together, that we cannot have one without the other.

Anarchism has always stood for individual freedom. But it also stands for democracy. We believe in democratising the workplace and in workers taking control of all industry. We believe that this is the only real alternative to capitalism with its ongoing reliance on hierarchy and oppression and its depletion of the world's resources.



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whatdowewantwhendowewantit.wordpress.com



What kind of democracy for the Arab world?/

In a previous article, I said that events shaking the Arab world today are as relevant as those that shook the world in 1989 [1].



WORDS :

JOSÉ ANTONIO GUTIÉRREZ D.

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Not only can parallels be made on the extent and depth of discontent over a vast geographical area, but also because this whirlwind of popular fury places a question mark over a particular geopolitical architecture that was hitherto believed to be as strong as steel.

In this case, these long-standing dictatorships were fed, promoted and installed by the geo-strategic interests of the U.S.A. (and its junior partner, the E.U.) in an area of critical concern as far as oil is concerned. In 1989 the political consequences of the demonstrations were deep and long-lasting. The fall of "real socialist" regimes not only meant the fall of a few unpleasant bureaucratic dictatorships, but because of the relative weakness of a truly libertarian and revolutionary Left, represented the fall of a set of political values and horizons that were incorrectly associated with the Soviet bloc. This led to the overwhelming rise of neo-liberalism as the unquestioned system in the economic, political and ideological field.

It was the end of history, according to quite a few

crusty apologists of the "New World Order". But history did continue to be written, as was dramatically demonstrated by the anti-globalisation protests in Seattle in 1999. And if further demonstration was needed, there was the cycle of open struggles between 2000 and 2005 in South America, which challenged the foundations of the model, with the people, the oppressed and the exploited classes as the protagonists of history.

The events in the Arab world which have kept us holding our breath during the past two months, have shaken the New World Order at one of its strongest links - among the dictatorships that have for decades been maintained by the "free world" to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil and keep a military foothold in an area of enormous economic and geostrategic importance for the empire. These mobilisations are taking place in the very heart of global capitalism, where the oil flows that keeps international trade and industry afloat.

They are happening in countries which are all close allies of Washington, hence the anti-imperialist content of all these demonstrations (even

what kind of democracy for the Arab world //////////////

the Libyan dictator, Qaddafi, had become a close partner of the U.S.A. and E.U., in the era of the "War on Terrorism"). They are all countries which are corroded by serious internal contradictions, where hunger coexists with macro-economic growth and the opulence of the leading families. But there is something more - they are at the same time challenging and shaking the political foundations of the system.

Those calling for "democracy" have sparked off an acute political debate on a global level over the political content of such a flexible term as "democracy". Above all because the "democracy" that liberals in suits and ties in the corridors of power talk about is not the same democracy that the people on the streets have in mind.

TWO ANTAGONISTIC CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY

The spectre of the mob taking a leading role in politics is the worst nightmare of the ruling class for whom "democracy" means maintaining the legal and economic structure that underpins its exclusive privileges. It is no coincidence therefore that the capitalist media have been reporting calls for "stability" and "order", together with the formal support for the need for democracy in Arab countries ("forgetting" their traditional support for regional autocracies). In "El Mercurio" (11 February), for example, David Gallagher writes a typical note: "You cannot govern a country from the street, despite all illusions to the contrary held by some intellectuals of direct democracy of an extreme, participatory kind". Opinions like this have been expressed in a wholesale fashion throughout the official media.

It is interesting to mention government from the street, since it shows the limits of formal, bourgeois democracy. Let us clarify some of the concepts he employs: when he speaks of the street, what he does is to equate it with the people. When he says that democracy cannot be of an "extreme", participatory kind, he means that the working class (the "extreme" as opposed to the class he represents) should be excluded from the democratic game. For the very reason that in his concept of democracy, we must exclude the poor, the workers, from any direct involvement in their affairs, that they must necessarily take on an air of "seriousness" and "respectability" in order to disguise the class interests behind this vision.

In an article on the Arab uprisings, the Uruguayan writer Raúl Zibechi hits the nail on the head when he states:

"The system is demonstrating only too well that it can live with any State authority, even the most "radical" or "anti-system", but cannot tolerate people on the streets, revolt, ongoing rebellion. We can say that the people on the street are the spanner in the works of the accumulation of capital, so one of the first "measures" taken by the military after Mubarak withdrew to his retirement home, was to demand that the people leave the streets and return to work." [2]

The street is the place par excellence where power is expressed from below. It is the symbolic space where the people fight their battle to the death with those on high. This is where the people experiment with alternative ways of handling the "res publica", public affairs.

Whenever the people have burst onto the stage of history through protest, they have always - through the exercise of direct democracy - established their own institutions outside and in opposition to the official institutions, the State.

This has been the case since the French Revolution, when in 1792 the proletariat formed the first commune of Paris and the people set up the bodies of budding direct democracy, only to see them taken over, changed out of recognition and finally crushed at the hands of the Jacobin bourgeoisie in its struggle against the Ancien Régime.

Democracy always has limits and the bourgeoisie knows this - the problem is who sets those limits. In classical Greece, where the concept was born, democratic rights were the privilege of only the "citizens", a minority of the population that lived off the labour of the enslaved majority. In Western democracies, for a long time, democracy was denied to the colonies that fed the cities or to the local workers who were without property or education.

In Israel, the "only democracy in the Middle East" as the famous cliché has it, the Palestinians are completely excluded from the delights of democracy. In the U.S.A. itself, the most "democratic" country in the world (according to themselves), despite the election of a black president, one out of every four African American men languishes in the ubiquitous US prison complex, many of them on death row. The others live in the vast majority of cases in ghettos, while the two-party system works like a charm for the military-industrial elite.

Let us take for example any Western democracy, those so-called "representative" democracies: make a simple survey of the social class and gender to which the majority of parliamentarians belong. The result is overwhelmingly males of the capitalist class. Entrepreneurs make up a tiny minority of society, but almost all parliamentarians are entrepreneurs. You will also notice that oppressed ethnic or national groups are underrepresented.

Who then is the democracy representative of? The capitalists, the rich, the powerful. The whole electoral and institutional engine is protected by a thousand and one tricks to prevent popular participation.

By contrast, the concept of participatory or direct democracy is the polar opposite of the concept of representative democracy as advocated by the capitalist class and their hangers-on. Its limits are set by the mobilized people, who during the process of the struggle acquire a new awareness of their abilities and their own existence. Direct democracy in the French Revolution, in the period 1792-1793, placed limits on the speculators, and momentarily consolidated the fight against them.

All the various experiences of people power and direct democracy that have occurred throughout history have excluded the notion of economic exploitation. The direct participation of each and every member of society, the collective exercise of power, drowns the capitalist minority in the ocean of the people's interests that are freely and directly expressed. It is no coincidence that direct democracy ignores the distinction between the political and the economic (horror of horrors for the capitalists) and tends towards the socialization of property.

The street is an important symbolic space. But it is not enough in itself. Gradually, the people always end up realizing that "democracy", their direct democracy built in the struggle, also includes the socialization of businesses, mines, land, factories and offices. When the people take charge of their own affairs, we see clearly that there can be no political equality without economic equality.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN THE POPULAR COMMITTEES

In Egypt, as elsewhere in the Arab world, popular committees have emerged that have demonstrated the political capacity of the working classes. Gallagher is wrong when he says that a country cannot be governed from the street. In fact, for several weeks in Egypt and Tunisia, the "street" was the only place of government.

There are numerous witnesses to how direct democracy works in the popular committees of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, which we know about thanks to the good offices of certain international correspondents. Let me quote one from the "commune" of Tahrir Square in Cairo, which I think is fairly representative:

"Egyptians of all social strata have voluntarily taken to street cleaning; directing midday traffic; coordinating neighboring patrols amidst early outbreaks of looting; and even organizing self-defense committees during the sporadic February 2nd clashes with the baltagiyya (thugs), fully equipped with security checkpoints, look-out posts, and makeshift hospitals to treat the wounded (...) People have not hesitated to share or willingly give away for free what little they possess in the way of food or drink.

Overcoming a long legacy of mutual hostility and suspicion along traditional sectarian lines, there is an Egypt for everyone in Tahrir Square: men and women, young and old, Muslim and Christian. Lively and vigorous debate - free and full of meaning, for once - have filled all four corners of Tahrir Square, conveying by loud-speaker the full array of diverse political views and opinions present. Any formal adoption of proposals has been decided democratically by clear majority-vote (...)

The people of Tahrir Square actually held a vote at one point about whether or not to elect representatives to make key executive decisions on behalf of the protest movement; they overwhelmingly and decisively voted 'no.' [3]

This testimony is consistent with others that have circulated regarding these committees, which are reminiscent of the proliferation of direct democratic institutions in Argentina after the crisis and the popular uprising in December 2001. Even the conservative newspaper "The Economist" (5-11 March 2011, p.41) says, without explicitly mentioning the popular committees in Libya, but referring to organisation in the "liberated zones" that:

"In areas in rebel hands, a feared descent into chaos has not materialised. Despite a dearth of policemen, crime has not risen. Female students attending celebrations have not reported harassment. For almost two weeks, restaurateurs have been offering free tea and sandwiches. To display their new-found sense of fraternity, businessmen have helped sweep the streets." [4]

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"Gallagher is wrong when he says that a country cannot be governed from the street. In fact, for several weeks in Egypt and Tunisia, the 'street' was the only place of government."

Of course, direct democracy won in the street, alone, is not a panacea to magically resolve the problems facing the Arab peoples. Neither unemployment nor the exasperating inequality, nor the high prices of food have gone. Clashes between Christians and Muslims in Egypt show that corrosive sectarianism has not been entirely overcome. But direct democracy creates public spaces in which the people's demands can become a devastating whirlwind, a collective leadership that seeks to promote equality and socialization.

REVOLUTION IN THE ARAB WORLD - NOT JUST AN END TO THE DICTATORSHIPS

While the U.S.A. and its local puppets bring up the spectre of Al Qaeda in order to create distrust among Westerners of their rebellious Arab brothers and sisters, the rebellion in the Arab countries has managed to reach unexpected levels of vitality, going far beyond the narrow demands to replace a government. The journalist Michael Jansen, writing in "The Irish Times" (4 March 2011), gives us a quick look at the profound changes within Egyptian society that are coming about under the transitional government and how the winds of change have not left anyone indifferent:

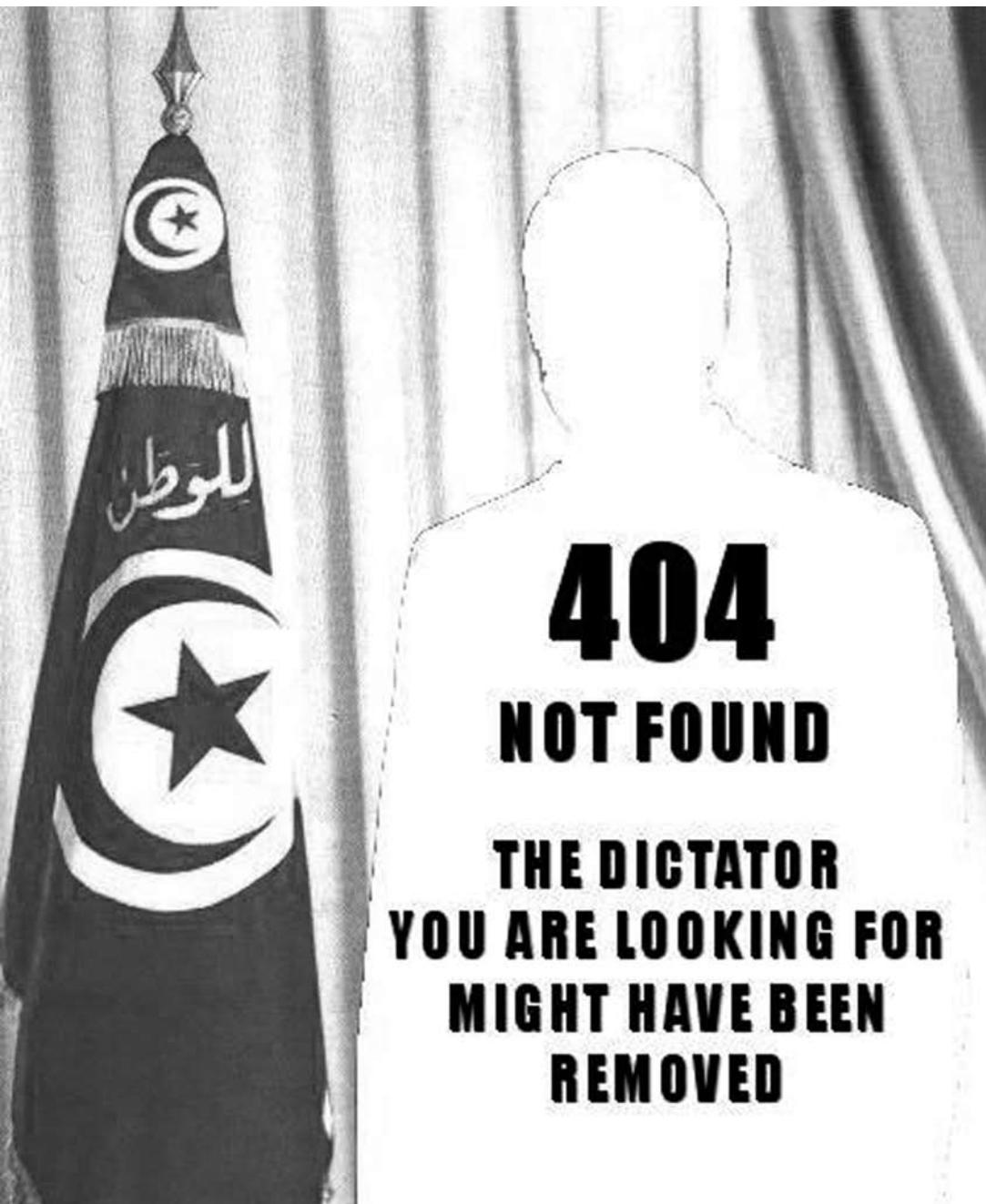
"Secondary school students have formed a movement calling for revision of the Egyptian educational system. Women's organisations are demanding equal rights and full representation in government and civil society. Journalists are calling for an end to restrictions on the media and removal of editors and board members who toed the government line under the Mubarak regime.

Scholars, preachers and students at Egypt's ancient educational institution al-Azhar University call for its liberation from 1,000 years of government control. The turbaned revolutionaries insist that Sheikh al-Azhar, the university's rector and the world's leading Sunni jurist, and other senior figures should be elected for fixed terms rather than appointed for life. (...)

Teachers, civil servants, university professors, lawyers, judges and workers in the country's public and privatised industries are venting their fury at officials, inept managers and rampant corruption. Tens of thousands of workers in the textile industry, communications firms, iron and steel plants, hospitals, universities, military industries and the Suez Canal have gone out on strike, first to support the democracy movement and then to claim higher wages and better working conditions. Workers are calling for the dissolution of the government's Egyptian Trade Union Federation. On Wednesday several unions established an independent association." [5]

Like Pandora's Box, the Arab revolution has opened the door to all these demands and these complaints which had been repressed for decades, if not centuries. The masses have created a unique historical moment, a historical hinge that will shape the future. And the people have proved to be a tough player, despite their youth and relative inexperience. Those forging the young Arab direct democracy are preparing to make a qualitative leap in their revolution, to turn it into a formidable social revolution in the mid-term.

That is why both the local ruling classes and the agents of the former regime, together with their imperial masters, set as their first task the



containment of direct democracy. They do this through the process of "transition", of "institutionalisation" and of "democratic reforms" that are altering the participatory content of these rebellions, channelling it into a safe and harmless "representative democracy". It is the *raison d'être* for all civil or military transitional governments - to be the friendly face of the counter-revolution.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD: SPREADING AND ROOTING THE REVOLUTION

The U.S.A. knows what is at stake in their backyard. The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mike Mullen, admits that there have been rapid changes in the region and that they are trying not only to keep up with events but to influence things in the direction they want according to their particular interests [6]. They will be helped in this regard by the "transitional" governments and dictators who, still clinging to power, offer cosmetic reforms.

But they still have an arduous task ahead, as it does not seem that the Arab masses have even the slightest appreciation or enthusiasm for the "American Way of Life." Furthermore, resentment against the Americans, a mainstay of the regional tyrannies, is crucial to understanding the protests in the Arab countries. Decades of complicity with Israel and collaboration with the U.S. imperial escapades in the region have undoubtedly helped to erode the legitimacy of these regimes [7].

This is what we meant by the undeniable anti-imperialist content of all these demonstrations, something even the Yemeni dictator himself, Ali Abdullah Saleh, has noticed. Recently, in a fit of demagoguery and appalling hypocrisy at a conference in the capital Sana'a, he said that all these events were nothing more than a Tel Aviv operation to destabilize the Arab world, that everything was being "controlled by the White House" [8]. He said it because he knows the deep resentment in the region to his U.S. ally and was cynically trying to exploit it - while pocketing the tidy sum of US\$300 million a year from the White House for his contribution to the "War on Terrorism".

Nobody in the Arab world was impressed by this clumsy demagogy, even though it seems that outside the Arab world, it has had some effect among some sectors of the left, particularly given the events in Libya [9].

The revolution in the Arab countries is not over, not even in Tunisia or Egypt. Indeed, maybe even less so in those two countries. The revolution, this gigantic awakening of the Arab peoples, has just begun, as evidenced by the protests that in recent weeks have forced the resignation of two recently-appointed prime ministers - the Tunisian, Mohammed Ghannouchi (along with five members of his cabinet), Ahmed Shafik in Egypt. Popular protests are continuing to force the removal of all elements of the old regime and dismantle its security apparatus and implement a very long list of popular demands.

As the experience of Argentina reminds us, these periods of open crisis are pretty fluid, political changeovers are common, and if the people's alternative does not win out, then the alternative of the powerful will soon do so and regain the ground it had lost. What is unsustainable is any long-term political crisis. And that is where we should remember the words

of our Syrian comrade Mazen Kamalmaz, who said that the "People's Committees should be the foundation of a new life, not just an interim measure". [10]

These committees are the basis of a new democracy of the people that is direct, participatory, assembly-based and built by men and women day by day in the Arab revolutions.

But the challenges are by no means easy. How are we to project these experiences over time so that they can be something more than a sporadic episode in the struggle, the germ of the new society? How are we to ensure that uncoordinated, sectoral proposals can mature into an alternative social project? The Arab masses have the potential to deepen and radicalise the movement, as well as to project beyond the current crisis. They are wary of the cosmetic reforms of these "transitional governments" that they know are, ultimately, only a way to contain the masses. Only time will show how to solve the crisis/crises, but what is clear is that however it turns out, nothing will be the same for the Arab peoples or for the rest of the world.



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www.anarkismo.net**

**Translation by FdCA-International Relations Office
(<http://www.fdca.it/>)**

Notes:

- [1] <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/18678>
- [2] <http://alainet.org/active/44376>
- [3] <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/467.php#continue>
- [4] http://www.economist.com/node/18290470?story_id=18290470
- [5] <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/0304/1224291282861.html>
- [6] <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90780/91343/7308634.html>
- [7] The antics of the Libyan dictator, who until recently was the West's best friends and a role model according to the former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, have turned him into little more than a pro-American clown in the eyes of his people. Moreover, in countries to which the USA was, objectively, interested in extending the protest such as Syria and Iran, the protests have been very weak or non-existent. This confirms that we are talking about different dynamics.
- [8] The Economist, 5-11 March 2011, p.45. <http://www.economist.com/node/18291501>
- [9] I refer here to an excellent article by Roland Astarita, who summarizes some of the debates in the Latin-American left in this regard. Even if you do not agree with everything in it, it is a sharp and insightful article and, at least in spirit, I believe mostly correct. "La izquierda y Libia" <http://rolandoastarita.wordpress.com/2011/03/07/la-izquierda-y-libia/> and a reply to critiques of the article, <http://rolandoastarita.wordpress.com/2011/03/10/criticos-nacionales-y-libia/>
- [10] <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/18923>





Project 2013 - Re-building a trade union movement from below

It is no exaggeration to say that the Irish trade union movement is in crisis.

Even a cursory glance at trade union density figures demonstrates the depth of the crisis. Just 34% of the overall Irish workforce, and only a worryingly tiny 20% of part-time workers, are members of trade unions.[i]

As a ball-park figure, these percentages should be enough to sound alarm bells among left and libertarian activists who see trade union organisation as being crucial to political organisation. The WSM Trade Union position paper states "Trade union struggle is an absolute necessity. In the course of these struggles workers begin to see their potential power, they can be radicalised and can be brought into the revolutionary movement..."[ii]

This is a view that is shared by many on the left. But if two-thirds of the workforce are not members of a trade union, how can we hope that these people can be 'radicalised and brought into the revolutionary movement' through 'trade union struggle'?

WORDS:
GREGOR KERR

AGING

When the figures are analysed further, however, they are even more concerning. Firstly they show that union membership is aging and younger people are less likely to be mem-

bers. For example, while 47% of workers aged between 45 and 59 are union members, only 27% of those aged between 25 and 34 and just 16% of those aged between 20 and 24 are members.

There is also a huge divergence between public and private sector workers in terms of membership - 69% in the public sector and just 25% in the private sector. This is reflective of the fact that many multinational and transnational companies which have established themselves in Ireland in the last 20 years have been non-union or often anti-union. And there is a massive gap between different economic sectors - Public Administration and Defence has 81% density while Accommodation and Food Services has just 6%.

Looking at educational attainment, it is interesting to note that 40% of workers who have completed third-level education are union members but just 29% of those who have only completed primary education.

So what do all these figures tell us and what implications do they have for those of us who have traditionally put trade union organising at the core of our politics? If large numbers - the majority - of the workforce are not identifying

with the trade unions, is it still valid to look to the unions as being the principal route by which working class people can be 'brought into the revolutionary movement'?

WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN UNIONS?

And what of those who are union members? Does membership in reality bring people any closer to the revolutionary movement? When someone joins a trade union in 2011 is it because s/he "recognise[s], to some degree, that he or she has different interests from the boss" (as the WSM position paper says) or is it more likely that s/he is joining (a) because everyone else in the workplace is a member or (b) to avail of the credit union/discount offers that most unions offer?

The reality is that far too often it is for the latter reason and, further, that many members generally see union membership as being more like an insurance policy whereby their paying the union sub on a weekly or monthly basis gives them a type of 'cover' against any trouble they might get from their boss. If that trouble does come along people wonder what is 'the union' going to do about it, rather than seeing themselves as the union and asking what are 'we' going to do about it.

This is an attitude that most union leaders are more than happy to encourage. Unions are run by a plethora of full-time union officials, usually on huge salaries that have no real relation to the members they are supposed to represent. These officials see themselves as professional 'fixers' out to sort out any industrial relations problems that arise. Increasingly, many of these people have never actually worked in a real job, they study 'industrial relations' and they understand how the state's industrial relations machinery works. But they seem to forget that their role should not be to fix the problem, their role should be to represent the members of the union.

UNBRIDGEABLE?

This situation of having a huge gap between the full time officials or bureaucracy and the ordinary members of the union is not new. But as unions have developed in recent years, the gap has grown to a point where it now needs to be asked whether it has actually become totally unbridgeable.

Ireland's largest union, SIPTU, is a case in point. In 2009, SIPTU's Biennial Conference approved what was described by the union leadership as "a plan to transform our Organisation". The union structures have changed from being based on what were in effect general branches to "an organisation based on specific industrial sectors"[iii]

This change in structure was explained and justified as follows:

"By focusing on particular sectors we can enhance the specialist skills and knowledge of our Shop Stewards, Committees and Officials. This will improve our capacity to run coherent industrial strategies across each industry and service. Our members in each sector will have the support of a national sector committee that will enhance, co-ordinate and lead initiatives for, and with, the members in the particular sector. The sectors will be supported by sector-based shop steward training, research, information

and communications.

The same principle will apply to the new Divisions. Each of the five Divisions named in this brochure has responsibility for leading and co-ordinating union organisation and member representation at every level. Focused specialist support will sharpen the effectiveness of shop stewards and activists and will enhance worker solidarity across the various employments"[iv]

POWER

But while the pamphlet outlining the changes talks about enhancing worker solidarity and sharpening the effectiveness of shop stewards, the net effect of the new structures is to take even more power away from the grass-roots members of the union, and their elected representatives, and place it in the hands of unelected (and therefore very difficult to hold to account) full-time officials.

To try to simplify what seems to be quite an unwieldy structure: The union is organised into 5 Divisions - Health; Manufacturing; Public Administration & Community; Services; Utilities & Construction. Each Division is divided into a number of Sectors e.g. the Services Division is divided into 4 Sectors - Security & Contract Cleaning; Hotels, Catering, Arts, Entertainment & Related; Wholesale & Retail Distribution & Related; Insurance & Finance, Print & Media & related.

Each Sector is divided into Sections. It is at Section level that a lay member of the union would hope to first become active. Section Committees meet quarterly and for a worker who joins SIPTU and wants to become an active union member and perhaps attempt to have input into union policy, getting elected to this Committee would be her/his first objective.

LABYRINTH

This may not be as straightforward as it seems however. Discovering where or when your Section meets and the procedure for getting yourself elected to the Section Committee can introduce you to the labyrinth of bureaucracy. And if you're lucky enough to manage to negotiate your way through that labyrinth, Rule 44 of the Union makes it very clear how much power you can expect to yield at Section Committee level: "The Section Secretary shall control the affairs of the Section, subject to the supervision of the Section Committee and subject also to the instructions of the Sector Organiser and Sector Committee."; No room for misinterpretation there that the members of the Section could have the temerity to believe that they might control their own affairs!

And Rule 45 even makes it clear that the members of a Section shouldn't be thinking about anything that doesn't concern them! - "The business transacted at a Section meeting shall be confined exclusively to the affairs of the Section, unless the Sector Committee expressly provides that some specified items of general Sector business may be transacted at Section meetings."

Looking at the Rules and at the labyrinth of structures in place it seems as if it would be almost impossible for a lay member or a group of members to identify an issue, propose a motion at local level, lobby support for it throughout the union and see that motion eventually

discussed at National Conference.

These are relatively new structures and how they work out in practice remains to be seen but one thing is clear - they are certainly not designed to maximise democratic participation or to encourage the members to take responsibility for, or control of, the day-to-day affairs of the union. The opposite is in fact the case. These structures are there to ensure that the leadership, those who - in their view - know best, retain real decision making power for themselves.

REFORM OR REBUILD?

One thing is certain. If trade unions did not exist, we certainly wouldn't invent SIPTU. What it has become is the opposite of a representative workers' organisation, there to control rather than organise. The question is whether it is reformable in any way. Whether the potential exists for members of SIPTU to democratise it, by putting structures in place that will allow for members' control. Or, in effect, whether we have to start again and build alternative structures to organise workers to defend our interests.

And while it may be worse than other unions, SIPTU is not really an exception. All of the main trade unions, and their collective gathering together in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, are unwieldy undemocratic institutions. There is not the space in this article to analyse the structures of other unions in any great depth but suffice to say that across all unions there is a huge democratic deficit and that union 'leaders' see their role not as that of representing the views of members but of controlling them. Their attitude to the views of members was summed up very well by a speaker from the floor at a recent Conference of my own union, the Irish National Teachers Organisation: - 'When we want your opinion, we'll tell you what it is'

And yet, the reality for those of us who want to see opposition built to the economic policies being pursued by this and the former government is that the trade union movement is the only body which has the ability to bring large numbers onto the streets. The only large protests that have taken place have been those called by the unions and those of us on the left have had to content ourselves with being a fringe movement on these protests. The fact that these protests have been much more about controlling, rather than organising, the anger of workers at government policy, is something that we have analysed on many previous occasions (see for example "ICTU can't be trusted to organise a general strike" [HYPERLINK "http://www.wsm.ie/c/general-strike-ireland-ictu-fail"](http://www.wsm.ie/c/general-strike-ireland-ictu-fail) \o "http://www.wsm.ie/c/general-strike-ireland-ictu-fail" <http://www.wsm.ie/c/general-strike-ireland-ictu-fail>).

But the challenge now is how do we move past simply saying that what we have in terms of unions isn't good enough and we must build something different/something better. What are the practical steps that might take us in the direction of re-building a movement that actually sets about the organisation and representation of workers' interests in a real manner?

2013 is the 100th anniversary of the birth of the trade union movement in Ireland. The 1913 lockout pitted workers against their boss-





////////// project 2013 - rebuilding a trade union ////////// movement from below

es in a life-and-death struggle. As we move towards its centenary, all of us concerned with reclaiming and rebuilding the legacy of Larkin and the workers who took on the might of William Martin Murphy and his fellow bosses in that great struggle, should use the opportunity to do some real in-depth questioning of where the trade union movement is at today. And futher, what we can now do to take it out of the hands of the bureaucracy which is crushing any aspect of real democracy or members' ownership of our movement.

This is deliberately not a fully worked-out idea. It is put out as a call to collective thought. The centenary of 1913 should be marked by a whole series of events, both historical - in the sense of looking back at the methods and tactics of organisation used then - and current - in the sense of looking at the huge challenges facing us as workers and trade unionists today.

Hopefully the year can be marked by a series of events which will reclaim the spirit of Larkin. Events which will set out to organise the unorganised and which will re-establish a trade union movement which has a clear vision. A vision that when the bosses and politicians talk about the 'national interest' we respond clearly that workers and the boss class do not have a common interest and that we will fight to establish our interests.

This call to collective thought and collective action needs input from as many sources as possible. I hope that this article will stimulate some of its readers into contributing ideas to ways in which the centenary of 1913 can be marked, and which might help lead to the re-birth of a genuine members-controlled trade union movement. Looking forward to hearing from you...

In Larkin's own words: "This great fight of ours is not simply a question of shorter hours or better wages. It is a great fight for human dignity, for liberty of action, liberty to live as human beings should live, exercising their God-given faculties and powers over nature; always aiming to reach out for a higher betterment and development, trying to achieve in our own time the dreams of great thinkers and poets of this nation - not as some men do, working for their individual aggrandisement." [v]

Notes

[i] All figures quoted re trade union density come from the Central Statistics Office Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 2, 2009 or the ESRI Survey 'The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employees' Views and Experiences' September 2010

[ii] The WSM Trade Union Position Paper can be accessed at <http://www.wsm.ie/story/423>

[iii] SIPTU pamphlet "SIPTU - Changing to win for Working People", 2010

[iv] *ibid.*

[v] From Larkin's message from prison to workers published in *Irish Worker*, 1 November 1913, quoted in Padraig Yates, "Lockout: Dublin 1913"



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BACK to the FUTURE: Imagining the Future in a post-revolutionary world

As an anarchist, it's not difficult for me to envision life after revolution. The idea of a world which is free from authority, exploitation, enslavement and brutality is the dynamo in my soul which powers me through this life, and inspires me to attempt to build this future.

Editors' Note:

Much of our time as revolutionaries is spent on the routine of organising in the here and now – building a campaign, organising for a demonstration, planning for a trade union meeting.... Too often we don't manage to take time to step back from the here and now and imagine or envisage what it's all about. But without dreaming, without imagining a future the daily humdrum can seem dispiriting.

To really build for a new society, we need to try to paint a picture of what that society might look like. And we need to be able to suspend reality and dream of the sort of future that might be out there. This article is the first of what we hope will be a series which will attempt to look into a post-revolutionary future and imagine what such a society might look like.

Read and dream....

Recently my mother, who is nearly 80, went into a psychiatric hospital and again it reminded me of how our society is so poorly equipped to deal with basic needs. The right to treatment when you are slowly slipping into insanity is a basic need. Yet, the fact that she has private health care meant that she was admitted after waiting one week, instead of the standard two months, to gain entry to the hospital. The other day a nurse asked me for €150 to ensure that she could have a CT (Cat) Scan. No money no scan. Due to this scan not being done, it led to a delay in a treatment which might bring some relief to this elderly woman who is tortured with paranoid delusions. So as I write this article she sits in a closed psychiatric ward, rocking back and forth believing terrible things are happening to her, to her family, to her children, and her grandchildren.

**"FROM EACH ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITY, TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS NEED (OR NEEDS)":
MARX**

'I think it is going to be difficult for me to explain how society works now to someone who grew up or only knew society as it was in the early 21st Century'. That's what I said to my tutor when he assigned me this essay. He said, 'pick someone from your past, someone who was alive back in the early part of this century and write to them about how life is now'. This made it easier for me, as I knew that my Great Grandmother was around then. She was born in 2010.

One of the things that she said to my grandfather about that time was, "We finally all came to the conclusion that people had needs, all over the world, that were not being met by the system. That's when it was decided that it (the system) had to



WORDS :
DERMO

.....The Irish Anarchist Review

change. That's what started this all off." When she said this, there was a wave of changes in various nations where people pushed for democracy where there was none. Then they got this and realised it wasn't fulfilling their needs so they pushed for the next thing. People also realised, thanks to the continuing series of ecological disasters like melt-downs from the old energy system called nuclear and from the heavy cost of extraction of fossil fuels, that the planet could not take much more of the system which was called Capitalism then.

But this is all social history, and I haven't decided to take Social History and my great grandmother would probably be more interested in how life is now, in the year 2085.

The essay is for Social Humanities, which is a course which we all sit for the first 18 months when we come to University. As we leave school at 17, no one is certain what to do, so you spend a year working with your local district volunteer committee and then you can come to University. It was decided by some ancient referendum that all people should do this 18 month course prior to deciding what to do in college. In the time we do SocHum we also can drop into lectures on any other subject and see what we think of it.

ACCOMMODATION

I live in an apartment with 3 other friends near to the University. Probably the most important thing is that I don't have to pay money for this, the apartment or the University. All citizens are given the option of going to college. Some people choose to just go straight into jobs for training in electronics, but they still sit the course on SocHum. Before I moved into the apartment, I was living at home with my folks, in another apartment on the North side of the city. I am linked into that district from the point of view of voting in the local assemblies every month on local issues. Obviously on the all island votes, I can vote via the web.

I suppose this attitude towards property is something that has changed. People don't feel the need to own stuff as much as they used to. My folks have lived in that district all their lives, and they put themselves down for an apartment there, and I may well return there if I don't go abroad after college. Accommodation was one of those issues that people had in the early part of this century. We, the local district, or City build the houses for their citizens because they need people to live and work in the city to make society function. But people then live there, and they can move to other districts as their job or life takes them. No one pays rent. For the most part, families have strong connections to certain districts and tend to stay in those districts.

In order to understand how society is now, you need to understand something about the great changes which happened. First there were the revolutions which changed where power resided. As my great grandmother said - "When power resides at the top, you find people's needs not being met at the bottom." So power in society was broken down at the time of the revolutions.

ASSEMBLIES

Decisions that directly affect local communities started at that time to be taken by groups of people from that community. It made sense. These became more formalised

over time, and are now called district assemblies. From each of these there are elected recallable delegates who go and make representations at a regional level. This leads to a series of proposals which all people get to vote on regularly, when proposals are agreed amongst the four regions on the island.

That's how decisions are made, and we make use of our extensive information network on the web to keep ourselves updated and informed on what is taking place in our society.

This decision making system didn't come about overnight. Many of the changes happened after the revolution and in the time of the Great Transformation. This was my grandfather's time. Thousands of jobs disappeared once we built a system based on the needs of humanity, and not on the need for profit or satisfying the markets.

But in the efforts to build a new society, everyone was able to make a contribution. There is some video footage in the family digital archive of my great grandmother sitting on a committee to re-allocate workers after the revolution. Some young Banker sits in front of a table containing my great grandmother and two other young earnest men. She growled at him "In a few years we'll have done away with money - your foolish ways of accumulation, tax avoidance, and making the rich richer will not be needed. What way can you contribute to our new society?"

Calmly he responded "Being a Banker has taught me about the allocation of scarce resources - How to manage them and how to maximise the return from them! I feel that I can make use of these skills and I wish to work in the Transport area, comrade" They all used this old Russian word back then. Anyway that banker went on to create the clean transport system that we have today.

UNLOCKED POTENTIAL

The Great Transformation really came about because a huge amount of potential was unlocked when society no longer had to make profits or answer to the speculative wishes of market investors. The resources were put into finding solutions to problems faced by all humanity. Useless jobs were eliminated and this unleashed a huge wave of people's hours which they now put to better use. People were inspired to leave behind the old system, to free themselves of the old ways, of doing tasks of work in offices for which they felt no pleasure or could not see the value in.

Many of those working in media and advertising went into setting up our information network for informed debates, so that people can make good decisions about where we are going to go from here. It also freed up the total number of hours that people had to work. People went from being accountants to being educators, from being van drivers, to landscape gardeners. No one was unemployed; they were inspired because they saw the possibility for real change and grasped it.

Huge investments were made between all the post-revolution countries in seeking a new form of alternative energy. After years of co-operation on findings, scientists came up with a new way of generating electricity which did not entail environmental damage. 50% of our energy needs are met by this new way and the other 50% is made up of the advances we made in wave and wind. [1]

"Thousands of jobs disappeared once we built a system based on the needs of humanity and not on the need for profit"

//////////Back to the Future: imagining the future in a post-revolutionary world



Now, all transport is electric, flights are made via electronic planes, the train and tram system is upgraded so that you can get from London to Paris in less than an hour, and most of our travel in Europe is via this high speed train network.

SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES

Advances have also been made in medicine, where we've found a cure for cancer and a way of killing immune attacking viruses. The exchange of information and the pooling of resources take place across all the post-revolutionary societies. Australia benefited due to our work in geological engineering meaning we were able to save cities from desertification.

I almost forgot to mention it, but most disease, hunger, and early mortality were all eliminated within 5 years of the revolution.

I think the big difference which would be hard for my great great grandmother to understand is that almost everything is collectively owned and managed for people. A citizens' card gets you use of the 10,000 [2] electro bikes that are set in stands throughout the city. You can also get use of an eco-electro car if you wish to travel out into the countryside with your friends or family using this card. You can walk into any hospital and be given a bed and the greatest medical care with this card.

When society moved away from the ideas of profit and accumulation, almost all crime was eliminated. Most of the crime had arisen out of poverty, or addiction. Now, there are still people who are mad and ill but they are treated and not punished and incarcerated like before. There is only a need to ensure that they're not allowed to interrupt or destroy the harmony that exists in our society. So we use the advances in medicine and refine their treatment so that they can be fully integrated back into society.

JUSTICE

If someone commits a crime, or does something that damages society, or infringes on individual liberty, then some of the privileges of collective living are removed from them for a time. This is decided by their fellow citizens. There is no such thing as Judges anymore. People atone for their crimes and are forgiven and move on with their lives. But there is precious little of anything like this anymore.

At the end of this college course in SocHums I go back and volunteer onto the district volunteer committee, and that means that I spend that time doing some of the work that no-one wants to do full time. It could mean fixing a drain, it could mean refuse collection, it could mean sweeping a road, or ensuring the water supply is working in the local district allotment. On these crews, as one of the younger ones who are there, I get to use some of the new fancy machinery for some of the jobs.

Last time in my work on the DVC I actually got to drive the community ambulance that picked up people and drove them down to the local day care clinic. One of the old women that I met when doing that, Lucy, reminded me of my great great grandmother. She said she remembered meeting her once during the days of 'The Great Transformation.'

Notes:

[1] In 2008 – Denmark had 27% of its energy supplied by Wind

[2] There are 3,000 bicycles in Lyon – a city with the same population as Dublin, yet we have 452 bikes.





OBAMA - change you CAN'T believe in/

The election of Barack Obama to the White House in 2008 was one of the most celebrated electoral victories of recent times. Not since Nelson Mandela's win in South Africa, following the collapse of the Apartheid regime, was the supposed power of the ballot box so publicly celebrated and displayed.

Obama's victory was hailed as a triumph for the 'democratic process' and was widely touted as a fine example of how people power and electioneering can trump entrenched bigotry and money.

Even outside the United States, in part due to the adverse reaction to George Bush's rule, the Obama win was widely viewed in a very positive light. It was speculated that the victory would open up a new chapter in U.S. foreign policy and might even amount to a clear break with Bush's militarist and war-mongering approach; a view that, no doubt, was in part responsible for Obama's dramatic Nobel Peace Prize win. Der Spiegel, a leading current affairs magazine in Germany, even went so far as to describe Obama as 'the World President'. [1]

COLOUR

Obama's victory was indeed significant – and for a number of reasons. Most importantly, perhaps, he was the first African-American to become President of the United States. In a country long dogged by endemic racism and discrimination, this was quite an achievement. After all it is not so long ago that the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. fought and overcame institutionalised racial segregation in its Southern states.

Today, legally speaking, African-Americans are fully equal but in reality like other groups in U.S. society they suffer massive disadvantage in terms of wages, their life expectancy and in terms of having the means to access health care. Not only do African Americans, for example, make up a disproportionately large section of the prison population in the States, there are also more African American men in jail than there are in college. [2]

The symbolism of Obama's win in this context was not lost on anyone. Because of the colour

of this skin and because of racism's strong and overarching connection to generalised oppression in society, Obama's victory had a strong resonance among other oppressed sections of U.S. society. American workers came out in droves to vote for him, as did a wide range of discriminated communities across the States – from Latinos to American Indians.

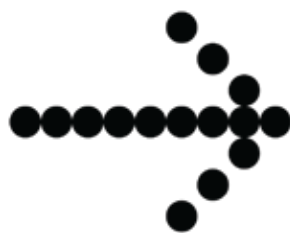
Nor was Obama himself slow in making the same point and underlining this connection. Drawing the obvious comparison with a similar journey made by Abraham Lincoln (the U.S. President credited with ending slavery) Obama said on his way to the inauguration day celebrations (a journey he also made by train) that:

"To the children who hear the whistle of the train and dream of a better life—that's who we're fighting for."

Obama's victory was certainly historic but this should not take from the reality that the road to the White House was nonetheless a long fought battle that drew on massive resources and commitment. Obama, to his great personal credit, went out and mobilised to win. He was determined and spoke at rallies that drew a huge layer of electoral activists into his orbit; these activists believed whole-heartedly in his mission. Ultimately it was the combined and effective efforts of this army of supporters that made his victory possible.

YES, WE CAN

In a similar vein it must emphasised that Obama's victory didn't derive just from some sort of 'underdog' effect or simply from having an effective electioneering machine. On the contrary his victory, and the message of social justice and change (remember the 'Yes, We Can' slogan?) that he embodied could not have come at a more relevant juncture in U.S. history.



WORDS :
KEVIN DOYLE

For many Americans, the prospect of 'the American Dream' (in other words enjoying material well-being in your life), has become a distant and unattainable goal. In the States, millions survive in poverty, in low wage jobs and are effectively excluded from access to basic health-care. This at a time when the United States is, by any measure, one of the wealthiest societies in the world.

The reality that Obama was able to connect to was the increasing gap in the States between the rich and the poor – and the anger that this has fuelled in layers of U.S. society. Commenting on the Obama campaign victory, the Wall Street Journal put it eloquently when it said about the United States that: "populist anger is like a long-caged animal now on the loose". [3]

In itself inequality, of course, is no stranger to the United States. But this said, there is no escaping the conclusion that in recent times, this situation has worsened dramatically. These recent figures point this up:

- In 2007, 1% of the population of the U.S.A. received a staggering 25% of all income in that country. Note that wealth ownership (as opposed to income) figures are significantly worse!
- The top 10% of the U.S. population received a staggering 50% of all income in that same year. The present income gap is now equivalent to what it was in 1928 in the U.S.A. Moreover the division is getting bigger. (See Figure 1)
- The average household income of the top 0.1% of the U.S. population is \$27 million dollars per year.
- Corporate bosses (CEOs) in the States now earn 185 times the average industrial wage. In the early '80s the factor was about 30 times. [4]
- The amount of tax paid by millionaires in the U.S.A. has been in steady decline since the late 1940s. [5]

If any particular aspect underlines this worsening situation for many Americans today it is the problem with the U.S. health care system. Access to an adequate and affordable level of care is just not possible for many, many Americans – a problem accentuated by the reality that if you can pay (or if you have access to top level insurance) then you're guaranteed the very best and most advanced treatments that money can buy. But, for so many, it is not a question about getting access to the best or most advanced care – rather it is about getting access to any care at all!

NO, WE WON'T!

As we all know now Obama's period in office, so far, has been marked by a series of broken promises and u-turns. The scale of these has been huge and around key issues like Guantanamo Bay (see A promise broken: Obama and Guantanamo Bay) and health care they have been fairly stark. But the key question is why have they happened. To get a better understanding of the answer to this question, consider this little discussed incident: Obama's NAFTA promise.

During the election campaign Obama made a very prominent pledge to pull the United States out of the NAFTA agreement – NAFTA being the free trade arrangement with Canada and Mexico. NAFTA was an election issue because

it was (and is) one of the mechanisms used to force down pay rates in the U.S.A. particularly in manufacturing. NAFTA allows U.S. manufacturers to move plants and production facilities to low wage Mexico and not suffer tariffs on re-imports to the States.

Needless to say for many U.S. workers and trade unionists, opposing NAFTA makes a lot of sense. For this reason Obama said, in order to appeal to these working-class voters, that it was also one of his policy aims to pull the U.S.A. out of NAFTA.

However when this became known (that this was an Obama policy), Canada, a signatory to the NAFTA protocols, became alarmed. They were aware that Obama was likely to win and so the Canadian government inquired as to whether this was true or not.

They were unable to speak to Obama himself but an Obama campaign director said 'There's nothing to worry about'. The official added that Obama's statement on leaving NAFTA was just 'campaign rhetoric'. The Canadian Government were pacified by this and made the situation known in a press release. As a result of the Canadian publicity however, Obama himself was now challenged anew – to clarify his true position. Once more and publicly he declared that it was a priority for him to take the U.S.A. out of NAFTA. However this time the Canadians took no further action and maintained that they had 'been told otherwise' and they believed what they had been told.

So what happened? As they often say, the proof is in the eating. Well, all this time later, the U.S.A. has not withdrawn from NAFTA. And in actual fact it has never even appeared as a remote possibility at any point in time - the U.S. will not be leaving NAFTA because it suits the big U.S. manufacturers too well.

So consider the explanations – and you decide! Is Obama a liar? Was he just 'playing the game', telling a bit of 'white lie' maybe? Was there confusion in the campaign? Either way – the point is – it doesn't matter now. People who voted for him were swindled. At some level in the electoral process voters have to make a call on trusting the people they intend to vote for. But, what many voters don't fully realise is that it is part of the game to lie to the electorate. And there's nothing we can do about it.

Let's look at other campaign pledges by Obama.

Heath Care Reform: One of Obama's campaign promises was to move to a system that guaranteed basic care to ordinary Americans [6]. And indeed there can be no doubt that if Obama had followed through on this priority alone, he would've been forgiven many other broken promises. But he reneged. His Heath Care Bill, signed into law in March 2010 was, Obama admitted himself, only 'a first step'. But a first step to what? Robert Reich, a mainstream economist, described the Bill as 'a very conservative piece of legislation, building on a Republican (i.e. a private market approach) rather than a New Deal foundation.'

And according to Rose DeMoro of Nurses United, the Obama bill 'strengthened the hand of the U.S.'s powerful Insurance Corporations and would require ordinary Americans once more to fork out thousands of dollars out of pocket to big private companies. In fact it amounted to little change.' Commentators noted that 'Too many people will remain uninsured, individual and family health-

care costs will continue to rise largely unabated and private insurers will still be able to deny claims with little recourse for patients.' [7]

Guantanamo Bay: See separate article.

War and Military Expenditure: In a famous speech about his opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq, Obama said in the lead up to his election victory: "If the troops are not home by the time I am elected, it is the first thing that I will do – you can take that to the bank." [8] In fact Obama only very gradually reduced troop numbers in Iraq. The current plan will see combat troops removed by the end of 2011 but the U.S. military will continue to base approx 30,000 in Iraq for the foreseeable future.

In tandem with the war in Iraq, the U.S.A. has hugely increased its involvement and commitment in Afghanistan under the NATO alliance. The U.S. military has been involved in a number of atrocities and in the murder of civilians in the border area with Pakistan. The use of the 'people killing' drone bombing tactic has also skyrocketed under Obama who has pursued war and sacrificed civilian casualties in favour of minimising U.S. troop casualties. U.S. military expenditure has also risen during Obama's term in office.

Wall Street Inequality: Near economic collapse followed quickly on the heels of Obama's election – for reasons that had nothing to do with Obama. The collapse was the result of Bush's tenure and the massive deregulation that had taken place in financial and housing markets. The consequences of the collapse were that millions more Americans were impoverished and thrown out of their homes. How did Obama respond?

In 2009 he signed into law a two year extension to Bush's infamous, 'super-rich' tax breaks. These tax breaks have been a foundation stone of increasing the share of income accruing to the very rich. What is perhaps more criminal is the fact that Obama appointed many of the figures that were at the helm in the financial crash to be his advisors once he got into office. As has happened in Ireland, the very wealthy white collar criminals have not been targeted.

Deep Well Drilling: The scandalous oil drilling accident in the Gulf of Mexico was one of the most serious crises to hit Obama's term in office. The accident polluted a huge area, ruined livelihoods and cost a fortune to clean up. Cost cutting, abandonment of safety guidelines and 'risky' behaviour by the multinational companies involved in the drilling (BP Oil and Halliburton) have all been implicated in the disaster. Although Obama 'got angry' about what happened in the Gulf of Mexico, the moratorium on risky drilling was lifted in March of this year in the States. [9]

CHANGE THAT WON'T HAPPEN

Obama rode to power on a wave of optimism and hope. He ran a vibrant, innovative campaign which maximised his support and raised expectations (See *Obama + Internet + Money = HOPE*). Yet, more than two years on from his dramatic victory, it is a changed reality that is facing those who supported him. To suggest that hope in this mission has been dashed and that optimism has collapsed is probably an understatement.

In truth, many of Obama's supporters have been shocked by the about turns and broken promises. Activist numbers and supporters have drifted from his camp and there is no doubt that his May 2011 visit to this country, Ireland, is a sign that Obama himself is now scraping the barrel.

.....The Irish Anarchist Review

"To suggest that hope in this mission has been dashed and that optimism has collapsed is probably an understatement"

In order to get elected for a second term, he will no longer be relying on promises. Rather he will be warning the voter that: 'However bad I am, the Republicans are worse'. It is indeed a far cry from the heady days of slogans like 'Obama - Yes, We Can', 'Obama - Hope' and 'Obama - Progress'.

For anarchists, of course, Obama's election and his subsequent litany of broken promises, come as no surprise. Rather they prove once again, albeit more dramatically than usual, that the anarchist arguments against involvement in the electoral process are solidly rooted in a reality we all see time and time again. However the anarchist argument is more than just a critique. Rather it is vital to understand if we are to move away from this cul de sac of the ballot box. The bitter truth is that there can be no wealth redistribution or meaningful reform through this method. Another way is needed; another way is possible.

But what exactly is the anarchist argument? Well, it is simple. Modern parliamentary democracy is not about giving you a say, it is rather about maintaining social control. We are offered the illusion of change and having a say, but what we vote for is easily deflected and quickly forgotten about. In reality, we are made promises and offered policy platforms - and these do influence how we vote in an election - but afterwards we have no say, one way or the other, as to what happens with any of these promises or policy pledges. Some people say, 'Ah but at the next election, you can get your revenge!' But, by the time the next election comes around, it is too late - a case of bolting the stable door after the horse has run a hundred miles away. And also, let's face it, revenge is fruitless. What we want and need is to have a say in the decisions that matter in our lives. That's the very thing we are not getting in fact.

A key point to realise too is that the present system of democracy - so called representative democracy - protects politicians and defends their right to break promises. We elect politicians but we have no power to recall them. The system moreover was set up this way in order to allow politicians to ignore popular mandates. This is the basic but most important ground rule of parliamentary democracy: politicians in government only have to be guided by our wishes; they are not bound by them. As a result of this rule, don't be surprised that this is exactly what they do.

Sometimes it is argued that this anarchist view point is over-simplifying the problems. Why don't people just wake up, look more closely and really vote for an option that they believe in? We are not children after all, this argument goes. But the problem with this argument is manifold. Firstly, isn't that what they did with Obama? The electorate that voted for him - that vote for change and hope - really did think he 'meant it' and look what happened.

Moreover you also have to accept that at election time is very difficult to separate out who stands for what when everyone promises 'good things'. So what are people to do? Say for example in France, the electorate might appear more thinking and vote in the Socialist Party there, but what if the Socialist Party then turns around - as it did - and implements the status quo and business friendly policies. What is the electorate to do?

Lastly it is worth pointing out that parlia-

mentary and presidential elections constantly need to re-invent themselves to appear relevant in our lives. Hence the appeal and profile of Obama. The system of control always has to appear 'new' and 'fresh' and to 'appear' like it still relevant. New blood that fosters the idea that 'this time we will be different' is an essential part of how social control operates. This is because, at heart, there is a hunger for change out there in society. This hunger is fed with a few crumbs every four or five years and people grasp at it. But it goes nowhere.

Here in Ireland we can already see that 'new radicals' and 'real alternatives' are ready to step forward to dance in front of the tired electorate. The ULA/Socialist Party/ People before Profit option now have some new faces in the Dáil, like Clare Daly and Richard Boyd-Barrett. They ULA is suggesting that it could become 'a real left' or 'a principled left' or even 'a radical left'. All we need to do, the ULA spokespeople say, is to devote our time and energy into the project of creating this 'new movement'. The ULA want activists to commit themselves to a long term campaign that will aim to 'capture' the Dáil one day. The promise, of course, is that - THEN - finally real change can and will happen. But it's the same tired illusion spun out once again. An Obama apparition of a different sort.

For anarchists the key is to build outside the parliamentary system. We want to channel our energies and the energies of those who want change into building something that is meaningful in fighting for change now - in our lives today, tomorrow and next week. The sorts of areas we want to build influence in are in areas where we live and where we work. We believe it is fundamental and vital to put our efforts now into any and all work in the union sphere, where our fellow and sister workers are opposing their bosses and this new regime of cuts and austerity.

Long term this where a real and strong extra-parliamentary opposition can be created.

Notes

- [1] Amy Goodman interview with Mathias Muller Von Blumencron, editor-in-chief of the German magazine Der Spiegel, http://www.democracynow.org/2008/12/11/president_of_the_world_editor_of
- [2] www.kff.org/minorityhealth/upload/7541.pdf
- [3] Gerald Seib in Wall Street Journal April 3rd 2009
- [4] Dean Baker (Economic Policy Unit) The U.S. Wage Gap and the Decline of Manufacturing in <http://legacy.usw.org/usw/program/content/432.php>
- [5] <http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-america-chart-graph>
- [6] http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2009/07/obama_july_22_2009_press_confe.html
- [7] Rose DeMoro of National Nurses United in <http://www.counterpunch.org/demoro03252010.html>
- [8] Obama in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zn134-KLL7Y>
- [9] <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2011/mar2011/oild-m02.shtml>



Obama + Internet + Money = HOPE/

The electoral system in the United States is notoriously conservative. Two political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, dominate. To be a Presidential hopeful, you need to have stacks of money – to pay for advertising and campaign teams and so on and so forth. Usually this means courting big business and corporate interests in return for campaign donations.

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As a former senator Obama was well aware of this situation and how things worked. Ultimately, however, his success lay in the fact that he mobilised in two distinct constituencies - among the business community but also amongst the grassroots voters. This latter aspect – his grassroots mobilisation - received considerable prominence because it was 'news' and noteworthy. His clear and unambiguous business friendly comments received less attention, but were nonetheless important.

Obama's new methods of organising were obvious in two distinct areas – in how he raised money but also in how he spread the word about his campaign policies [1]. These new and dynamic methods further enhanced the image of Obama as 'being different' and radical – this was particularly important among the younger voter groups.

INTERNET

Obama used the internet to build his campaign, but crucially he did this in ways that empowered and involved his target support base.

- Obama had a big presence online from the outset. His campaign was registered on all the main social media platforms like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter.
- He had a very smart 'online' headquarters called MyBO at my.barackobama.com. This was not just a static showcase: MyBO allowed "users to create events, exchange information, raise funds, and connect with voters in their area. MyBO was the digital home from which the campaign could mobilise its army of supporters." [2] It incorporated over two million profiles during the campaign.
- MyBO succeeded in creating a 'sense of community as everyone with political interest could participate. Via blogs, people could express themselves and report about their personal experiences during the campaign. Importantly the site was also used to organise more than 200,000 offline events during the campaign.' [3]
- The Obama campaign used traditional internet avenues like email. It accumulated 13 million email addresses and sent one billion emails to mobilise supporters. Emails were used to make contact with 'supporters, bloggers, and online media'. [4]
- Obama made massive use of texting. "A million people signed up for Obama's text-messaging program ... On Election Day, every voter who'd signed up for alerts in battleground states got at least three text messages. Supporters on average received five to 20 text messages per month, depending on where they lived -- the program was divided by states, regions, zip codes and colleges -- and what kind of messages they had opted to receive." [5]
- Obama's own blog was the centre where

all news and information was displayed. "It was the hub that captured all activities in the Obamaverse and shared them with the world. The blog was the campaign's repository, a place where stories, videos, news, and pictures were captured and pushed out to Obama's many social network profiles."

DOLLARS

In terms of fundraising Obama made a lot of capital (no pun intended) from the fact that he was more citizen-funded than his opponents. This touched on a sore point with a lot of voters in the USA who see the system of candidate funding as being in the pocket of 'big business'. So many citizens donated small amounts of money and this was both popular and a big campaign plus.

"3 million donors made a total of 6.5 million donations online adding up to more than \$500 million. Of those 6.5 million donations, 6 million were in increments of \$100 or less. The average online donation was \$80, and the average Obama donor gave more than once." [6]

However Obama also got plenty of money from big business. Analysis shows that only a quarter of Obama's donations actually fell into the 'small' category (less than \$200). To get around the matter of limits to campaign donations, Obama set up with the Democratic National Committee, the Obama Victory Fund. The maximum individual donation to this fund was set at \$28,500. However this was deemed to be quite limiting and a second pro-Obama organisation, the Committee for Change, was created which allowed individual donors to give up to \$65,500. [7] As you can well imagine, people who give these sorts of donations are not exactly from the poor side of town.

VICTORY

In the final analysis, the crunch outcome for Obama's innovative mobilisation was as follows:

1. Obama benefited from a big increase in voter turnout – in other words he succeeded in convincing apathetic voters that this time around they could make a difference.
2. He also succeeded in 'changing the minds of already mobilized voters'. [8]

Notes:

[1] <http://pep-net.eu/blog/2009/06/26/politics-20-the-obama-campaign/>

[2] Rahaf Harfoush. Yes We Did. An inside Look at how Social Media built the Obama Brand. New Riders: Berkeley, 2009.

[3] *ibid.*

[4] *ibid.*

[5] http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/11/20/obama_raised_half_a_billion_on.html

[6] *ibid.*

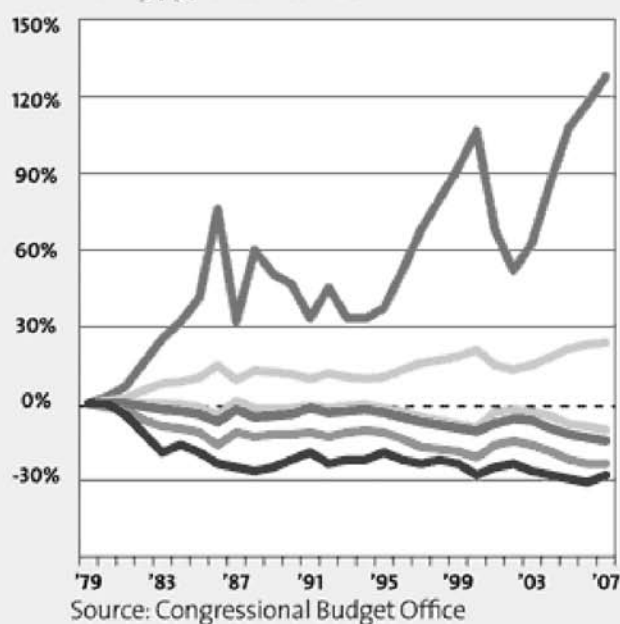
[7] *ibid.*

[8] Voter Mobilization and the Obama Victory. Tracy Osborn. University of Iowa

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME before taxes



CHANGE IN SHARE OF INCOME vs. 1979, after taxes





A promise broken: Obama & Guantánamo Bay

The Guantánamo Bay detention facility was created under George Bush's Presidency in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001. Described as 'a place where normal legal rules' do not apply, it quickly became infamous for harsh and extreme conditions of detention. Interrogators practiced a variety of torture techniques on prisoners at the facility including the now well known water-boarding procedure.



WORDS :
KEVIN DOYLE

In the run up to his election Barack Obama declared that he would close Guantánamo Bay once he got into office. He declared that the facility was a stain on United States' 'moral stature' in the world [1] and that it would be a priority to close it. Here is what happened.

January 21st 2009: Fresh from election victory, Obama signed an executive order directing the Central Intelligence Agency to shut down what remains of its network of secret prisons. By this directive the Guantánamo detention camp is to be closed within a year – by Jan 2010.

January 25th 2009: Obama officials, charged with implementing this directive, begin to investigate the cases against those held at Guantánamo. They conclude that it will take time to "assess cases and gather meaningful legal evidence into a presentable form" so that those cases pending at the facility can be processed. It emerges that evidence and interrogation information gathered on prisoners at the camp is not 'readily' accessible or even collected in one file or set of folders!

April 2009: A statement released by Mohammed al-Qaraani, a prisoner at Guantánamo, alleges the torture and abuse has worsened at the camp since Obama's election [2]. This is denied.

May 2009: Claiming he is 'entangled in legalities', Obama opts to proceed with prosecutions of the prisoners held at Guantánamo – this despite the concern that torture was used to obtain confessions. Obama argues that his new strategy "will begin to restore the commissions as a legitimate forum for prosecution, while bringing them in line with the rule of law." (Note that 'commissions' are special military courts set up to facilitate the trial of prisoners at Guantánamo.)

November 2009: On a trip to Asia, Obama admits in interview that his deadline for closing Guantánamo (Jan. 2010) will not be met. He states, 'I knew it was going to be hard,' [3] He refuses to give a new deadline date for closure. [4]

December 2009: The Pentagon officially resumes trying foreign prisoners before military commissions at Guantánamo Bay. This is the first time following their suspension after President Obama took office.

Dec. 2009 / Jan. 2010: In a further set back for human rights, Obama orders a stay on the repatriation of a set of prisoners from the Yemen who have been held in Guantánamo but who have been cleared for release – as there is no evidence against them. Obama officials state that "security concerns" along with congressional politics prompted Obama's phone call to Attorney General Eric Holder to halt the releases.

Jan. 2010: The deadline for the closure of Guantánamo passes.

Nov. 2010: The Washington Post reports that the Obama Administration has effectively abandoned plans to close the Guantánamo Bay prison. They cite technical obstacles including an inability to secure congressional funding to close the prison and transfer remaining prisoners to the United States.

Dec. 2010: In a further blow to human rights standards Obama signs the order for the 'indefinite detention' of certain prisoners without charge or trial. ProPublica [5] reports that the Obama Administration expects to indefinitely hold at least 48 of the prisoners remaining at Guantánamo. Prisoners will however be 'allowed' to challenge their incarceration periodically. ProPublica also reports that nearly two years after Obama's pledge to close the prison at Guantánamo, more prisoners there are formally facing the prospect of lifelong detention than they were on the day Obama was elected.

March 2011: Obama signs an executive order creating a formal system to indefinitely detain prisoners without trial at the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In addition, the White House says it will resume new military commission trials at the base. Lawrence Korb, (Center for American Progress) explains that "basically it means that Guantánamo Bay is going to be open for as far as we can see..."

Notes:

[1] http://www.democracynow.org/2008/11/17/as_obama_reiterates_call_to_close

[2] <http://www.democracynow.org/2009/4/15/headlines#2>

[3] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8366376.stm>

[4] <http://www.democracynow.org/2009/11/19/headlines#3>

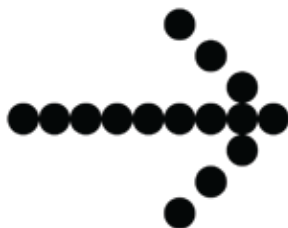
[5] <http://www.democracynow.org/2010/12/22/headlines#1>





capitalism & the price of fish/

Recently, a number of the UK's celebrity TV chefs have launched "Fish Fight"[1], a campaign to address the rapidly increasing crisis of declining fish stocks that threaten the continued supply of fish for the dinner table.



WORDS :
PAUL BOWMAN

The campaign's aims are worthy and laudable and the sincerity of the celebrity chefs involved is unquestionable. But as much as they understand food and the threat of the collapse of fish stocks, their limited understanding of the economic forces behind capitalism's inability to sustainably manage limited natural resources guarantees that this well-intentioned campaign is ultimately doomed to failure.

Although this is a UK campaign, the specific problems it confronts apply equally to Ireland and other European countries and is hence worthy of our attention. Moreover, the more fundamental problems underlying the fish problem relate to the relationship between the environment and market forces as a whole.

The problem stated is thus: the current fishing fleet working even the restricted number of days it currently is limited to by EU regulations is taking too many fish for the fish stocks to sustain themselves. The new campaign has focused, as a first target, on the issue of discards. Under the current EU quota system, boats are limited to quotas of maximum numbers of fish of each species type they are allowed to land in a given season. Consequently any fishing boat that finds fish for which they have already exhausted their quota as part of the catch, those fish are thrown back dead into the sea as discards, as they cannot land them without incurring fines or the possible loss of their licence. Obviously the exact figures for these discards are not recorded, but the current estimates are that they could be up to 50% of all fish being caught. Reducing the species quotas then is not necessarily helping the overfishing problem in terms of impact on fish stocks.

While attacking this problem of discards may potentially make gains around the margins of the problem, it is really only playing for time. The fundamental problem remains that too many people are eating too many fish (of particular species). The demand for fish is too large for the rates of

recovery of existing fish stocks to sustain. In the terms of market economics, what we have here is a market failure. Supply and demand are not balancing in a sustainable way.

Now if we were to stop there, by saying that the current depletion of fish stocks is a case of market failure, then that might be seen by some as an achievement. That is, to get the large number of people who have some concern in the issue to accept this, as a failure of unregulated markets to manage the balance between supply and demand in a sustainable way, would ground the environmental movement in a more critical attitude to markets as a solution to environmental problems. But in many ways this would be like the Grand Old Duke of York who, when only half-way up the hill, was neither up nor down. To diagnose market failure is useless without some understanding of why exactly the market is failing, so that we may continue on to the top of the hill and see the view of the way forward.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that the existing fishermen work 200 days a year and to reduce the catch to a sustainable level, at current levels of productivity, we need to reduce that to 50 days a year. Clearly fishermen need to eat and pay bills all the year round, so to make a living wage that would mean increasing their level of pay to four times existing levels. This then would, as a knock-on effect, raise the price of fish proportionately. At quadruple the existing price, fish would become a luxury food item and, according to market logic, demand would reduce accordingly, and we would get a balancing of demand with sustainable supply. (Of course demand and supply curves are not simplistically linear like this in real life, but the shape of the argument remains valid). But there's an obvious problem of competition here. Why wouldn't another fishing concern hire part-time or precarious labour at the pre-existing daily rates and compete the higher-wage fishermen out of

.....The Irish Anarchist Review

business? Clearly hoisting the price of fish by paying fishermen higher wages to compensate for reduced production is a non-starter.

The market solution to the impossibility of paying existing fishermen to fish for only part of the year by increasing their wages would at first sight seem simple. If there are too many fishermen at current levels of productivity to reduce the catch to sustainable levels, then let there be fewer fishermen. They are always complaining of the need for government intervention to stop them going out of business, is it not the laissez-faire solution to let them go out of business until the fishermen are reduced to a quarter of their former numbers so that the reduced catch matches sustainable levels?

There are a number of arguments why this is not straightforward. Despite appearances, individual fishing boats are not self-contained economic units. They still rely on fishing ports to land their catch, ports with fish processing plants and workers to clean and prepare the fish for the buyers, and with a sufficient volume of fish landed so that the large wholesale buyers for retail chains will send their refrigerated trucks to collect the fish. There is a whole interlinked economic chain here that is subject to economies of scale, such that if the number of boats landing catches at a particular port drops below a certain level, the entire chain is no longer economically viable and the local industry as a whole collapses.

But these arguments, while true, are almost beside the point. Within Europe, the populist and nationalist argument would be that if you destroy the local fishing industry, all that will happen is the Spanish trawlers, working on an even more intense (and less sustainable) level of industrial productivity, will simply move in and Hoover up the local fish stocks. Fish that will be taken back to Spain's giant seafood industry and fed to Irish holidaymakers complaining that they can't get seafood like this at home, little knowing that what lies on their plate may equally well have been caught in Irish coastal waters not an hours drive from their home.

But again, these populist and nationalist arguments, while not entirely lacking any basis in fact, are beside the point. The more fundamental issue is one that cannot be solved by arguments at the EU's agriculture and fisheries committees. The fundamental problem is that the market cannot raise the price of fish (or any other product) by limiting the supply of labour to produce it. The moment prices rise to a level where entrepreneurs can turn a profit by hiring additional fishing labour at the average wage to catch more fish, they will do so and increase the supply until the price falls back to the level set by the average wage and the average productivity in the industry.

Within capitalism we simply cannot increase the price of fish to a level that would balance naturally sustainable supply with consumer demand, because the price of fish is set by the price of the labour it takes to catch it, and not the other way round.

This apparently banal observation actually has profound consequences for our understanding of how the capitalist economy works, and, more importantly, what will and will not work as a means of correcting the market failure that is emptying our seas of fish.

For the first part, since the late 19th century and the publication of Karl Marx's criticism of capitalist economics, economist defenders of capitalism have been falling over themselves to declare the labour basis for exchange value a "theory". In fact there is nothing remotely theoretical about production costs being driven by wage costs, it remains a simple fact. But this has particular importance in relation to the management of scarce natural resources for

which our economic system pays nothing and thus cannot balance its limits of sustainable supply with our demands.

No amount of regulations or compensatory (Pigovian) taxes will re-balance these market failures, whether it be sustainable management of fish stocks or the release of atmospheric carbon within limits that will keep climate change within boundaries amenable to human civilisation. The only solution to the management of scarce resources are absolute limits to our collective extractions or emissions. And the only fair distribution of these absolute limits is an equal one. That means that affected goods and resources need to be taken out of the price system, to the extent that the marginal price of fish (or other limited natural resource) beyond sustainable limits, must be literally priceless - that is, not for sale at any cost.

Notes:

[1] <http://www.fishfight.net/>

"Fish that will be taken back to Spain's giant seafood industry and fed to Irish holidaymakers complaining that they can't get seafood like this at home, little knowing that what lies on their plate may equally well have been caught in Irish coastal waters not an hours drive from their home."





Peripheral vision/

At the same time that we are witnessing a wave of popular protest in North Africa and the Middle East against aged and corrupt neo-colonial dictatorships, in the heart of Europe we are witnessing something unprecedented and absolutely extraordinary.



WORDS :
PAUL BOWMAN

History appears to be moving in the 'wrong direction' in the so-called peripheral countries of the Eurozone.

In the last 12 months first Greece, then Ireland and now Portugal have been forced into the arms of so-called 'bailouts' by the European Central Bank with the aid of the IMF. In the cases of both Ireland and Portugal this meant the imposition of 3-4 year comprehensive economic programmes of austerity that gave the lie to the subsequent elections that followed or will follow shortly after. Despite the best efforts of the political and media commentators to pretend that it's 'business as usual', this has effectively meant the ending of any democratic influence on economic policy by the electorates in these three countries, now subject to economic direct rule from Frankfurt.

This movement from capitalist liberal democracy back to a new form of colonial mandate is the reverse of the direction that the liberal worldview has told us is 'normal' for the last half a century. From the decolonisation struggles of Asian and African countries in the 60s and 70s, through the gradual emergence of Latin America from under the heel of US-sponsored military dictatorships, the conventional story has been of an inevitable historical progression from colonialism, through neo-colonial dictatorships to the eventual end goal of liberal democracy. In that light, what has now happened to Greece, Ireland and Portugal is so far off the script that the corporate media have yet to grasp its full meaning.

Let's be clear about this - we are not trying to externalise all blame for the current situations in our different countries onto the banks and financial interests of the core countries. Certainly here in Ireland

we have scores to settle with local capitalists who continue to hang on to their ill-gotten gains, having dumped their losses on the ordinary taxpayers. But neither is it the case that the situation that we 'peripherals' find ourselves in is purely the doing of the local business class, in isolation from the bigger picture of capital flows within the Eurozone.

In Ireland's case, the outline of how the large movements of UK, German and other European bank money into Ireland in search of a quick buck fed the property bubble, and the fundamental robbery of making the Irish population liable for the losses of these European banks, is beginning to be heard amongst a number of voices in the media. Following on from that the call for a default on the debts the state has taken on from the banks has been raised. While we support the need to build an opposition with the strength to force a default onto the agenda, the question of default is not the fundamental issue here. The fundamental issue is one of power and democracy in the current composition of Europe. The fundamental issue is the reversal of history that is transforming the Eurozone into a new imperial space where the peripheral regions are to be ruled as provinces of the core homelands.

Our project is not a struggle for bourgeois justice. We know that real justice is not possible under capitalism. To fight against the injustice of the current distribution of austerity is to promote the reformist and pro-capitalist agenda that if only the austerity was equally shared, then justice would be restored. But so long as capitalism persists, the basic injustice of the exploitation of the majority for the expansion of capital and the enrichment of its minority representatives will continue. We reject the perspective

of liberal critics of Frankfurt's dictatorship, that it is based on a violation of capitalist principles of fairness and casts the struggle in a narrowly nationalist 'beggar thy neighbour' frame. We understand that the Eurozone's reversal of history and evisceration of liberal democracy is not a violation of the logic of capitalism, but its very product. Our project is not for a fairer distribution of misery and oppression of workers. Instead, our project is one of resistance, transformation and liberation.

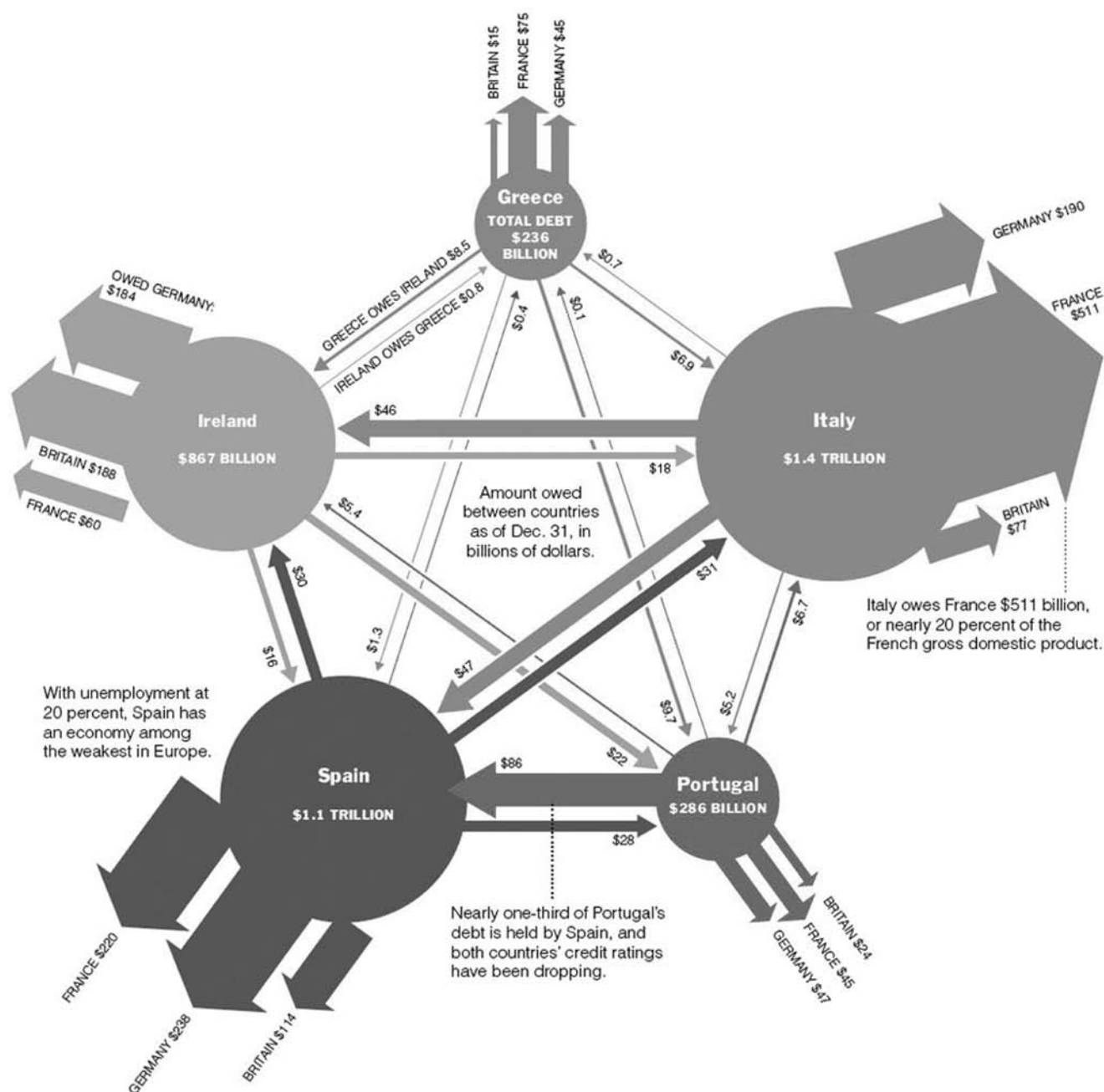
Peripheral Vision then should not be understood as being simply an attempt to defend the interests of the workers of the peripheral countries against the agenda of the Core, but a transformation of our societies that is in the interests of all workers, whether Core or Periphery, inside or outside the Eurozone. In the same way that feminism is not only about transforming the conditions of women but also men's, in the way that the struggle against racism is more than defending the rights of minorities but creating a fair and equal society for all, so Peripheral Vision is not the mirror image of the Core Vision - the advancement of the interests of 'insiders' at the expense of 'outsiders' - but its opposite - an end to all inequality of power, of all exclusions, and a transformative vision of real equality.

Fine words, but how to put them into action? Just as you cannot have a feminist vision without the voice of women being central and you cannot fight racism without listening to the voices of people of colour, so we cannot create an alternative vision to the model of Core domination without a process of collective articulation of perspectives from the peripheral regions. This cannot be done by the capitalists and politicians of our different states because they represent the interests of those who are dependant on the free flow of financial capital in the Eurozone, not the workers. Nor can we do it by demanding as a preliminary an allegiance to some pre-existing rigidly-defined political ideology or analysis. This would simply be the mirroring of a core-periphery dynamic on an ideological level. We must accept that the principal of harmony between means and ends requires that we come together as equals, horizontally, and without preconditions. That is preconditions other than the general principles of horizontality, means-ends coherence, anti-capitalism and working class self-reliance already mentioned - we have to start somewhere, after all!

We hope with the meeting on the theme of Peripheral Vision at the Dublin Anarchist Bookfair, to begin a process of dialogue and comparing our experiences of the austerity offensive in our different countries, and our resistance to it. We hope that this is the beginning of a many-threaded series of communications between, not only friends from the peripheral countries within the Eurozone, but also our neighbours in the 'external peripheral' countries of Eastern Europe and the other shores of the Mediterranean, as well as with comrades in struggle in the Core countries. We each have different pieces of the jigsaw we need to bring together to create a new vision for a more just and egalitarian recomposition of Europe open to and in solidarity with the wider world.



"Our project is not for a fairer distribution of misery and oppression of workers. Instead, our project is one of resistance, transformation and liberation."





The Kronstadt Rebellion, Still Significant 90 Years on

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH WOODS O'ROURKE

Zabalaza Books, the anarchist printing project linked to the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF) in South Africa, recently produced this pamphlet to commemorate the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921, when the sailors and workers of the Kronstadt naval base rose up against the Bolsheviks and were slaughtered by the dictatorship.

As a pamphlet it is excellent - it carries the same style as most Zabalaza pamphlets, with clear and simple presentation and interesting cover art, in this case a painting of a scene from revolutionary Russia. It is available as a PDF in a ready-to-print pamphlet format, which I found very useful to print, being easily readable and with compact texts. Most anarchists would be quite knowledgeable about Kronstadt, but not so much with the Russian Revolution itself, the context of which is extremely important, especially the actions of the Bolsheviks in the lead-up to the uprising. For this reason, the pamphlet first gives a brief timeline of the revolution, starting in February 1917. It outlines the development of soviets (workers' councils) across the country, and the coalition between the Bolsheviks, anarchists and Left Socialist Revolutionaries that brought down the Provisional Government in October 1917.

This pamphlet is very well referenced, and the use of quotes really does bring home the absolutely counter-revolutionary nature of the Bolsheviks at the time, and the contempt they held for the workers and peasants of Russia. For example, Trotsky is quoted as condemning those who "put the right of workers to elect their own representatives above the Party, thus challenging the right of the Party to affirm its dictatorship even when the dictatorship comes into conflict with the passing moods of the workers' democracy". From the moment the Bolsheviks took power, they proceeded to usurp the power of the soviets, establish the Cheka political police, and arrest and murder political opponents, including anarchists and other members of the workers' movement. Likewise the soldiers were no longer able to elect their officers, and differential rationing was introduced, with the Bolsheviks benefiting.

Several waves of strikes broke out over a short period of years for better wages, over food shortages and against the authoritarian management of the state-controlled industries. It was during one of these strikes, in the city of Petrograd, that the Bolsheviks and the Cheka declared martial law and suppressed the strikers. Hearing of this, a delegation from the Kronstadt naval base travelled to Petrograd to see the real situation for themselves. When they returned to Kronstadt and

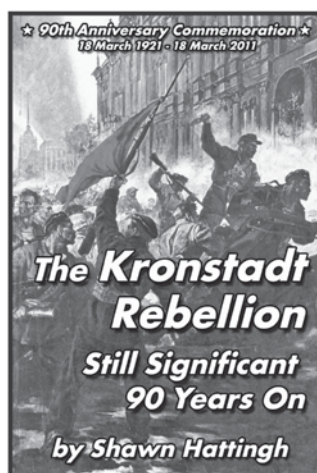
reported what they had seen the people there were horrified, and they drew up the Petropavlovsk Manifesto through an open soviet process. The pamphlet reprints the manifesto of the Kronstadt rebels, which is very interesting as you can read the ideas and demands of the sailors in their own words. To summarise (as is also done in the pamphlet), the manifesto called for: "free and fair elections to the soviets; freedom of speech for workers, peasants, anarchists and socialists; free trade union activity; and peasants to control land without employing wage labour." These demands were libertarian and socialist in nature, so the Kronstadt sailors were hardly the capitalist counter-revolutionaries the Bolsheviks claimed them to be. The people of Kronstadt hoped that the matter could be resolved peacefully, and that the Bolsheviks would listen to their demands for a more democratic socialism. The Bolsheviks rejected their proposals, and when the people of Kronstadt founded a new free soviet, Trotsky threatened to shoot them down 'like partridges'. The Kronstadt uprising was crushed by the Red Army, and the revolution in Russia was over.

So are there any criticisms to be made of this pamphlet? Perhaps more of a mention of the Makhnovists could be made (anarchists who were a major force in Ukraine, where an anarchist society was realised in large parts of that country), to which there is only a short reference. Overall the pamphlet is fantastic, and is a good short introduction to the Russian Revolution, the Kronstadt Uprising and the counter-revolutionary nature of the Bolsheviks. As is stated in the preface of the pamphlet, socialism is enjoying an upsurge in interest due to the capitalist crisis being experienced by most countries of the world, and this pamphlet addresses the need for a democratic socialism, by pointing out the failings and contradictions of an authoritarian Communist dictatorship.

Dig It Out!



Title: The Kronstadt Rebellion - Still Relevant 90 Years On
Publisher: Zabalaza Books
Available online from
http://zabnew.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/kronstadt_90th_anniversary_commemoration.pdf
Cost: FREE!



Moments of Excess; Movements, Protest and Everyday Life

REVIEWED BY PAUL B.

In November 1999 a new cycle of struggles burst into the media consciousness of the world with the spectacle of anti-WTO protesters confronting police in the streets of Seattle. In fact this was a cycle that had first raised its head in England earlier that year when astonished TV viewers turned on the news on June 18th to discover that the City of London was under siege by 'anti-capitalist' protestors, the first time that term had ever been heard in media reporting. 'Moments of Excess' is a collection of texts by the Free Association written from 2001 to 2011 paralleling this cycle of struggles, of the so-called anti-globalisation or counter-globalisation movement with its succession of counter-summit mobilisations from Seattle, Prague, Genoa, Evian, Gleneagles and Heiligendamm amongst others. The Free Association were participants as well as commentators in these events and many of these texts were originally published to be distributed freely to the participants in the mobilisations, either individually or as part of the Turbulence Project. The texts chosen for this collection show the progressive development of a unique political viewpoint through the learning experience of these protests and encounters.

The Free Association, originally the 'Leeds Mayday Group', came out of the group within the Class War Federation that pushed for the latter's self-dissolution in the late 90s and organised the Bradford Mayday Conference of 1998. Coming out of the autonomist Marxist current within Class War, the first text in this collection 'Anti-Capitalist Movements', a commission from a publisher looking for a book on 'anti-capitalism', reads somewhat as a confession of 'orthodox' autonomist Marxist faith (if such a thing can even be said to exist) with its obligatory hat-tips to Tronti and Negri. Nonetheless, the Free Association's practice of writing collectively guards them from the lapses into impenetrable 'intellectualese' all too often associated with older individual writers from this current, who have nowadays swapped prison cells for lecture tours. Rejected by the publisher as being 'too militant, not academic enough', the FA have thankfully continued in this vein ever since.

It is really with the later texts addressed to the participants of the counter-summit mobilisations that the FA's writings really begin to develop into a unique perspective squarely aimed at an audience of the movement itself. Indeed the question of what exactly 'the movement' is, is a continual theme throughout these texts along with a continual return to the maxim "again and again, the most productive place to start is with the question of what we want, not what we're against".

Although the theoretical background to these texts, whether the autonomist tradition of Tronti

or Negri, or the progressively growing influence of Deleuze and Guattari, is not only rich but also dense to the point of being resistant to many readers, the Free Association's choice of audience and their intent to produce an effect in 'real-time' tactical situations transforms this density into lucid, affective prose. 'Event Horizon' for example, begins with a description of the subjective experience of being in a real time 'moment of excess' situation in language that speaks directly to emotion and affect far more powerfully than the jaded art-school dropout poetics of any insurrectionist text. Although never explicitly stated, the feminist maxim that 'the personal is the political' and its converse that the political is either about personal and collective liberation or it is just another alienation, runs through all of these texts.

In reaction to the recent uprising against Mubarak in Egypt, just before the dictator's downfall, an Egyptian commentator wrote of the schizoid experience of reality in Cairo as a city split between two different timezones simultaneously. In one timezone, Tahrir square and other neighbourhoods, the dictator had already fallen, the broadcasts of state TV from the other timezone where he was still in power appeared like a bad joke, as if from another era, another reality. It was a powerful piece and yet, to this reviewer, strangely familiar. Since receiving my review copy of 'Moments of Excess' I placed that familiarity. In many of the texts, for example 'Worlds in Motion' or 'Event Horizon', the FA address the question of 'worlding', that is how to rip up the script and create new possibilities in the here and now, as opposed to the millenarian promises of some far off day 'after the revolution'. In writing of what the 'composition' of such situations is they write, "Maybe its as simple as acting though we already exist in a different reality" and "Take the example of Rosa Parks, who simply refused to move to the back of the bus. She wasn't making a demand, she wasn't even in opposition, she was simply acting in a different world".

'Moments of Excess' is a collection of political texts coming out of a cycle of struggles that is now closed, as the authors accept in their final text. This text, 'Re:generation', new to this edition, looks towards the emerging new cycle that has shown its face in the anti-austerity protests and the recent student clashes in Britain and Ireland. This book is a record of lessons learned in that previous cycle, written in language that participants in the coming wave can access so as to be broken into parts for appropriation to their/our own needs. Above all, it speaks to the most basic questions of radical or revolutionary politics - the need to break through the alienation of the everyday under capitalism and to combat the reappearance of those same alienations in our oppositional organising or activity, and to renew the vision "that we can develop new tactics, new technologies and new ways of living that will cause a cascade of events to sweep through society".

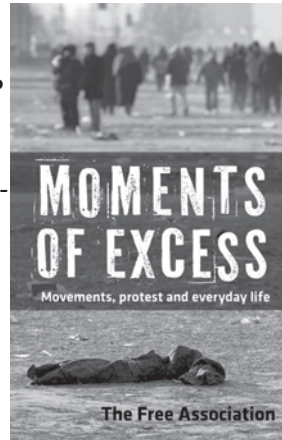
Today, in the wake of the financial implosion of neoliberalism, we are told 'There Is No Alternative' to a decade of savage cuts, dismantling social provision, lowering wages, an age of austerity. This, we are told, is the way the world is. Well then it's time for us to make a new world, not in some far-off future, but right here, right now. This book is a contribution to the debate of how to make new worlds that respond to our needs instead of those of capital. If that sounds like something you're up for, then beg, borrow or steal this book!

Dig It Out!

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Title: Moments of Excess;
Movements, Protest and Everyday Life
Author: The Free Association
ISBN: 9781604861136
Publisher: PM Press
Available online from
Amazon etc.

Cost €12 (approx.)



VIDEOCRACY: Broadcasting Control over the Italian Psyche

REVIEWED BY JULIAN

Erik Gandini's "Videocracy" is an intriguing and distressing documentary film that explores Silvio Berlusconi's media empire, and the deep impact that it has had on Italian society and culture. Gandini's investigative endeavour was released in 2009, but the trailers were blocked on the six main Italian television channels, which are controlled by Berlusconi. It was a tacit form of censorship aimed at obstructing Videocracy's popularity, the alleged reason for doing so being that it was offensive to Berlusconi's reputation. This backfired completely as the block created mass-hype about the film, and when it was screened at the Venice Film Festival it was received by a huge audience and accolades.

The film is ostensibly about Berlusconi's TV empire, built upon reality shows, and the omnipresent chauvinistic, sexified focus on scantily dressed women, which has in turn created a ubiquitous obsession with celebrity culture. The film explores this media-led hysteria in which image and appearance are everything, and most important of all the gate to money, power and fame. Gandini also focuses on the fact that in Berlusconi's case, the image and power he built through his TV empire allowed him to enter the world of politics and run a three month political campaign that got him elected as Italian prime-minister for the first time. But Gandini goes further; he wants to find out just how deeply this screen-obsessed culture has penetrated Italian consciousness.

The film begins with afflictive scenes of scantily dressed Italian show-girls, with dark music accompaniment in the background. The first character explored is Ricky, a tragic young factory worker from the north of Italy whose dream is to make it big on TV. He sees himself as a mix between Ricky Martin and Van-Damme, but despite countless auditions for programmes and shows, all he can ever get is work as an audience-filler. He blames his inability to make it big on the fact that he is a man; and men in Italy, in his opinion, have a lot harder time

becoming famous than women. For Ricky, TV is the only chance of breaking away from the sad realities of Italy's socio-economic barriers, the only chance of being someone that means something. The film moves on to look at Sardinia's Costa Smeralda, the coastal area that is Italy's ultimate VIP capital. Lele Mora, Italy's top celeb agent and Berlusconi's close friend (now in the middle of the Rubygate sex scandal investigations) is interviewed at his lush villa, where he reveals his praise for Berlusconi and his obsession with Mussolini. During the interviews his vast poolside and garden are inhabited by Big Brother and I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here stars who have made it big thanks to Mora's power to transform people into VIPs. The final character that Gandini investigates is the squalid paparazzi boss Fabrizio Corona. Corona was once Mora's right hand man, but his money-obsession led him to become the man with a monopoly over paparazzi in Italy. He however, does not usually sell compromising images to gossip magazines, he blackmails the very celebrities in the photos and sells the images back to them for extortionate prices (which shows just how much image matters, and costs, in Italy). He defines himself as a modern Robin Hood, one who "steals from the rich, to give to himself". All throughout the film, snippets are shown of the programs that Berlusconi has fostered throughout the years, mindless reality shows, programs where mother-in-laws choose the perfect wife for their thirty-something sons based on how well they clean the house, and how good their cooking is. Whatever the shows, women are objects and ornaments, their bodies talking to the minds of Italy, their mouths not saying much.

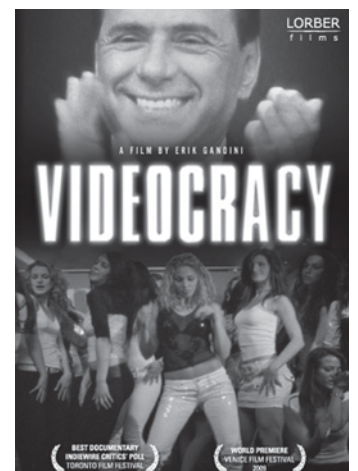
Videocracy is a poignant analysis of Italy and the principles that guide it. Berlusconi receives criticism daily for his dodgy fiscal dealings and most recently for the sex scandals he is involved in. Videocracy however digs far deeper as it successfully attempts to uncover just how powerful Berlusconi is, and the devastating effects that his empire has had on the minds, lives and aspirations of Italians. Gandini says "You get a picture of a generation which is very very obsessed by brands, by their own appearance, not interested in politics so much, nor in the world... You have a country which is culturally caught in a bubble of values which are what I call a videocracy, where image is everything". Gandini explores how Berlusconi's thirty year monopoly over TV broadcasting, his ownership of important newspapers and the most popular gossip magazines (of which 120 million are sold annually in Italy) has created a society in which the lines between reality and fantasy have become strangely blurred and warped. Without television and the mass trash-culture that it broadcasts daily to millions of Italians, this form of control over the consciousness of Italians, and silent guidance of their desires, would not have been possible.


Dig It Out!

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Title: Videocracy: Control Over
the Italian Psyche
Director: Erik Gandini
ISBN: 190604029X
Publisher: Atmo Media Network
Available online from
Amazon etc.

Cost €9.00 on Amazon.co.uk



A collage of images. At the top is a tiger's face in shades of red and black. Below it is a large, stylized letter 'S' with a blue and white speckled texture, set against a red background. A red speech bubble with a white border points to the 'S'. Below the speech bubble is a photograph of a green forest. In the bottom right corner, there is a photograph of a multi-story building with a grid-like facade.

I want you
to wake
up, to wake
others up
and know
you are
free.