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Red & Black *Revolution*



£1.50

A magazine of libertarian communism

Number 3

Winning the Water



**Anarchism in
South Africa
& Italy**

**The internet, trade
unions, new
organisation & more**

A Comment A

Welcome to issue three of "Red and Black Revolution". Apologies for the fact that we are about six months behind schedule but we hope that you will forgive us for using the old cliché 'better late than never'. We hope to be back on schedule with Issue 4 which should be on the shelves in October '98.

In this issue we look at Anarchism past and present, at home and abroad. Anarchism is a political current with little historical basis in Ireland (at least little historical basis that is generally known about). Fintan Lane's article in this issue shows that anarchists were active in Ireland over 100 years ago.

We look also at what is happening in Anarchist circles and organisations in Italy - where Anarchism is enjoying something of a re-birth, and in South Africa - another country whose Anarchist history is little known but where great strides have been made by the movement in recent times.

The need for organisation, the idea that capitalism won't fall by itself, is a theme which is central to the politics of the WSM. We return to this theme in an article which challenges anarchists to face up to the necessity for organisation, and which sets out to discuss some of the challenges involved in such organisation.

Finally, on the good news front. It is rare in these times to be able to report on campaigns which successfully involve large numbers of people in challenging the state and which emerge victorious. However, just such a campaign has been run in Ireland, and especially in Dublin, over the past three years. The successful campaign against water charges was a tremendous victory for people power. It was a campaign with which the WSM was proud to be associated and our heartiest congratulations go to all involved. The significance of victories in single-issue campaigns such as this should never be under-estimated. All of those involved - whether centrally or peripherally - played an important role in forcing the government to back down. Solidarity did indeed prove to be strength, and this message must be carried forward to the next battle.

Back Issues

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R & B R 1 featured articles on the
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Marx & the state, the EZLN & more.

R & B R 2 included Russian
Anarchism today, Chomsky on
Anarchism, Two souls of the unions
etc

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- If you are also translating an article please send us a copy of the translation on computer disk so we can add it to our electronic archive.

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.

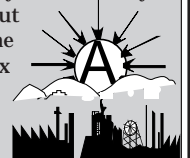
Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. 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. As Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian anarchist said, "*Socialism without freedom is tyranny and brutality*".

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 on going reliance on hierarchy and oppression and its depletion of the world's resources.

In the years since our formation, we've been involved in a wide range of struggles - our

members are involved in their trade unions; we've fought for abortion rights and against the presence of the British state in Northern Ireland; we've also been involved in campaigns in support of workers from countries as far apart as Nepal, Peru and South Africa. Alongside this, we have produced fifty issues of our paper *Workers Solidarity*, and a wide range of pamphlets. In 1986, we organised a speaking tour of Ireland by an anarchist veteran of the Spanish Civil War, Ernesto Nadal, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the revolution there.

As anarchists we see ourselves as part of a long tradition that has fought against all forms of authoritarianism and exploitation, a tradition that strongly influenced one of the most successful and far reaching revolutions in this century - in Spain in 1936 - 37. The value of this tradition cannot be underestimated today. With the fall of the Soviet Union there is renewed interest in our ideas and in the tradition of libertarian socialism generally. We hope to encourage this interest with *Red & Black Revolution*. We believe that anarchists and libertarian socialists should debate and discuss their ideas, that they should popularise their history and struggle, and help point to a new way forward. If you are interested in finding out more about anarchism or the WSM, contact us at PO Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland.



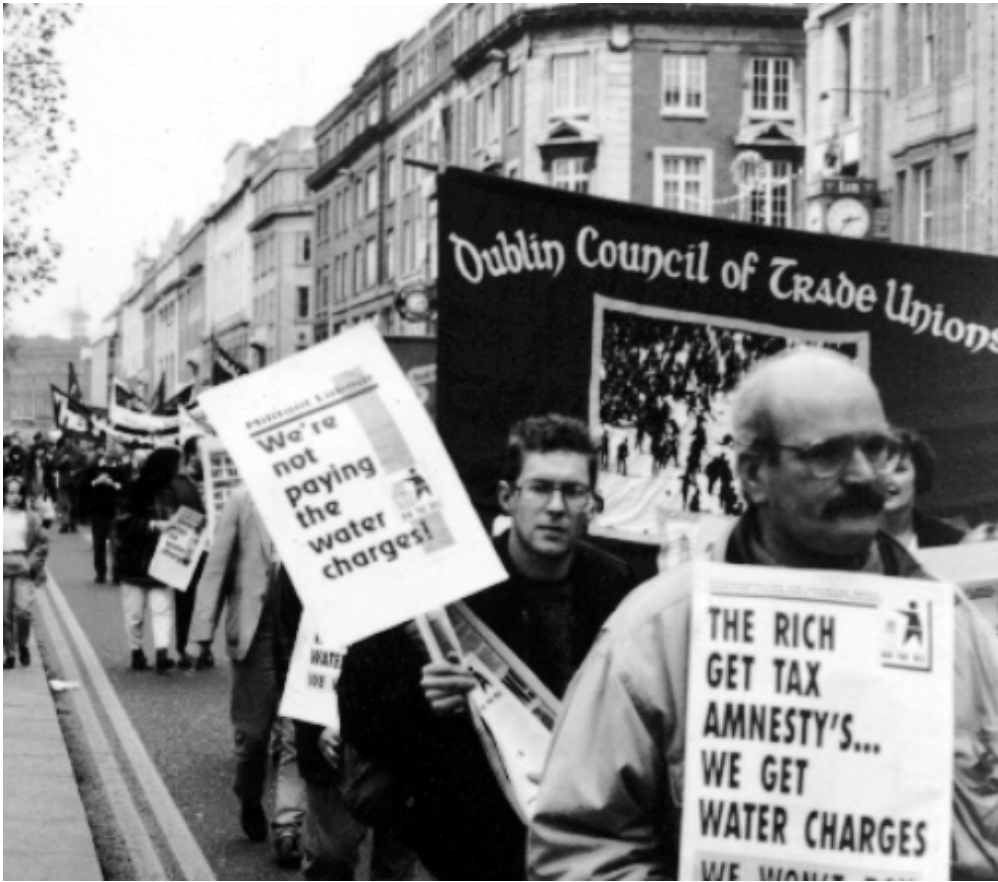
Contents

Winning the Water War	Last year the domestic water charge was abolished. In 'Winning the Water War', <i>Dermot Sreenan</i> , an activist in the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaigns examines the campaign and the demonstration of people power that brought about the downfall of this charge.	Page 4
Italian Anarchism..get back to where you once belonged	Italy is one of the historical strongholds of the anarchist movement. <i>Donato Romito</i> , the international secretary of the Italian Federation of Anarchist Communists (Fd.C.A), provides an overview of the anarchist movement in Italy today, the organisations and publications that comprise it and the direction it should take in the future.	Page 10
Organising against capitalism	Many revolutionaries in recent years have been engrossed in analysing the mistakes of the past and the changing nature of capitalism. <i>Andrew Flood</i> a participant in the "Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and against neo-liberalism" argues it is time to start moving on to the constructive work of building a new movement.	Page 12
The Emergence Of Modern Irish Socialism 1885-87	<i>Fintan Lane</i> is a historian and left-wing activist. He is the author of <i>The Origins of Modern Irish Socialism, 1881-1896</i> which will be published by Cork University Press on 1 May.	Page 19
Anarchists and the trade unions - Be active - be involved	Trade Unions are important organs of the working-class. <i>Gregor Kerr</i> - a member of the Irish National Teachers Organisation who has been involved in campaigns against "social partnership" and in many strike support groups - argues that trade union involvement should form a central part of the political activity of all anarchists.	Page 23
Review: Constructive Anarchism	Despite its relevance, <i>The Organisation Platform of the Libertarian Communists</i> is as controversial as ever. <i>Kevin Doyle</i> reviews <i>Constructive Anarchism</i> , a new pamphlet from Monty Miller Press in Australia that has collected <i>The Platform</i> and some of the early responses to its proposals into one useful edition.	Page 27
Review : The Labour Movement and the Internet	The internet - viewed by some as the highway to the future, dismissed by others as an over - hyped toy with little practical value. <i>Conor Mc Loughlin</i> reviews a new book on the internet and its use by the labour movement.	Page 29
After Apartheid: Anarchism and the 'new' South Africa	Just three years after the famous elections that ended apartheid in April 1994, South Africa's reforms are in crisis and dissatisfaction is rising. In a wide ranging interview we ask the <i>Workers Solidarity Federation</i> for their views on what has happened since the end of apartheid. Interview by <i>Kevin Doyle</i> .	Page 31

1997 - 98

Red & Black Revolution is published by the Workers Solidarity Movement. The deadline for the next issue is April 1998. Submissions are welcome and should be sent either as 'text only' files on Mac or PC format computer disks or typed on plain white paper. Disks are preferred. Letters are also welcome. All correspondence should be sent to Red & Black Revolution, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland.

Winning the Water War



Ireland is famous for being a place where you can get all four seasons in the passing of one day. The predominant season here is the rainy season which extends through spring, summer, autumn and winter. The one thing we are not short of on this island is water. But then, since when did our 'leaders' or the authorities let the facts get in the way of further exploitation. Over the last three years in Dublin a battle has raged between the councils, trying to implement a charge for the supply of water and the people opposed to this policy. This is the story of the campaign against the imposition of this double tax.

When the domestic rates were abolished in 1977 following the general election an increase took place in income tax and Value Added Tax. The money made from these increases was to be used to fund the local authorities, who had previously relied on the domestic rates for their funding. Central government was to pay a rate support grant to Local Authorities. This rate support grant increased until 1983 when the then Fine Gael and Labour government decided to cut this grant and brought in legislation to allow the councils to levy service charges.

So though people were effectively paying more taxes, less of this money made its way to local councils, so they were asked to pay more money in the guise of 'service charges'. Eighty seven per cent

of all the tax paid in this country is by the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) worker. This is a massive amount of money especially when contrasted to the fact that many multi-national companies are attracted to this country for exactly the opposite reasons, because they have to pay relatively small amounts of tax. Put plain and simply the beleaguered tax-payer in Ireland has been getting screwed not once but twice. This is what made this campaign so important.

The Son of Rates

In the 1980's resistance in Dublin led to the scrapping of the first attempt to introduce a water tax in Dublin. Other successful campaigns took place in Limerick and Waterford. In Waterford also, around the Paddy Browne Road a gang

of contractors who were cutting off non-payers were held hostage by residents and Waterford Glass workers.

In other counties the charges continued and by 1993 the amount expected to be paid by a household varied from one county to another. The service charge for Kilkenny was £70 per annum plus extra money for refuse collection while in the County of Cavan you had to pay £180 to the local council. In 1995 the service charges continued to rise with Mayo commanding an annual charge of between £205 and £235.

The Water-Charge is Born

The writing was on the wall that a new charge was about to be levied on the people of Dublin when on January 1st 1994 Dublin County was divided into three new County Council areas. Fingal, South Dublin, and Dun

Laoghaire/Rathdown were created and they all had to strike a rate which they would then be charged to each household for the water service. The existence of three new areas made it easier to administer the charge on each household.

All the councillors had been elected on the basis that they opposed this charge. In 1985 the Fianna Fáil manifesto for the local elections stated "*Fianna Fáil are totally opposed to the new system of local charges and on return to office will abolish these charges and repeal the legislation under which they are imposed.*" However when the time came to show their opposition they stalled before striking a rate. In South County it was £70, in Fingal it was £85, in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown it varied from £50 to £93.

The sorry excuse that arose on the occasion of all these politicians proving themselves to be liars was that they were forced to strike a water charge rate or else the government would dissolve the council. Councillor Don Tipping of Democratic Left later wrote his excuse in the

Tallaght Echo "We (Democratic Left) faced down a threat to abolish the council in 1994 by Fianna Fail Minister Smith, who insisted that we must have the water charges." The way Mr Tipping and his fellow councillors 'faced down' this threat was to concede totally to the government wishes. It is on such weak reasons that politicians' promises are broken. This whole episode also speaks volumes about how our 'democracy' works. The government pushes for Water Charges and the councillors bluster but fail to oppose it in any meaningful way. Instead they set the charge and set about the business of collecting it. In just a short space of time nearly all the elected councillors went from opposing water charges to imposing water charges.

Opposition blooms

In the spring 1994 issue of *Workers Solidarity* (paper of the Workers Solidarity Movement) Gregor Kerr wrote "Householders and residents in Dublin should immediately prepare to resist these charges. If nobody pays, they will be impossible to collect." Over the summer of 1994 political opposition to these water charges was drummed up as many public meetings were held all over the county. Members of Militant Labour (now known as the Socialist Party) and the Workers Solidarity Movement and many non-aligned activists worked at leafleting information about the forthcoming charge. We showed what had happened when similar charges were imposed in the other cities, towns and county areas. The water charges had

soon developed into a service charge and now households were facing annual bills from their local councils in excess of £100. We knew this first charge was the thin end of the wedge and we went about getting that information into as many houses as possible.

Long hours were spent going around housing estates dropping in leaflets talking to people on the doorsteps. I remember spending evenings walking around one particular suburb with comrades leafleting for a meeting which we had organised in a local pub. After distributing thousands of leaflets two people turned up for the meeting, one from the local newspaper and one a worker in the council. In Templeogue people had not been involved in campaigns and there was little history of community based struggle. A sense of community appeared absent as each person looked after their own interests. But this area became more organised later on in the campaign and more people became involved as the council began to drag people to court. The hard work done a year earlier was rewarded as the campaign blossomed in the area.

The response was different in other areas of the city. In Firhouse 70 people showed up for the initial meeting. The activists organised a survey as a good means to develop contacts and as a means to argue against the charges. Persistent work by activists helped raise the awareness of the issue. As people became aware of the campaign more and more became involved.

On September 24th a conference was held and this gave rise to the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaigns. Councillor Joe Higgins (Militant Labour) was elected Chairperson of the campaign. Gregor Kerr, a member of the WSM, was elected secretary of the campaign. We prepared and built for a march which took place in November 1994. Local meetings were held throughout Dublin and they were generally well attended. A march took place in the city centre and over 500 people protested at the implementation of this double taxation. The campaign was by now well and truly alive and we were building all the time by raising the issue where we could. Over the course of late 1994/early 1995 nearly every house in Fingal and South Dublin had received a leaflet from the campaign.

Ambush in the Night

By early December '94, South Dublin County Council had had enough of our campaign. People weren't paying the bill fast enough for their liking so they decided to up the ante and declared that if people didn't pay their outstanding bills within a certain number of days cut-offs would commence. The councils were now resorting to the tactics of the school yard bully by their use of threatening language in letters and ultimately with the threat of cutting off people's water supply.

All the activists raced into action. There were stake-outs at the water inspectors' houses. We would follow them around to



ensure that they didn't attempt any cut off under the cover of the night. Clondalkin people organised their own cars to patrol around that area. CB radios were installed in the cars so that we were in constant communication with each other as we monitored the movements of the men who would try to cut people's water off. One house in Tallaght was turned into a virtual Head Quarters for the campaign. The phone calls kept flooding in. Communities learned to be vigilant of the blue Dublin Water Works vans and were very wary when they came into the estates. Children playing football on the park were told to knock on the doors when they saw such vans in the area. Indeed one van ventured into

an estate in Clondalkin village and when the kids alerted everyone to their presence they hopped back into their van and drove away rapidly!

I remember freezing one night in a not so new car with a comrade from Militant Labour and waiting on one water inspector to move. I got out of the car to answer the call of mother nature behind a bush and I heard a huge roar from the car. Our man was on the move at 5.00am in the morning, a little early to be starting work we thought. He was aware that he was being followed so he gave up and went back home via Crumlin Garda station where he moaned about our close attention.

All our efforts did not go unnoticed. One South County Dublin councillor called us "political pygmies." The Evening Herald entitled us the "water bandits." But the final result from the reports the campaign received was that 12 houses were disconnected and they were duly reconnected. The campaign had won the first battle and no house would be without water for that Christmas.

Little Changes except the Government

Things now suddenly changed because a different game was being played in the Dáil. The Brendan Smith affair¹ caused the collapse of the Fianna Fáil and Labour government.

A new government was formed. It still had Labour in it, but this time their partners in government were Fine Gael and Democratic Left. With the change in government came a change in the tactics used to try to extract the double tax of the water charge. In the Dáil the Minister for the Environment announced that the power of the local authorities to disconnect water was to be 'delimited'. When pursued on this issue he said "The Government will delimit their power to ensure that water supply is not cut off as a quick reaction but where somebody has

the capacity to pay and refuses to do so the ability to disconnect water supply will remain with the local authority."² As you can see statements like this did little to clarify the matter for us.

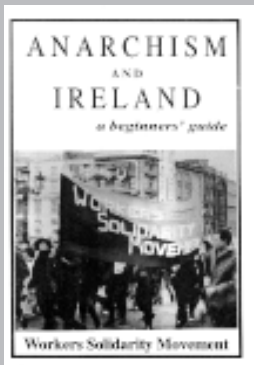
We continued to apply political pressure. We held a picket outside the Democratic Left conference which was held in Liberty Hall. The Labour party conference in Limerick was picketed by a number of activists. Labour members continued to be smug as they passed our picket and they paid little attention to us but disliked the slogan "You didn't axe the double tax, now watch your vote collapse." On that picket we were joined by anti-water charge activists from Limerick and Galway.

Over the next couple of months nearly a hundred thousand leaflets were produced and distributed calling on people to maintain a non-payment policy and explaining the government's pathetic tax-free allowance scheme. It proposed that if you paid your water charge on time then you were entitled to claim a tax rebate at 27%. So if your tax was £150 you were entitled to a maximum rebate of £40.50. In South County Dublin with the Water Charge at £70 you were entitled to a maximum rebate of £18.90. If you lived in Cavan you could claim back £40.50, but you'd already paid £210 for your service charge.

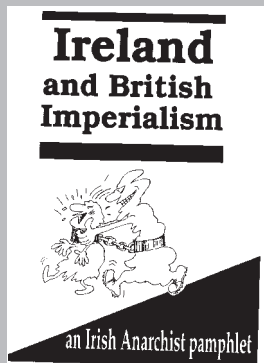
A Law made to be Broken

On 31st March an announcement was made that the councils would have to bring people to court to obtain an order prior to being able to disconnect the water. This was what the newspeak word "delimit" meant in real terms. This was the major concession that was won by Democratic Left in their negotiations in government! A press conference was held by the campaign outlining a strategy for dealing with the threats of court action. All cases would be legally defended in Court but whatever the outcome, pickets and protests would ensure

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that nobody's water was disconnected.

A conference was held in the ATGWU hall in Dublin on May 13th. It was decided then that during the coming Summer the FDAWCC would launch a membership drive at £2 per household to help fund the legal costs which would no doubt be incurred when the councils finally got around to summoning people. For the moment they contented themselves with sending out more threatening letters. The rate of non-payment remained strong. Over £23 million remained outstanding from 1994. Successful meetings were held in many areas with 150 people showing up for one meeting in Tallaght.

Late into the summer final warning notices began to appear threatening court action. This was the final stage before the real summonses would appear. The membership campaign was growing quite rapidly and over 2,500 householders had contributed. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union very kindly provided the campaign with an office. An All Dublin Activists Meeting was held in September with the campaign working on a three pronged attack of non-payment, defence of non-payers in court, and maximising political pressure.

The first court cases were scheduled for Rathfarnham court on November 13th

1995. The activists made a large attendance at this case a priority and on the day over 500 people turned up. They voiced their support for those people fighting in court and made clear their opposition to the charges. There were people from all over Dublin, as well as from other cities and towns throughout the country. Various union banners were present. People sang and were in good spirits as the judge decided to adjourn the cases to the next week.

We never expected justice in court. So the next week we returned to the court house. That day in Rathfarnham finished with a 500 strong march through the village after the judge threw the council's cases out of court. RTE (national broadcasting service) finally decided that the campaign warranted some coverage and the picket appeared on the afternoon news. Both Joe Higgins and Gregor Kerr were amongst some of the many people interviewed on the Gay Byrne morning radio show. After two years in existence the media finally began to take notice of us.

The local authorities continued to pursue people through the courts. The council had many legal representatives such as a solicitor, a barrister and sometimes a senior barrister, as well as various council officials. They pursued the cases tirelessly but the campaign's solicitors (F.H. O'Reilly & Co.) contested them on

several grounds. Despite this some disconnections were ordered but the campaign's tactic of appealing these decisions to the circuit court ensured that no disconnections could take place. Larry Doran (a pensioner from the Greenhills area of south Dublin) made an eloquent speech from the dock of this courtroom in February 1996 when he highlighted the injustice of this state which grants tax amnesties to the rich while pursuing pensioners for water charges through the courts. He said "*if the wealthy paid their due taxes, PAYE taxpayers would not be asked to pay double and I would not be before this court.*" The Judge ordered the court to be cleared after the cheering and clapping that Mr. Doran's speech received. Larry, with the support of his local campaign, decided not to appeal but instead challenged the council to come and try to cut his water off. A demonstration was organised outside his house to show the council who they would have to deal with if they attempted to cut Larry's water off. The council decided not to take Larry up on his challenge.

The Councils of Fingal and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown brought people to court as well. All members of the campaign were represented. After 6 months of trials up to May 18th 1996, involving 25 appearances by councils, only 25 disconnection orders were issued against campaign members. One judge in

WANT TO HELP OUT?

Like most of the publications of the left, *Red and Black Revolution* is not a profit making venture. It exists in order to spread ideas and contribute to the process of changing the world.

If you would like to help out in this work there are a couple of things you can do. One option is to take a number of copies of each issue and sell them. We are also looking for bookshops or stalls that will sell this magazine on a commercial basis.

Whatever you can do, you will be sure of our gratitude. If you want to help, write to us at *Red & Black Revolution*, P.O. Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland and indicate how you can help out.

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Swords even invoked the Public Order Act to deal with a protest outside his courthouse. As William Morris said back in 1887 *"The ruling class seem to want people to use the streets only to go back and forth to work, making profits for them."* In 1996 the judge was still not too keen on the idea of the streets being used for much else, especially protests.

Death & opportunity

When Brian Lenihan, the Fianna Fail TD for Dublin West died it became obvious that his seat would be contested and Councillor Joe Higgins was going to run for the vacant seat as a Militant Labour Candidate. Joe had always spoken strongly against the water charges and campaigned tirelessly against them. On

13th January an All Dublin Activists Meeting was held at which Joe sought the endorsement of the campaign for his candidacy in the forthcoming by-election.

Members of the WSM present at this meeting spoke strongly against this proposal. We said that we would much prefer to see the charge defeated by the working class organising on the streets to show their opposition. We believe that people have to seize back control over their own lives and this is not done by electing some official to fight your corner. Empowerment would come from defeating the combined forces of the state, the government, and the local authorities, by organising together and fighting against the imposition of this charge. Now that we were winning, we just had to keep on pushing forward with our demands to have this charge abolished. Electing Joe to sit in the Dáil to argue our case was never going to be empowering. Joe would have been ignored just as on the local council his opposition to the charge was ignored. While our arguments were well received and considered, the decision of the meeting was to endorse Joe's candidacy.

In the end Councillor Joe Higgins nearly became Joe Higgins TD but for a few hundred votes. In the end however, Irish politics didn't vary from the mean





Gregor Kerr, WSM member and Secretary of the campaign addressing the victory rally

and the son Brian Lenihan Junior was elected to the seat his father had died in.

The Federation of Dublin Anti Water Charges Campaigns held a conference in May of 1996. Many people were jubilant by the good showing of Joe Higgins in the Dublin West by-election. For many activists this was the most media coverage the campaign had received since its inception. But on the various prongs of attack we were doing well. Not one member had been disconnected despite the flurry of court activity and the huge resources spent by the councils chasing non-payers. The Campaign was still solvent and over 10,000 households had contributed £2 each to it. We decided to continue to maximise political pressure and the majority of people were in favour of the campaign running a slate of candidates in the next general election in order to 'put the frighteners on the politicians.' Once again we argued against this tactic. The Campaign was already on winning ground. The courts couldn't operate. Resistance to payment was still very high with over 50% of the houses not paying. The Councils were heading into their third year of setting a rate that would not be paid by the majority of people in the area. When a campaign of working class resistance to this injustice is so strong the last thing you need to do is to elect more politicians whose voices will be lost, soon to be followed by their principles. Mass resistance had got the campaign into this winning position and mass resistance would be the murder weapon of the water charges.

In November and December of 1996 the Campaign increased the pressure on the local councillors. All sorts of incentive

schemes had been introduced to try and make people pay this double tax and all of them had failed. The non-payment of water charges had increased and the councillors knew the imposition of this tax was becoming impossible. The prospect of a General Election in the Summer of 1997 had all the political parties running for cover. They were running scared in the face of the massive unpopularity of this form of local funding. The last turn of the screw came in the shape of Civil Process cases. In this instance the councils took people to a civil process court where they would try and get the judge to rule for them and where they would be entitled to seize assets to the value of the money owed. This new tactic, which they are continuing to persevere with, has met with as little success as the previous ones. Again, people turned up in their hundreds to defend their fellow citizens from this persecution, and a combination of court protests and legal defence continues to make life very difficult for the councils.

The water charges were effectively dead in the water (pun intended). They had become uncontrollable and largely uncollectable. Further demonstrations were held outside local council meetings where they tried to strike an estimate for the following year of how much they would seek from the people. A march was held in the city centre which attracted a good attendance. The message was to stand firm and we would definitely see victory. Protest phone calls bombarded the local councillors. Massive public meetings were held. 500 people attended such a meeting in Baldoyle in late November. Finally, on December 19th 1996 the Minister for the

Environment announced that the Water Charge was going to be replaced by a new system whereby the road tax collected in each area would be the source for local council funding. Of course he neglected to mention that his hand was forced in this change of policy.

The working class people of Dublin had organised, rallied and won an important victory. Double taxation was over and this is due to the policy of mass resistance, organisation and direct action. The political establishment had once again thought they could exploit the working class for yet more money. But this time they had their noses bloodied. The fight is not over but the victory is certainly ours. In time to come we should remember this victory and how it was won because the politicians will not be long before they come up with a new method to exploit us while they leave the rich to get richer. We must remember that direct action and mass resistance destroyed their best laid plan this time and be ready to employ these tactics again when they unveil their new tricks.

Footnotes

¹ The Brendan Smith affair brought about the collapse of this Government. The Attorney General's office took an exceedingly long time to get extradition papers prepared so that Father Brendan Smith could be extradited and prosecuted for child abuse. It led to the resignation of Albert Reynolds as Taoiseach and the formation of a new government (without an election).

² Quote taken from minutes of the Dáil as Minister Howlin answered a question.

Italian Anarchism

Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged

The present Italian anarchist movement is passing through a crisis which it will only be able to get over if it finds a new political project. This crisis comes not only from the choices made in the '50s (a slow and unrelenting self-exclusion from the Italian political and trade union life), but also from more recent causes: due to difficulties in reading the current situation and in not having a political project since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

Italian anarchists are often active in many struggles and support many different campaigns and initiatives, though this is mostly at a local level, which is preferred both out of choice and out of lack of wider political action. There are rare attempts to organise regional or national co-ordinations, but these almost immediately have to face a single fact: the existence of various tendencies inside anarchism. This diversity could be a richness if each tendency shared in making a common project, but it is a grave source of weakness if sectarianism and "crossed vetoes" prevail.

I will give a brief account of the different tendencies in the movement today.

NATIONAL FEDERATIONS

At present there are two national federations. The first and largest is the F.A.I. (1). It was founded in 1945, and has passed through different political periods: enthusiasm after the end of the WWII and after the great contribution that anarchists made to the Resistance; next the renunciation of the class-struggle for all of the '50s and the '60s; the disaffiliation of the individualist tendencies at the end of the '60s; the expulsion of the "Platformist" groups at the beginning of the '70s; the subsequent re-discovery of social struggles. The FAI issues the weekly paper *Umanita Nova*, which is the most widely circulated paper in the movement, dealing with news and topics written for anarchists but which often fails to reach the people. FAI is an organisation composed of various tendencies, which, while enriching the debate, may block the congress resolutions, as each branch has large autonomy. FAI branches are often very active at a local level, but nationally FAI doesn't seem to have any official or public political line. The last congress launched the idea of building an "anarchist strategy for social transformation", but it's not easy to strike a balance. The second and smaller federation is Fd.C.A.(2). This was founded in 1986 and is the latest organised expression of Italian anarchist-communism, after the O.R.A.(3). Fd.C.A. has branches and comrades in some regions in the centre and north of Italy and issues the quarterly bulletin *Alternativa Libertaria*, that reflects the activity and the positions of the federation. It's an organisation based on theoretical and strategic unity for all the members

and on tactical experimentation. Its members are active in the unions, in the social centres and in local single-issues movements. At present FdCA is trying to develop a "minimal program" for political and social intervention today. The 2 federations don't have stable relations at national level, but they sometimes collaborate at local level. Each federation has international contacts with similar organisations: FAI is inside I.A.F.(4); and the FdCA has promising new relations with A.L.(5), O.S.L.(6), W.S.M., C.G.T.(7).

NON-FEDERATED GROUPS

There are tens of non-federated groups and circles. They are very active at local level about local issues or about national echo campaigns. They often make anarchism known in little towns and this is very important work. Their political life is tied to the ups and downs in their members' lives. Among these groups we have to mention *Cane Nero* (8). Their positions are inspired by insurrectionalism (in the name of anarchy). Their "military" actions are decided in secrecy and often provoke police repression against all anarchists who more often than not know nothing about Cane Nero's actions. These comrades are then asked by Cane Nero to support it. Yet when the dust eventually settles, the name of anarchy has been ruined and around anarchism there is only a desert!!

There are many magazines, papers and fanzines at local and national level. It would be impossible to mention all of them here. But I will mention *A-Rivista Anarchia* (9), which is very widely circulated and concentrates on cultural, philosophical and historical topics. It has always been very distant from class-anarchism. It is issued in Milan. *A-Rivista Anarchia* is paying a lot of attention to questions such as municipalism, self-management, anarcho-capitalism, influencing the debate and the fashions within the movement. Very close to *A-Rivista Anarchia* is *Volonta* (10), a magazine-publisher about the State, Education, Utopia. *Comunismo Libertario* (11) deals with social, political and union problems and is interesting for the class-anarchist tendencies: welfare, unions strategy, economy. It is issued in Livorno. *Germinal* is a paper from the north-east; it deals with ex-Yugoslavian problems, anti militarism,

social centres. It is issued in Trieste. Close to *Germinal* is *Senzapatria* (12). It is about antimilitarism. *Collagamenti / Wobbly* is a good magazine concerning theoretical reflections about current struggles caused by the present change in industry. It is issued in Turin. *Ombre Rosse* (13) is something like a strategical reflection and analysis bulletin. It is issued by libertarian-communists in Genoa. *Rivista Storica Dell'Anarchismo* (14) deals with historic questions and it's an attempt at collaboration among historians of different anarchist tendencies. It is issued in Carrara. *Eleuthera* is a good publisher and does interesting books about social and historical topics. Close to *A-Rivista Anarchia*. There are many other little publishers within the movement and on the edge, whose work is very useful.

MEETINGS, CAMPAIGNS

These are the only chances to collaborate.

Anti-Clerical meeting: held in Fano for 13 years, it has been a successful way to dust off the old anticlericalism against Church power, but with a modern approach. Not an anti-religious meeting, but anti-clerical: i.e. how the Catholic Church, and all the fundamentalist churches, control our social and private lives (family planning, sexuality, education, abortion, Vatican Bank, religion-tax) and how to fight against it/them. This is an example where anarchists have been able to involve many non-anarchists in the issue.

Self management Fair: it's a touring meeting (this year's is the 3rd) presenting experiences and debate concerning self management. It tries to respond to the new needs emerging from the movement: how to begin and develop experiences based on self management - education, farming, libraries, bookshops, services, self-productions (videos, CDs, infos-net.). Some people think that this is the way to smash capitalism, whereas others believe that it is just a way to "secede" from capitalism. Some think that these experiences belong only to those who are directly involved while others think that this may be the beginning of an alternative network for all the people and not only for anarchists or libertarians. Since welfare is under attack, the debate has been growing around the two positions. To briefly describe this debate: On the one hand the workers' movement tries to defend the dying welfare-state and links itself to the reformist parties and reformist unions that continually negotiate welfare cuts, thus reinforcing the state and the government. At the same time welfare can't be in the hands of

private agencies so the anarchist minority must reject State-welfare and Market-welfare and help to build self managed welfare. On the other hand you can hear people say that to defend welfare does not mean to defend the state but the workers' immediate interests: health, education, social security aren't options, but rights to defend along with wages. Therefore a great mass movement is needed to fight against neo-liberalism and welfare cuts; at the same time anarchists and libertarians have the right to experiment with new social models, beginning from themselves but going towards all the people. The debate is open. . . .

Spain: in 1996 the movement campaigned about Spain '36 with videos, conferences, debates. "*Tierra y Liberated*" helped a lot. But only the Trotskyist Socialismo Rivoluzionario was able to organise a six-day camping about the Spanish revolution!

Americans in north-east: a new campaign is beginning against the American troops in the north-east of Italy. Anarchists are in the front line.

Ship to Bosnia: this was a very important initiative involving part of the movement in material solidarity to multi-ethnic Tuzla. It was a mass campaign both inside and outside the movement. All the various tendencies lost their holy importance. . . . and many workers subscribed.

Political Problems: Unions, social centres. . . . Despite all this activity, the Italian anarchist movement is practically "*clandestine*", far from the public political eye. This is often deliberate, but more often due to media indifference. . . . though what is also true is the movement is not able to reach the tens of thousands of people as in the '20s, or just after WW2. Maybe only co-ordination among the several groups and national campaigns can restore visibility and credibility to the movement. Maybe?

Union: The anarchist workers are split up between different unions. And this seems to be a good thing. We can find anarchists inside CGIL (15) as part of the left opposition inside the greatest Italian union, organising rank-and-file activity in the workplace for full control over bargaining, delegates and struggles. There are anarchists inside CUB (16), a new alternative union that gathers some thousands of workers from industry and the public sector. The anarchists have been put in the minority by a centralised management of the CUB. The CUB is based in Milan. There are anarchists inside UNICOBAS (a new alternative union which grew out of the 'cobas' struggles in the '80s: schools, airports public sector) that tries to be a mass-union giving importance to the workers' interests along with struggles against social cuts, unemployment and traditional union power in national bargaining. Based in Rome. There are anarchists inside U.S.I. (17), re-born at the end of the '70s from the

ashes of the glorious pre-fascism USI. Unfortunately USI split into 2 parts before summer. The reason for this partition are very complex: a different point of view about which role the union has to play and a different attitude to the ARCA (18). One USI bases itself on libertarian-socialism as conditions for building the revolutionary union and a revolutionary project, and believes that joining ARCA is a negation of the original USI project. Roughly, but briefly, we can say that they put more emphasis on ideological aspects. The other USI bases itself on trying to be a mass-organisation with no ideological influences; it is active in bargaining in the workplace and has been recognised as a "*representative union*" in different sectors. It is part of ARCA, which is a confederation of 4 unions (UNICOBAS, USI, SdB, CNL), with 25,000 members and aims to get full union representation at national and local level. The two USIs have branches all over the country and issue two papers with the same name: *Lotta di Classe* (19). A third USI is in Milan (very active in Health) and till now hasn't sided with either of the two former USIs. There is a similar situation in France with CNT-F.

Social Centres: In Italy, the self managed social centres (different from those created by local administrations and controlled by the parties) are an important part of the opposition movement. Where they are set up they often become a sort of land-mark in the towns: young and not-so-young people can meet there, organise concerts, debates, watch and produce videos, listen to and produce music, support social struggles and international campaigns (Chiapas, Cuba, ex-Yugoslavia). Anarchists tend to set up their own self managed social centres and they generally leave or ignore social centres build by other political groups. But sometimes you can find co-operation among different tendencies of the Italian revolutionary left. Anarchists should avoid the marginalisation of the social centres from the surrounding community: between ghetto and no-man's land we should always choose solidarity and co-operation. This is the way to beat Leninist tendencies inside the social centres.

CONCLUSIONS

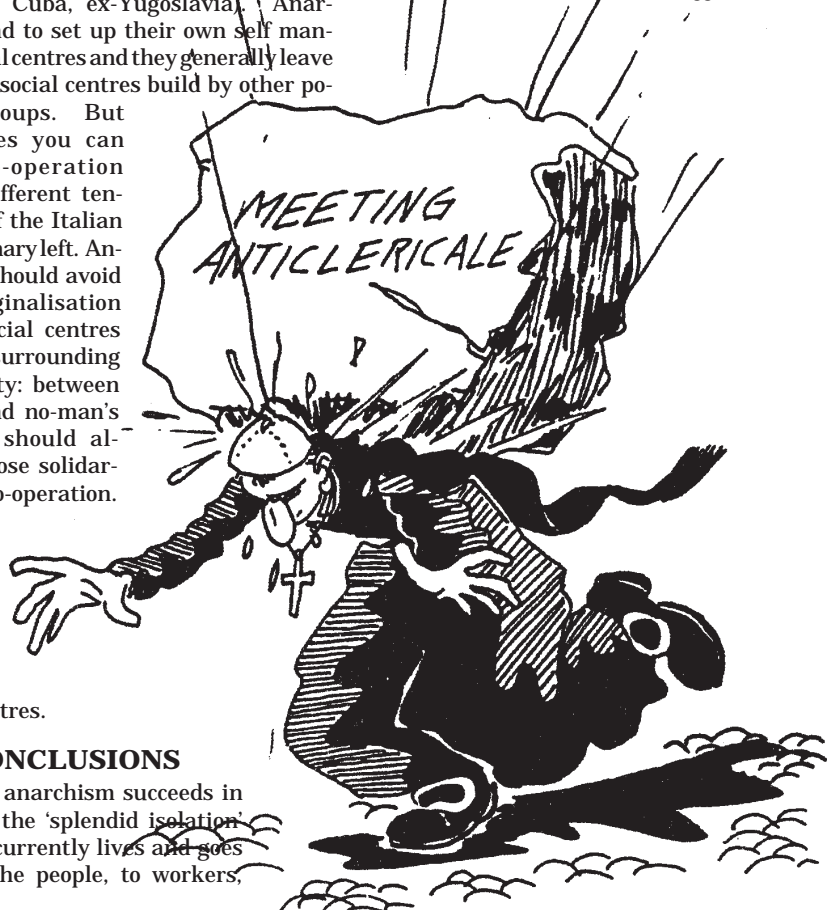
If Italian anarchism succeeds in breaking the 'splendid isolation' where it currently lives and goes back to the people, to workers,

and to the social movements it may become a new force for change, for social transformation towards a better life, and, step by step, towards libertarian-communism: this is revolutionary gradualism. Those who have already taken this path have the responsibility to reach out, to contact, to relate with all the others willing to leave the ivory tower in order to organise, to collaborate, to create a network linking the libertarian left and the possible alternative.

Donato Romito (Fd.C.A)

NOTES:

- (1): F.A.I. is the Italian Anarchist Federation
- (2): Fd.C.A. is Federation of the Anarchist-Communists
- (3): O.R.A. was the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists similar to French and English ORA
- (4): I.A.F. is the International Anarchist Federations
- (5): A.L. is Alternative Libertaire in France
- (6): O.S.L. is Libertarian Socialist Organisation in Switzerland
- (7): C.G.T. is the Union Confederacion General del Trabajo in Spain
- (8): Cane Nero means Black Dog
- (9): A-Rivista Anarchia is A-anarchist magazine
- (10): Volonta is Will
- (11): Comunismo Libertario comes from FdCA experience. Now it's an independent magazine .
- (12): Senza Patria means Without Country
- (13): Ombre Rosse means Red Shadows
- (14): Historical magazine of Anarchism
- (15): CGIL means Italian General Confederation of Labour
- (16): CUB means Unitary Base Confederation
- (17): USI was/is the Italian Syndicalist Union
- (18): ARCA means Association of the Self managed Confederated Representations
- (19): Lotta di classe means Class Struggle



★ Organising ★ against Capitalism

Over the last few years I have taken part in many forums which have discussed the collapse of the left, the changes in capitalism and the need for a new opposition. Not all of these have been exclusively anarchist, I attended the 'Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism' organised by the Zapatistas in Chiapas in the summer of 1996 for instance, but most have been held by anarchists in Britain or Ireland. A common feature of these events is a recognition that everything has changed in the last decade, that many of yesterday's answers are discredited today and that there is a need for the construction of a new movement. Such discussions cannot remain on the theoretical level, we must start to put these ideas into practice in building a new anti-capitalist movement.

Seven years ago the Berlin wall came down, bringing to a definitive end the period of history begun by the Russian revolution in 1917. Since the 1950's this was known as the Cold War. To supporters of the Western status quo the end of this period was a signal that history had ended. Not in the sense that nothing interesting would ever happen again but rather that the most perfect model of society had been found and tested in the form of the 'western democracies'. Now it was only a question of allowing time for the rest of the world to catch up. The future was rosy since the

'peace dividend' along with the new markets and productive capacity of eastern Europe would usher in a new era of prosperity.

Five years ago the peace dividend collapsed with the 'war' against Iraq. A war that was no more than a high tech light show for western viewers, but which led to the loss of up to 200,000¹ relatives and friends for those in Iraq. Parallel to this, civil war was brewing in Yugoslavia, and the economies of eastern Europe were collapsing, resulting in widespread poverty, civil war and -

particularly for the old - a dramatically reduced life expectancy. The 'New World Order' that was coming into being, we were assured, would indeed introduce global prosperity but first some belt tightening and the removal of 'new Hitlers' was required. This of course required the maintenance of a strong military!

Three years ago this 'New World Order' received its first real resistance when rebellion² broke out in one of its show pieces of improvement and modernisation. Mexico was a 'model' of how developing countries which started to move from a state led to a free market economy could also reach the 'end of history' and join the first world. The Zapatista rising blew away this smoke screen to reveal an end of history that excluded most of Mexico's population. The period since has been scattered with examples of capitalism not only failing to provide for people's needs but, more importantly, people recognising this and organising on a mass scale against it. This



resistance has spread to the very western countries which were supposed to have moved beyond the need for the population to take to the streets to oppose the state. History, we have learnt, is not over yet.

Dead and buried

State socialism has died as an attractive alternative to anyone, that much is a welcome truth. The need for an alternative to capitalism continues to be strong. Supporters of state socialism have become dwindling cadres of various Leninist groups, 'New' social democrats indistinguishable from conservatives and the occasional dinosaur whose brain has yet to recognise that there is a difference between sloganeering about 'socialism from below' and actually organising in such a manner. The end of these organisations - which mostly served as barriers to workers organising themselves - is welcome, but there is a price to pay. The weakness of libertarian ideas in Britain and Ireland means the possibility of an alternative to capitalism died with these fake 'alternatives' in the minds of many activists. This is not terminal but the message that alternatives to capitalism, other than the state run (non-) alternatives that were on offer, exist will have to be widely spread.

Another legacy of the domination of the authoritarian left is that we are left with a tradition of working class struggle being almost immediately tied to a particular political organisation. Workplace struggles, for instance, take place through the organisational structures of the trade unions but the left, rather than encourage self-activity in economic struggle and the extension of this self-activity to the political arena, have instead sought to tie the unions to the Labour party. This is of course just a reflection of the left's strategy on the economic level which, instead of encouraging workers to take direct control of their struggles, have instead directed the attention of militants towards electing left wing bureaucrats to run the union on 'their' behalf.

This pattern extends outside the workplace as well, in Britain in recent years we have seen an often obscene struggle between different left groups as to who can control working class militancy against fascism and racism. Campaign after campaign arises that pretends to be independent but on examination is obviously controlled by one organisation alone. Even where joint work occurs, large amounts of energy may be squandered in attempts to control the decision making structures of campaigns. Many activists have become demoralised and then exhausted by these bureaucratic squabbles.

The party and the class

This pattern of organisation occurred because the key thing for the authoritarian left was the relative strength of their organisation and not the level of self-activity of the class or even the strength of the class. Historical and current defeats of the

working class were analysed as being due to the absence of a strong enough vanguard that was equipped with the right slogans, rather than due to a weakness of self-organisation and a reliance on minority leadership by the class. An excellent recent example of this logic was provided by Tony Cliff, the leader of one of the surviving Leninist groups, the British Socialist Workers Party. In 1993 mass demonstrations took place all over Britain aimed at preventing the Tories closing the remaining coal mines. These demonstrations however remained firmly under the control of union bureaucrats and Labour MPs with workers playing the role of a stage army to be marched up and down hills under their control.

To the SWP though, the weakness of this movement was that they did not have enough members to control it. As its leader, Tony Cliff, said at the time

"If we had 15,000 members in the SWP and 30,000 supporters the 21 October miners'

it seems just about everywhere discussion groups have formed ... trying to sketch out a new left

*demonstration could have been different. Instead of marching round Hyde Park socialists could have taken 40 or 50,000 people to parliament. If that had happened the Tory MPs wouldn't have dared to vote with Michael Heseltine. The government would have collapsed.*³

This sort of logic, which can only see the strength of the struggles of the working class in terms of the strength of the party, is precisely the same logic that kept Leninists defending policies they knew to be rubbish year after year. It was what kept Communist Parties all over the world together as the Russian tanks rolled over the working class of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968. To go further back again it was what caused the Workers' Opposition⁴, in the process of being purged from the Bolshevik Party in 1921, to be to the forefront of attacking the revolutionaries who had risen in Kronstadt. This despite the fact that these sailors they were massacring had a programme far more in common with their platform than that of Lenin and Trotsky, who directed the massacres!

This is putting the party first, so well described by Trotsky in 1921 when he rounded on the Workers' Opposition declaring *"They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed*

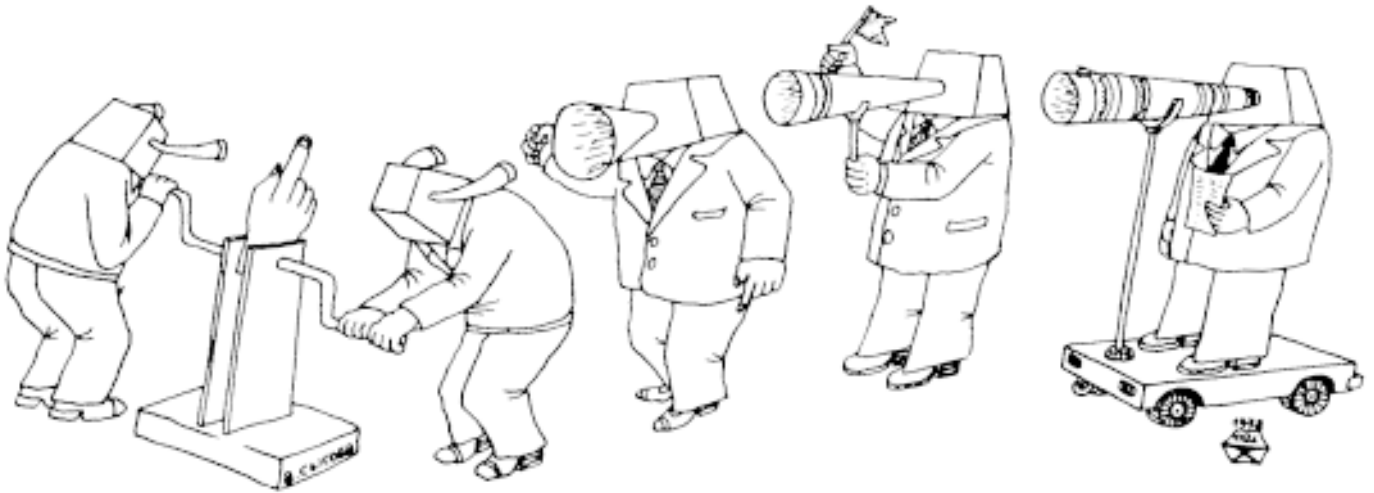
*the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!"*⁵

This is the logic behind the decades of sabotage of working class struggles by Leninists, justified by the recruiting of a few extra people into the party. This is also why gaining positions of power is so central to Leninist doctrine, so that through these positions they can control struggles - even if they lose popularity within them.

With the attraction of 'actually existing socialism' or 'degenerated workers' states' consigned to the dustbin of history, many Leninists have reconsidered their position and abandoned Leninism. Indeed it seems just about everywhere discussion groups have formed made up of ex-members of Leninist and Social-democratic organisations trying to sketch out a new left. So far these initiatives have tended to run around in circles or to partially re-invent the wheel. Few appear to have considered anarchism seriously as having already answered, at least in part, many of the 'new' questions they are now puzzling over. Sometimes because they have judged anarchism on the poor state of the local movement, but commonly due to a combination of a fear of breaking with the last idol, Marx, alongside a failure to understand that the organisational purpose of anarchist groups is completely different in aim and content to that with which they are familiar. If you are familiar with an organisational practice that constantly seeks to take things over then the anarchist method of organisation can seem worse than useless.

Anarchist organisations exist not to obtain leading positions in the organisations of the working class, but rather to achieve influence for anarchist ideas. From this point of view there is absolutely no point in loyalty towards an organisation whose ideas you do not agree with. The anarchist organisation should seek neither to absorb the whole class under its leadership nor to simply become the class by recruiting every worker regardless of their understanding of anarchism. Rather our organisation(s) need to be nuclei for anarchist ideas and organisation that will be active in all the struggles of our class and so carry these ideas into and between these struggles. Our aim must not be the creation of one big anarchist organisation through which all the struggles of our class will be conducted,





but rather aiding the growth of a tradition of working class organisation that is based on direct democracy and independent of all political organisations.

The role of the anarchist organisation is not to compete in the destructive rat race for control of working class organisations, but rather to seek to undermine the rat race itself by creating an alternative tradition of self-organisation of struggles. Such a tradition cannot be built either through attempting to guide struggles within anarchist organisations (the classic tradition of anarcho-syndicalism) or by withdrawing from broad struggles to create narrow anarchist dominated groups operating on the edges of them. Anarchists must be wherever workers are entering into struggle, attempting to influence the direction and organisational strategy of that struggle towards self-organisation. In practice this means anarchist organisations must encourage their members to join and become active in organisations of working class struggle like Trade Unions and community campaigns despite the fact that we may share nothing in common with the leadership of these organisations.

The struggle goes on

In recent years a host of grassroots movements have demonstrated not only that the class struggle is very much alive but, on single issues at least, capitalism can be defeated. Even in Ireland the struggle against Water Charges shows the continued power of ordinary people. The December 1995 French strikes against neoliberalism demonstrated the potential for these struggles to begin to develop an alternative vision of society. 1996 saw mass strikes and demonstrations in Canada, Germany, and parts of Australia where demonstrators also stormed the parliament building. If such movements are limited to being protest movements against aspects of capitalism, they also offer a very positive strategy as they were based on direct action that frequently took them outside the narrow confines of protest allowed under capitalism.

Yet it was only France which showed the potential in such struggles for the growth of anarchism. In the aftermath of the

December strikes all French anarchist groups reported a marked increase in interest in anarchism and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT-F⁶ grew from just over 1,000 members to 6,000 by late summer of 1996. France is also where the struggle is moving from a defensive to an offensive one, the lorry drivers' strike which brought the country to a halt in November of 1996 demanded a lowering of the retirement age and working week. Contacts with French anarchists since December 1995 have indicated that a new mood is entering the workers' movement there, large numbers of people are talking about different ways of organising society.

In Britain and Ireland⁷ however, while anarchists have continued to play a major role in local struggles throughout the 1990's, they have completely failed to break out of the very small circles of activists they relate to. What is more disturbing in many cases is the lack of interest in or discussion of doing so. Rather than looking for ways of winning numbers of people to anarchism, many groups have become content with providing a service to local struggles on the one hand or on the other providing commentaries for the left in general on how such struggles are (or are not) good, bad or indifferent.

Anarchist methods have to be shown to work in people's day to day lives.

In terms of national organisations, of those that existed in 1990 in Britain and Ireland (WSM⁸, Organise!, ACF⁹, Sol-Fed/DAM¹⁰, Class War¹¹) none have grown significantly although we can note the addition of the SFA¹² and the self destruction of the AWG¹³. Excuses of course can be provided, some good, some indifferent but in an overall sense the complete failure of any of these

organisations to win a significant number of new people to anarchism, despite both the potential in terms of struggle and the redundancy of the alternatives has to say something. The fact that the same experience has been reflected in the USA, Australia and New Zealand underlines that something, somewhere is badly wrong. The question is what?

Where are we going?

This failure in a period which saw anarchism proved 'right' in many respects should cause anarchists to pause and think. Does it reflect a fundamental failure in Anarchism, perhaps an inability to deal with the conditions of the modern world? Or is it something to do with the way we have been organising over the last few years? If we are serious about revolutionary change and do not want to be just a permanent protest movement, we need to confront this question head on. The easy answer of course is to blame it all on the international circumstances we find ourselves in, the general swing to the right found throughout society.

According to this perspective the failure of the organised anarchist movement to grow¹⁴ in the post-Cold War period is due to the lack of opportunity. Circumstances, which include the collapse of Soviet style 'socialism' and the boost this gave to capitalism, mean that very few people believe there can be an alternative to capitalism. From this point of view there is little anarchists can do except wait for workers to enter into mass struggle and re-discover the need for an alternative to capitalism.

Yet in terms of anarchism a strategy of waiting for 'the workers' to enter into prolonged periods of struggle before expecting large numbers to become anarchists is deeply flawed. The level of struggle itself brings things to a head long before this process can be completed as capitalism, rather than waiting for the revolutionary movement to gather its strength, will precipitate the revolution by attacking first. This was what happened in 1936 in Spain when the majority of the capitalists opted for backing a military coup rather than allowing the anarchists to continue to gain in numbers and influence. During the

Spanish revolution many anarchists laid their failure to complete the revolution on the not unreasonable¹⁵ grounds that the anarchists, being a minority¹⁶, could not make the revolution for fear of creating an 'anarchist' dictatorship. If the majority of an organisation of anarcho-syndicalists with over one million members could feel this **unprepared** after a couple of decades in existence as a **mass** organisation, the suggestion that we can afford to wait for the next revolutionary wave before growing is perhaps not the wisest of strategies.

Many of those at the forefront of the struggle in Spain were aware of this problem, even in the anarchist stronghold of Barcelona on the outbreak of the revolution. They were aware of how the moment of revolution is always forced prematurely on revolutionaries rather than being something they can hold back until the time is ripe

*"There was total disorder. We formed a commission and thereafter all arms were handed only to revolutionary organisations ... 10,000 rifles, I calculate as well as some machine guns, were taken. That was the moment when the people of Barcelona were armed; that was the moment, in consequence, when power fell into the masses' hands. We of the CNT hadn't set out to make the revolution but to defend ourselves, to defend the working class. To make the social revolution, which needed to have the whole of the Spanish proletariat behind it, would take another ten years...but it wasn't we who chose the moment; it was forced on us by the military who were making the revolution, who wanted to finish off the CNT once and for all."*¹⁷

This is one of the key questions anarchist have to tackle in the aftermath of the Spanish revolution, for it should be clear that far from being a combination of exceptional circumstances the environment in which the revolution took place is typical of the environment all revolutions have taken place in. Unlike the Leninists we cannot advance a strategy where a small minority of activists, prepared with the right ideas before a revolutionary upsurge, can then manoeuvre themselves

into the leadership of such an upsurge. A successful anarchist revolution requires not only huge numbers of conscious anarchists but also a massive confidence throughout the working class in its ability to immediately move to take over the running of the workplaces from the local to the global level. Such a confidence can only come from experience of self-managing struggle in the years before the revolution. Here and now anarchists cannot be content to exist in isolated propaganda or activist groups but must seek out ways to draw in wider and wider layers of society.

Playing a waiting game

We could hope for revolutionary periods that last decades but historically such periods are far shorter and revolutions begin when the revolutionaries are in a small minority. It seems more sensible to lose our complacency about being small 'guardians of the faith' now, while awaiting mass upsurge, and look for ways to win over at least a sizeable and militant minority in the period before the next revolutionary upsurge. For when it comes we need to have the numbers and confidence to make sure it does not stop short of overthrowing capitalism **but also** goes on to defeat the authoritarian left that will argue for a new state.

This means organising alongside our class in the here and now, **despite** whatever differences we may have with the way unions or community campaigns are structured. Our role in the unions or community organisations must be to bring anarchist ideas into them and gain an audience for these ideas by being the best activists. Anarchist methods have to be shown to work in people's day to day lives. We cannot gain this audience by carping from the outside about flaws in their structure and refusing to involve ourselves until these flaws are spontaneously rectified. The authoritarian tradition of organisation will not be changed by small numbers of activists criticising from outside. Instead it will be eroded over time if anarchists enter struggles and argue for different methods of organisation as the opportunities arise.

It is useful to consider why it seems necessary to make these arguments, ones that should be self-evident. To start

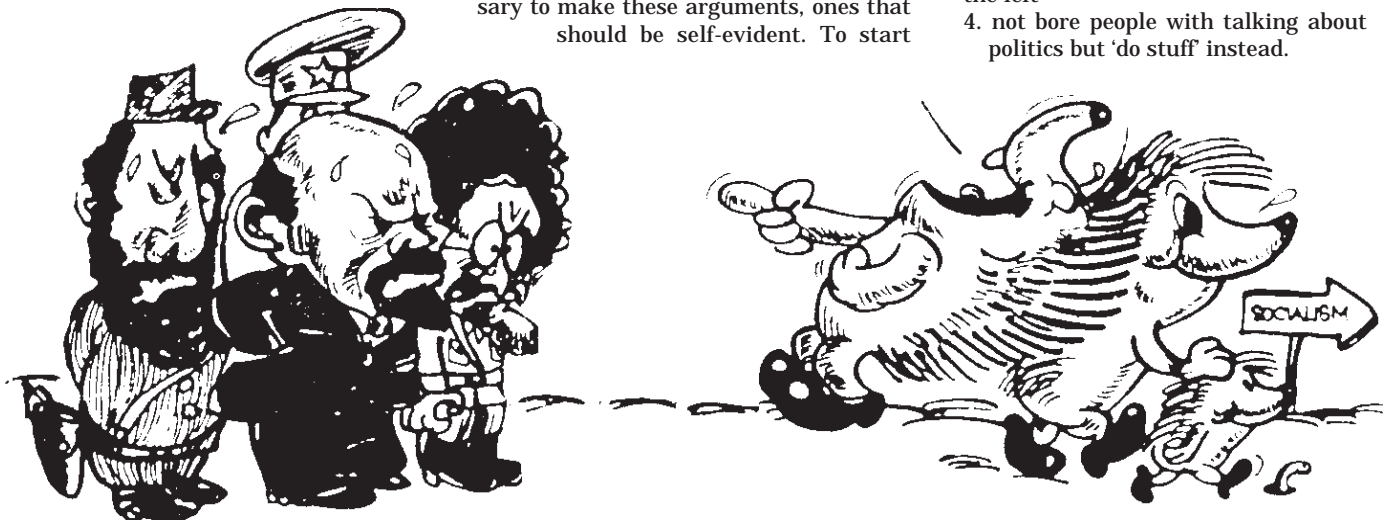


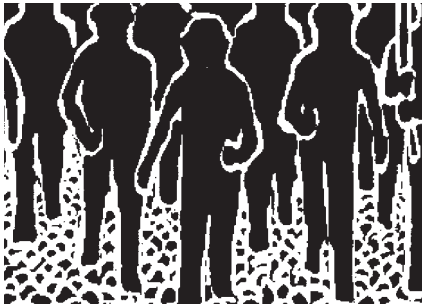
answering this question it is useful to examine the forces that created the anarchist movement in the English speaking world.

Anarchism re-emerged in the English speaking countries in the post-WWII period in two forms, one was a kind of liberal radical democracy that paid lip service to the historical movement and the movement elsewhere but never really had all that much to do with anarchism. Essentially it combined a utopian wish for a nicer world with a rejection of any and all of the methods needed to achieve such a world. It comprised a minority of those who called themselves anarchists but received the bulk of the attention of the media because it included a number of prominent intellectuals.

Secondly there were groups formed by activists who were inspired by anarchism as a fighting ideology that seemed to avoid the pitfalls of Leninism. The label 'class struggle anarchist' is sometimes used to distinguish this second set from the liberals above. But because these groups were a tiny minority in a much larger social democratic or Leninist left they came to adapt themselves almost completely around the issues and practices of that left. They tended to define themselves not in a positive fashion but in a negative one, against some aspect of the existing left, so they would

1. seek to build 'real revolutionary unions' rather than social democratic ones
2. write a funny and aggressive paper rather than a boring and complaining one
3. expose the authoritarian practices of the left
4. not bore people with talking about politics but 'do stuff' instead.





Cold War Culture

This is part of the cultural legacy of the Cold War for anarchists, an attitude where the idea of mass national and international organisations may get lip service but very little energy or enthusiasm goes into constructing them. Another legacy is that many anarchists have come through the destructive mill of Leninist politics and are nervous about seriously addressing organisational issues in case this is seen as 'latent' Leninism.

This culture also arose in part as a reaction, often by ex-members, to the manipulative practices and authoritarian internal organisation of the left in general. This also resulted in a tendency to shy away from anything too closely connected with recruitment, spreading ideas (paper sales/public meetings) or trying to advocate a strategy for a particular struggle (as opposed to criticising someone else's).

This culture was never useful but it is entirely useless for anarchists today in a situation where there are a vanishingly small number of authoritarian left outfits to expose or be mistaken for. There is a very serious need to junk a lot of the prejudices and traditions developed in the long years under Leninism and initiate a positive, outgoing, organising and **growing** movement to take its place. We can no longer be satisfied with being a 'pure' opposition, we must begin to move into a position where anarchist ideas lead struggles rather than simply explaining why they are failing or will in the future be sold out.

In Britain it may be said that 'sure the national organisations have not grown but locally there are far more anarchists around and involved in stuff'. This might be true but while these groups may be useful in aiding struggles they are very limited in building a wider anti-capitalist movement. Where this is discussed local groups tend to repeat on a local scale the problems of 'national' organisations (discussed below). This does however raise a second question, why do so many otherwise active anarchists reject not only the existing national organisations, but it would appear organisation at the national level altogether?

A large part of this must be the experience of national organisations, which in most cases has been negative. There is a sharp tendency in many countries for national organisations to become little more than propaganda groups which criticise but are

seldom seen as doing anything, while local groups become the centre for activity but seldom manage to develop strategies for promoting anarchism. So while national organisations are associated with sectarian feuding, at least local organisations are seen as doing something, even if that 'something' isn't particularly coherent. This division is disastrous as it separates theory and action into two separate spheres and commonly two separate and mutually suspicious sets of people. It is impossible to build a movement on this basis and until organisations arise that are capable of bringing together theory and action such groups that exist will be condemned to continuing irrelevance.

Make love not war

This conflict is also avoidable. While there is a clear and pressing need for coherent national (and international) organisations, this in no way precludes anarchists coming together on a geographical basis to work on common projects. In fact local co-operation between organisations with political differences would seem to be essential in preventing or overcoming sectarianism. There are many projects that need considerable resources but don't require more than a minimum of political agreement, for instance the opening and running of centres and bookshops, that will obviously benefit from such co-operation and indeed, in areas where anarchism is weak, cannot take place without it. Likewise joint activity around campaigns will commonly be possible and make the anarchist input very much stronger. The holding of regional gatherings of anarchists can only help the flow of information.

Almost everyone's experience of first encountering the left is to find the divisions and rows that go on frustrating and puzzling. 'Why can't everyone just come together and be more effective?' is a common plea of newcomers. With time you understand that many of the differences are actually important, and indeed from the perspective of vanguard organisations it is a central part of their politics to see similar organisations as the biggest problem because they are 'false prophets'. Anarchists have been influenced by this practise too but it is entirely nonsensical for us. Where we disagree we are competing on the terrain of ideas alone, we are not competing for leadership positions in working class organisations. So adopting the sectarianism of the vanguardists towards each other is suicidal and has to be overcome. As long as anarchist groups are on the fringes of society this sort of behaviour is likely to

continue. It's both a product of and a cause of being on the fringe. But revolutionary change requires that we move into the centre of society.

The anarchist organisation(s) has to become a centre for struggle in today's society. In this way, although it may not be possible to win a majority of workers, it should be the case that a very large minority have either worked alongside or in anarchist organisations and so a large minority have experience of libertarian practice and know it can work. The organisation needs to not just preach the need for social revolution but organise the fight against the day to day grind of capitalism now.

This implies an organisation quite different from any that currently exist. The advantage of the syndicalist method is that, where it can be applied, it results in an organisation that is based very much on



day to day struggles in the workplace or, at a more advanced stage, in the community. If the limitations¹⁸ of anarcho-syndicalism have caused us to reject it as an adequate organisational tool, this should not prevent us from recognising its strength in creating genuine, mass, grassroots organisations.

Stop and think

Let us stop for a moment and consider what level of organisation we're talking of. We mean not only activists on every street and in every workplace but social centres in every neighbourhood, weekly or even daily papers with circulations in the tens or hundreds of thousands, radio stations.... and all this of sufficient strength to resist the state oppression that will come before the revolution. It must have activists who are known and trusted in all the struggles occurring throughout the class.

What is the role of our organisations instead of being social clubs or talking shops? That role must be to become a 'leadership of ideas' within the struggles and organisa-

tion of the working class. That is for the organisation to gain the credibility and acceptance, so that when it speaks people listen and seriously consider what it has to say. At the moment, particular individuals within a group often succeed in doing this on an individual level by becoming known as a 'good head', with whom it is worth talking to about a new situation in a struggle. This may give a certain local influence to that individual, but it does not give a wider influence to the organisation, or lead people to realise that it is anarchism as a set of ideas that is worth looking at as the motivation of this 'good head'.

If the organisation hopes to influence the struggles and ideas in the class, it must speak with an agreed voice. This idea was put forward in the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists* as the need for "Tactical and Theoretical Unity".

Because it is difficult to talk of a leadership of ideas because of the negative connection most anarchists draw between the word leadership and authoritarian politics, I want to explain the term and then move onto discussing a practical example of what this means in practice.

Bourgeois politics is based around the concept of the 'leadership of position'. This means that you get to a particular position and, because you are in this position, you then get to implement your ideas. The position may be that of a politician or a union bureaucrat but the basic idea remains the same, the position gives you power over people. In fact, once in power you don't even have to pay any attention to those you claim to represent. It is not unusual for this sort of leader to claim some sort of special understanding which the people he represents lack because they lack the time or information to form this judgement. Obviously anarchists completely reject this form of leadership.

However Leninists deliberately confuse this form of leadership with a second form, that of the 'leadership of ideas', into the general term 'leadership'.¹⁹ Many anarchists make the mistake of accepting this deliberate confusion and so end up rejecting or feeling uncomfortable with the idea of becoming a 'leadership of ideas'.²⁰ This is the source of confusion, not just in politics, but also on more general questions like that of the role of specialists in the workplace (e.g. surgeons, architects etc.).

What the leadership of ideas means is **not** that the organisation holds any special position but rather that it has built up a record of being 'right' or 'sensible' so people are inclined to take its advice seriously and act on it. Its power lies solely in its ability to convince people. But obviously to develop such a reputation, it must be able to speak with a common voice in its publications and at strategy meetings. Otherwise, although individuals may develop this reputation the organisation cannot!

Follow the leader?

So why do we need to develop organisations that are seen as a 'leadership of ideas'? There are two answers to this. The first is that it is a bad thing for this development to take place at the individual level as it tends to lead to informal cults of the individual.

The second though is more profound. The world is a big place, if we ever hope to see an anarchist revolution we will require to be able to address the majority of the population with libertarian ideas. It's unlikely the capitalist media will ever allow any individual the sort of media access this would require (and, even if they did, this - for the reasons outlined above - would not be a good thing). So this is going to have to be achieved on an organisational basis.

There are two reasons for joining an organisation. The first is to meet like minded people and in the end tends to result in a small organisation that consists of a circle of friends (and feuding partners). The second is because you believe that the organisation is trying to achieve what you are trying to achieve, that the parts of it you can't see (because of geographical separation or just complexity) will act in a similar way to how you will act, that in the event of a crisis you will then be part of a large number of people acting in a common way on the basis of prior agreement. All these require tactical and theoretical unity.

The main misunderstanding which arises from discussion of the need for theoretical and tactical unity is that an organisation which has such agreement will consider itself to hold the 'true' ideas of anarchism and all others as heretics. It's not hard to see where this idea emerges from, again from the culture of the left and the 57 feuding brands of Leninism. But for anarchists such an attitude has to be impermissible. It is also obviously incompatible with the role of the organisation I argued for earlier - that of being a nucleus of ideas

and activists within the struggles of the working class rather than something which seeks to become the formal leadership of the class.

A final area of controversy around this idea is the surrender of individual sovereignty it entails. The original 'Platformists' talked about this as a "Collective responsibility" the organisation shared for the action of its activists. Alongside this is the responsibility of activists to implement the decisions of the organisation even where they clashed with their own views on this matter. Some anarchists see this as being akin to the organisational discipline required by many Leninists where party members are required to give the party a "monopoly of their political activity" and follow "democratic centralism".

Of course there are similarities but there are also similarities with respecting a picket line even if you voted against the strike. In fact every day in our lives we voluntarily adhere to a "collective responsibility", when we share cooking or holiday arrangements with others, or even settle on going to a pub we are not all that keen on because that's where our friends want to drink! Doing things that are not your first preference are pretty much part of all social interactions, the only way to avoid this in any society would be to live the life of a hermit.

Follow the Party?

What makes these decisions **different** and acceptable to us is in fact what separates "collective responsibility" from "party discipline". The first and most important of these is that we have an equal say in how these decisions are reached. In the anarchist organisation all have an equal say and vote in defining the organisation's position through conference discussions or mandated delegates. In the Leninist organisation the closest you get to this is getting some sort of vote on which party leader tells you what to do²¹. Secondly, in the anarchist organisation the nature of



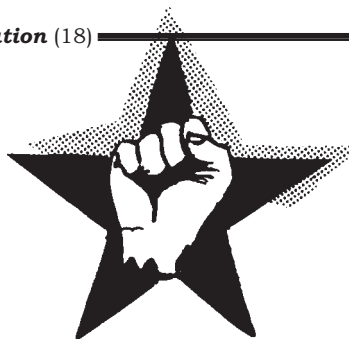
this discipline is voluntary in the sense that members should be free to leave organisations they disagree with and join ones they agree with without being regarded as "class traitors" (readers will be aware of how Leninist groups relate to each other)²². A third difference is that members would be free to carry on whatever activity they were interested in providing it did not contradict the agreed policy of their organisation, rather than having their political activity monopolised by the party leadership.

Many of the readers of this article may find themselves agreeing with the sort of organisational structure and principles it outlines. But this is not written merely as a set of ideas to be thought about and then laid aside. If you agree with the core ideas presented here then you have a responsibility to start to put these into action by searching out others who also agree and taking the first steps in building such organisation(s). It is my experience that many of the anarchists I have met are completely selfless when it comes to putting themselves in exposed physical positions in the struggles of our class, it is time to put the same sort of energy into building anarchist organisations that can re-define the traditions of working class struggle and prepare for a successful revolution.

Andrew Flood

Footnotes

- 1. This casualty figure is the maximum estimate for actual war deaths I have seen. It is a sign of the continued acceptance of the rationale behind the war in the West that no-one actually seems to either know or care how many died on the Iraqi side, or that perhaps 500,000 Iraqi children have died since the end of the war due to the combined effects of destruction at the time of the war and sanctions since.
- 2. The EZLN rising of 1 Jan. 1994 in Chiapas; see *Red & Black Revolution No. 1* for an analysis of



- the Zapatistas [<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3102/abezln.html>].
- 3. Quoted in *The SWP and the Crisis of British Capitalism*, 1992.
- 4. A faction within the Bolshevik party that was based on the unions and demanded a return to some workplace democracy. The main result was that factions were then banned in the Party!
- 5. R.V. Daniels *The Conscience of the Revolution* Pp. 145-6
- 6. This is split into two sections, the section with its HQ in Paris was expelled from the IWA-AIT at its December 1996 Congress.
- 7. This article is referring to the anarchist movement in Britain and Ireland except where I state otherwise. This is the area where I am very familiar with the internal life of organised anarchism but from what I am told similar problems apply in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand. These countries all share a common tradition of union and political organising, dominated by struggles for the leadership of the movement and where self-organisation of struggle has seldom progressed beyond a slogan.
- 8. Workers Solidarity Movement (publishers of *Red & Black Revolution*)
- 9. Anarchist Communist Federation
- 10. British section of the IWA, now called Solidarity Federation, formerly the Direct Action Movement
- 11. Although including Class War in a listing of national anarchist organisations is problematical as they keep changing their minds about whether they are or are not anarchists.
- 12. Scottish Federation of Anarchists
- 13. The Anarchist Workers Group which self-destructed in 1992 when it abandoned anarchism, changed its name to Socialism from Below and

- then vanished. [<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2419/awg.html>] for more information
- 14. There has been an increase in interest in anarchism as a set of ideas but in English language countries this has not translated into a significant growth in organisation.
- 15. Not unreasonable in the context of syndicalism where either the union is capable of taking over the economy on its own or it is not. In terms of non-syndicalist anarchist politics, however, the idea of completing the revolution on a non-syndicalist basis through the creation of other organs of workers' self-management was open. By 1937 a sizeable minority of the CNT were willing to explore this possibility in the form of a revolutionary junta elected (and recallable) by the CNT and CGT workers.
- 16. The CNT had about one million members at the start of the revolution, this may have risen as high as two million by 1937.
- 17. CNT textile worker Andreu Capdevila, quoted in *Blood of Spain* P.72
- 18. See the article *Syndicalism: Its strengths and weaknesses* in *Red & Black Revolution No. 1*
- 19. Which is why we must be careful not to imagine that the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, which means no more than democratically selecting who gets to decide party policy, has anything in common with the anarchist concept of theoretical and tactical unity.
- 20. Bakunin discussed the difference in the two forms as being two different forms of meaning of the word authority; i.e. to be an authority on something as opposed to being in authority over something.
- 21. In practice, though, this selection is fixed through mechanisms like the use of slates. Leninist groups are infamous for having the same leader 'elected' again and again until he dies and the organisation then splits!
- 22. In fact, as usual, we can observe that the Leninists have adopted the methods of capitalist organisation on this issue, with a division between those who make decisions and those who carry them out whereas collective responsibility models the future anarchist society, where those making the decisions will be all of those effected by those decisions (workers' self-management in the economic context).



The Emergence of Modern Irish Socialism 1885-87

Hans Christian Andersen went weak before princesses and he was a shocking apologist for elves but when it came to trolls he had an excellent grasp of his subject. In *The Snow Queen*, Andersen introduced a most evil specimen of troll:

One day he was in a really good humour because he had made a mirror that had the quality of making everything good and fair that reflected in it dwindle to almost nothing, but whatever was worthless and ugly stood out and grew even worse. The loveliest of landscapes looked like boiled spinach in it... now, for the first time, you could see how the world and mortals really looked.

Sometimes, if you look hard enough (as Andersen would have put it), this troll can be glimpsed traversing the Irish socialist movement with his malignant mirror in tow. In recent years, with socialism under severe pressure, he has been a particularly busy little bastard. The history of socialism often looks infinitely miserable in his mirror of cynicism and the calamity of orthodox communism is allowed to envelop everything. But there is much in the past that should give socialists hope for the future. Unfortunately in Ireland it is a past unfamiliar to most political activists.

Irish historiography has traditionally been inadequate with regard to working-class political life and this is especially true for late nineteenth-century Ireland. For many historians, the arrival of James Connolly in May 1896 has remained a seminal event, when, in the opinion of F.S.L. Lyons, a spark was lit and Irish socialism began. (1) In fact, organised Irish socialism began in 1885 and is a tradition more diverse and more vibrant than commonly assumed.

BEFORE 1885

It could be argued that modern Irish socialism began with the establishment in 1872 of branches of the International Working Men's Association (or First International). However, these branches (in Dublin, Cork, Belfast and Cootehill) were short-lived because of the intense opposition that they encountered and their demise was followed by a complete absence of socialist organisation until 1885.

Among the Dublin Internationalists the leading figure was a cabinet-maker in his forties called Richard McKeon who the police described as "a troublesome character, and a regular fanatic in politics, having been a Chartist, a Young Irelander, a member of the National Brotherhood of St. Patrick, and a Fenian". (2) McKeon was an old friend of Joseph McDonnell, the ex-Fenian who represented Ireland on the General Council of the International in London.

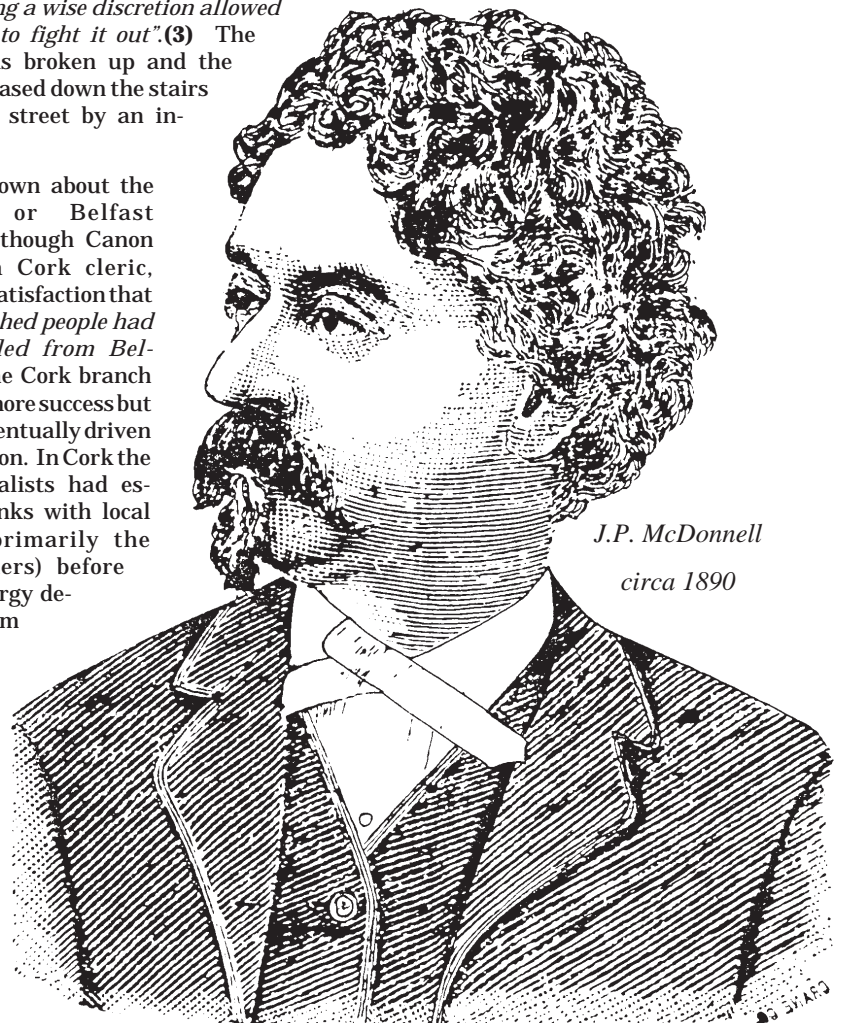
The Dublin branch of the International first emerged in mid-February 1872 and

was routed by April. All of its public meetings saw the section under severe attack because of the Paris Commune of 1871 during which the Catholic Archbishop of Paris had been killed. The final meeting, held at McKeon's premises in Chapel Lane on 7 April, sealed the fate of the branch when a mob of anti-Internationalists stormed the building. According to a hostile *Irish Times*: "The defenders of the Communists of Paris were set upon, and a hand-to-hand encounter ensued.... chairs and tables were upset, the glass was smashed in the windows, and every stray piece of wood was availed of as a weapon for attack or defence.... several members of the detective force were in the room at the time, but exercising a wise discretion allowed the parties to fight it out". (3) The meeting was broken up and the members chased down the stairs and up the street by an incensed mob.

Little is known about the Cootehill or Belfast branches although Canon Maguire, a Cork cleric, noted with satisfaction that "those wretched people had been expelled from Belfast". (4) The Cork branch had rather more success but it too was eventually driven into extinction. In Cork the Internationalists had established links with local workers (primarily the coach-builders) before the local clergy declared them

antagonistic to religion and called on Cork workers to crush them.

The Freeman's Journal assessed the Cork membership to be as high as three hundred within a few weeks of the branch's formation in late-February 1872. (5) In fact, the strength of the group can be roughly gauged from its ability to effectively disrupt a meeting called on 24 March in order to distance the city from the International. Over three thousand people turned out for this rally but the Internationalists arrived shortly before it commenced with "a body of men, perhaps about one hundred in number, composed of working men, and in parts of roughs, nearly all of whom wore green neckties". (6) In the ensuing free-for-all the meeting-hall was wrecked: "They rallied at both sides repeatedly, and the taking and re-taking of the platform was conducted by leaders who were armed with bludgeons.... The building was very much damaged". (7) After several hours of rioting the Internationalists emerged as victors. Within weeks, however, a 'red-scare', exacerbated by the riot, caused the branch to collapse. The



J.P. McDonnell
circa 1890

International Working Men's Association.

Propaganda Fund for Ireland.

In consequence of police espionage, middle-class tyranny, and clerical intimidation in Dublin, but more especially in Cork, some of the most devoted, earnest, and unselfish of Irish Internationalists have been almost ruined. One member—an earnest Irish Republican—on the Monday after the Athenæum meeting, was discharged from his employment for his connection with the International, and at every place where he has since sought employment, he has been met with the reply of “No Internationalists Wanted.” Such is the freedom that the middle classes of Ireland, and indeed of all countries, grant their slaves. But the case of the truly able and disinterested man—the Secretary for Cork—is even worse. Cursed from the altar by the wealthy agents of the Government, outlawed by what is called “respectable” society, and discharged from the Academies where he taught and to which he was an ornament, he finds himself to-day the victim of an oppression that would disgrace the worst days of the Spanish Inquisition. Shall we abandon those heroic men, who, through fighting the battle of Truth, Intelligence, and Emancipation, bring ruin upon themselves and their families. *A thousand times NO!* A fund is now established to enable those to whom I have referred to remain in Cork in order that they may propagate our principles and trample over our dastardly foes. In time they may be able to win an independent position for themselves. This sheet is entrusted to the Secretary of each Irish section on the condition that he will enter down the name and weekly payments of every contributor, and that at the end of every week the amount collected be forwarded to Cork for those to whom I have referred. When the sheets are full they are to be returned to me, that they may be compared with the returns from Cork. Private persons to whom I entrust sheets must return to me their receipts weekly, with the names of the contributors, in order that I may publish the latter. When the fund closes the total received will be published.

Let every true man now go to work in a manner worthy of Ireland, her Republican cause, and the cause of Universal Humanity.

April 21st, 1872.

J.P. McDONNELL, Secretary for Ireland,
33, Rathbone Place, London,

Leaflet announcing the creation of the Propaganda Fund for Ireland

main organiser was forced to leave the city.

DUBLIN DEMOCRATIC ASSOCIATION

There were socialists in Ireland during the 1870s and early 1880s but it was not until late 1884 that they again attempted to organise together. In a sense, Irish socialism from 1885 onwards is best seen as an outpost of the British ‘socialist revival’.

In 1881 the Democratic Federation was founded in Britain by radicals (and some socialists) who opposed the use of coercive legislation against the Irish Land League. The Land League, which sought the diminution of landlordism and the promotion of peasant-proprietorship, was ultimately banned in October 1881 and many of its leaders interned. The ‘land war’ of 1879-82 was a politicising experience for many in Ireland and in Britain. The Democratic Federation, which had formed as a result of the Irish agitation, went on to develop into Britain’s first ‘nation-wide’ socialist organisation and in 1884 was renamed as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

The Democratic Federation had sent a delegation to Ireland in the summer of 1881 but it made no serious attempt to recruit members. There were certainly socialists in Ireland at this time but it was not until the formation of the Saturday Club in 1884 that they began to work together. This Club, which met on Saturday evenings in the Rotunda in Dublin, provided a debating forum which was independent of the nationalist movement. Social and political issues were discussed by radical Dublin workers and the attendance was generally impressive with hundreds at some debates. Its formation and the links it engendered probably encouraged those who attempted in December 1884 to form an SDF branch in Ireland.

On 20 December 1884 *Justice*, the SDF weekly newspaper, carried a letter signed by Samuel Hayes, R.G. Russell, and Alexander Stewart signalling their intention to

found an SDF branch in Dublin. In the event an inaugural meeting held in the Oddfellows Hall, 10 Upper Abbey Street on 18 January 1885 saw the formation of a Dublin Democratic Association which stated that its objective was “to promote and defend the rights of labour, and to restore the land to the people”.⁽⁸⁾ Alex Stewart was elected secretary and James Doyle was made treasurer. Both were officials in the local branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

According to Samuel Hayes, the crowded meeting at the Oddfellows Hall had decided not to form an SDF branch “because it would frighten away any who would be disposed to consider our principles, besides that all the influence of the Roman Catholic Church would be levelled against us, as also of the National League”.⁽⁹⁾ They decided to advance their principles “without calling them by the name of socialism”.⁽¹⁰⁾ In fact, of the Democratic Association’s sixty members, it would seem that only some fifteen were committed socialists: the majority were land nationalists and political radicals of varying types. At least one, Adam O’Toole, was a former member of the Dublin branch of the International. Two, Amos Varian and P.A. Tyrrell, were formerly leading Dublin Land Leaguers.

The Dublin Democratic Association retained strong links with the SDF in Britain although it never affiliated. On 25 January it decided to hold a series of public meetings “for the advancement of democratic principles”.⁽¹¹⁾ Over the following months Adam O’Toole spoke on ‘Democracy Defined’, Amos Varian on ‘Franchise And Representation’, Edward O’Connor on ‘the Social Question’, Alex Stewart on ‘Democratic Demands’, and Andrew Byrne on ‘The Social Revolution’. Members of DDA also utilised the Saturday Club in order to put forward their arguments. A foreign socialist, the Danish Marxist Fritz Schumann, spoke at the Club on 31 January provoking Michael Cusack, the GAA

founder, to charge Marx with being the creator of an organisation in which “such destructive agents as petroleum oil had been employed” and he implored Dublin workers to leave such “international business” alone.⁽¹²⁾ After a rambling speech and a confrontation with Alex Stewart, Cusack stalked out of the Rotunda. There were other less dramatic opportunities for the socialists to argue their politics.

The Dublin Democratic Association ‘adjourned’ in May for the summer but it was never to reconvene. Samuel Hayes blamed attacks from the nationalist party “who did all they could to crush it”, but also admitted that it had become a financial failure and its membership had gradually diminished.⁽¹³⁾

SOCIALIST LEAGUE

The emergence of the Dublin branch of the Socialist League in December 1885 can be said to mark the real beginning of modern organised socialism in Ireland. An unbroken continuity of organisation exists between this first socialist group and the Irish Socialist Republican Party of 1896. Moreover, the libertarian socialism of the Socialist League remained influential within Dublin socialism until, arguably, the arrival of ‘new unionism’ and the subsequent establishment of branches of the Independent Labour Party in the mid-1890s.

The Socialist League in Britain formed in December 1884 as a breakaway from the SDF. The reasons for the split are complex but many had to do with the politics and personality of H.M. Hyndman who was determined to maintain his grip on the leadership of the SDF. Hyndman’s socialism was a most dogmatic and unimaginative variety of Marxism and he held a condescending view of the working class. His apparently cynical view of workers’ political and industrial self-activity was one of his chief weaknesses and it greatly irritated many of those who split to form the Socialist League. For Hyndman, to use E.P. Thompson’s phrase, social reforms “were the carrot for the donkey; and the donkey was the people.”⁽¹⁴⁾ The Socialist League, in contrast, under the leadership of libertarian Marxists (like William Morris and Andreas Scheu) and anarchists (like Joseph Lane), declared its immediate objective to be social revolution and saw social reforms as palliatives made by capitalism, in the words of Morris, “with the intention ofbeing a nullity or a bait to quiet possible revolution”.⁽¹⁵⁾

From the beginning the Socialist League saw itself as primarily a propagandist organisation which would help to sow the seeds of revolution in working class minds. It also declared itself, like the SDF, in favour of Irish Home Rule and its secretary, John L. Mahon (of Irish extraction), made efforts to recruit in Ireland. These efforts bore fruit mainly because of the arrival of an English Socialist Leaguer in Dublin in 1885. Michael Gabriel, an anar-

chist, moved to Bayview Avenue in the North Strand area of Dublin and in June he began to distribute League leaflets and the group's newspaper, *The Commonweal*.

Samuel Hayes had already, earlier in the year, distributed material advertising *The Commonweal* but the Dublin Democratic Association, which had existed until May, showed no real interest in the Socialist League. However, George King, a former

“What would be the use of sending labour candidates to Parliament? It would be no use whatever to send them to talk to capitalists and landlords

member of the Dublin branch of the International (and probably also of the DDA), contacted the League in London in July expressing his interest in the organisation. Samuel Hayes subsequently evinced a similar interest and he sent a list of former DDA members to H.H. Sparling, now secretary, in London. Nevertheless, while sending the list he struck a pessimistic note: *“Most of the persons mentioned are rather disheartened as far [as] the propagation of socialism is concerned....It is impossible to get the people in this country to think for themselves - they believe everything they hear both from their political leaders and clergy”*.⁽¹⁶⁾

Despite such pessimism, Michael Gabriel managed to form a Dublin branch of the Socialist League at a meeting in December 1885. The first monthly membership report gave membership as ten among whom were a number of members of the former Dublin Democratic Association. Samuel Hayes became branch secretary and John A. Ryan was made treasurer. Other founding members included George King, Fritz Schumann, Thomas Fitzpatrick, John O’Gorman, Auguste Coulon, Michael Gabriel and Arthur Kavanagh. (Ryan, King and O’Gorman were all former Internationalists.) The branch selected the Oddfellows Hall in Upper Abbey Street for its weekly meetings which were held at 8p.m. on Thursday night. By December Gabriel had already made his presence felt at the Saturday Club when he argued against returning workingmen to parliament: *“What would be the use of sending labour candidates to Parliament? It would be no use whatever to send them to talk to capitalists and landlords whose interests*

were different from theirs. As working men they would never get anything by using a vote.”⁽¹⁷⁾ This raw anti-parliamentarianism represented both Gabriel’s anarchism and the general policy of the Socialist League. William Morris held precisely this opinion.

Fritz Schumann also made an impact at the Saturday Club when he tried to defend the merits of atheism during a debate on Charles Bradlaugh. (Bradlaugh was a Radical MP excluded from the House of Common in London because of his atheism.) *“The chairman,”* declared Schumann, *“has allowed atheism to be assailed with not a word in support of it (groans).”* The chairman’s response was swift: *“This gentleman has said now that he will defend atheism and I say I won’t hear it! (applause)”*.⁽¹⁸⁾ Religious sensibilities in Ireland provided an enormous impediment for socialist organisers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Nevertheless, the Dublin socialists received a good hearing at the Saturday Club and over the following years they played a prominent role in the organisation of the debates and provided many speakers. In April 1886, the Dublin Socialist League was instrumental in bringing William Morris to Dublin and, among other meetings, he spoke on socialism to a packed meeting of the Saturday Club.

At most the Socialist League in Dublin had just over 20 members at its height. It was a minuscule organisation but this small group was enough to raise the spectre of socialism in Ireland. During its existence it held a number of public meetings although, following a dispute with the Oddfellows Society in January 1886, the branch had difficulty in finding halls for its lectures. Samuel Hayes estimated an attendance of sixty at its first public meeting on January 7 and *The Freeman’s Journal* carried a long report on its proceedings.⁽¹⁹⁾

During a general discussion at this meeting, Thomas Fitzpatrick, a young anarchist who was to become an energetic

socialist agitator, accentuated one aspect of Socialist League politics which became a serious problem in the years ahead. *“The tendency of the age,”* he said, *“is towards internationalism not nationalism. It is absurd to think that the separation of Ireland from England would alone benefit the working men of Ireland”*.⁽²⁰⁾ Fitzpatrick did not dismiss Irish anti-colonialism in this statement but, in the main, these early socialists equated separatism with a narrow-minded nationalism (which they correctly saw as harmful to the interests of the working-class). John O’Gorman summed up this attitude in 1891 when he contended that Home Rule would entail *“the rule of the farmer, the publican, the clergyman and the politicians”*.⁽²¹⁾ However, rather than oppose Home Rule with an alternative, as James Connolly was later to do, the Socialist Leaguers tried to stand above what was the primary political issue of their day. This attitude, needless to say, did not bring them either recruits or popularity.

The socialists’ dislike of the Home Rule movement was partially an objection to the notion of change through constitutionalism. In January, Gabriel argued at the Saturday Club that the *“idea of looking to Parliament, whether Irish or English, to do anything for them was a mistake”*, and that *“everything depended on the organisation and co-operation amongst the working class”*.⁽²²⁾ Gabriel’s anarchism included a distaste for piecemeal reforms and even extended to the dubious assertion that a suggested *“agitation about rack-renting would not do them any good at all.”*⁽²³⁾ Such ‘realism’ must have appeared rather cold comfort to the many victims of rack-renting in Dublin at that time. Anarchist ideas exerted a real influence on these pioneers of Irish socialism, although it would be a mistake to presume that all members of the Dublin Socialist League adhered to these ideas. Some were Marxists and other, undoubtedly, were ill-defined in their socialism. This diversity was acknowledged and accepted by the mem-

DECLARATION BY THE GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

International Working Men’s Association.

POLICE TERRORISM IN IRELAND.

The national antagonism between English and Irish working-men, in England, has hitherto been one of the main impediments in the way of every attempted movement for the emancipation of the working-class, and therefore one of the mainstays of class dominion in England as well as in Ireland. The spread of the International in Ireland, and the formation of Irish branches in England, threatened to put an end to this state of things. It was quite natural then that the British Government should attempt to nip in the bud the establishment of the International in Ireland by putting into practice all that police chicanery which the exceptional legislation and the practically permanent state of siege there, enabled it

bers of the branch. "Socialism," said Michael Gabriel, "was capable of a good many interpretations". Nonetheless he went on to state that in his opinion "all the evils were caused by class government. He was opposed to a million men ruling one man, or one man ruling a million. The power of one man to govern another should be swept away under the socialist system."⁽²⁴⁾

Unlike the International the Socialist League, despite suffering some attention from the police, was largely unmolested at its public meetings, although its March social evening to celebrate the Paris Commune was, according to Gabriel, "a small private meeting" because of the fear of it "being broken up" if openly advertised.⁽²⁵⁾ Nonetheless, such trepidation was uncommon and when a man named Magennis lectured in the Rotunda on the topic of socialist "snakes in the grass", the League advertised its following meeting under the same title and specifically invited Magennis to attend.⁽²⁶⁾

Apart from its public meetings the branch raised the profile of socialism in Dublin by its involvement, through Fritz Schumann, in the bottle-makers' lockout in early 1886 and in April the lectures in Dublin of William Morris generated some interest in socialist ideas. However, April marked a high point for the League in Ireland and as summer approached the Home Rule issue seems to have impacted on both the members' morale and activity. April had seen the introduction into the House of Commons of Gladstone's doomed 1886 Home Rule Bill and the rest of the year was completely dominated by the controversy and the hopes that it generated. The socialists admitted this to be a problem in May when Fritz Schumann wrote to London that it was proving "extremely difficult just now to get people to think of anything but Home Rule".⁽²⁷⁾ By late 1886 the branch was terminally ill but it staggered on until March 1887 when it finally collapsed.

In October 1886 the Dublin branch clashed with the Central Council of the League in London and this probably accelerated the demise of the section. The Council had on 17 May expelled Charles Reuss as a spy for the German police. Reuss and some supporters counter-charged Victor Dave, another League member, with being a spy and this accusation was backed by a Reuss-biased 'commission' which exonerated Reuss himself. Both Reuss and Dave were anarchists, although from contending factions. Anarchism in Britain at that time was a rather diffuse and murky affair. It later emerged that Reuss actually was the spy after he betrayed Johann Neve, an anarchist wanted in Germany. However in October 1886 *The Anarchist*, which was Britain's only native anarchist paper, devoted almost the whole of its front page to an article attacking the Socialist League and supporting Reuss. This dispute in Britain was noted in Dublin where members of the branch received copies of *The Anarchist*. The Dublin socialists contacted London to express their concern and following an exchange of correspondence they unanimously adopted a motion attacking the Council. That they took the word of *The Anarchist* over that of their own Council certainly points to the strong influence of anarchism among the Dublin members.

The conflict between the Dublin branch and London was eventually resolved at a special meeting held in Dublin on 9 November to discuss the issue. John O'Gorman let Sparling in London know that his letters "and assurances considerably lessened the hostility to the Council (practical Anarchists, we) that was displayed at other meetings" and the matter was left drop.⁽²⁸⁾ Nonetheless, the dispute would not have encouraged the Dublin members to maintain the Irish section.

AFTER THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE

This article set out to outline the emergence of modern Irish socialism with particular emphasis on the Socialist League.

It is necessary to understand the politics of the League branch before one can fully understand the groups and clubs which followed. Most of the Socialist Leaguers remained politically active through the next few years and some like Arthur Kavanagh, John O'Gorman and George King had connections with Connolly's ISRP.

Perhaps one of the most exciting of Ireland's early socialist organisations emerged after the demise of the Socialist League in Dublin. The National Labour League (which included the senior Land Leaguer J.B. Killen) mobilised the unemployed during 1887 and brought thousands onto the streets of the capital city. The speeches made by the leaders of the Labour League were explicitly revolutionary. Killen told a crowd of some 3,000 at one rally held on Harold's Cross Green on 6 March that the land and all the instruments of production should belong to the community and that the worker was "justified in using any means whatever in order to get rid of the idle class that fattened upon his misery".⁽²⁹⁾ On 13 October, 1887 the National Labour League (at a meeting attended by, among others, Gabriel, Fitzpatrick and King) issued a manifesto to Irish workers which called on them to rise up against capitalism:

All over the civilised world the people are rising up against their tyrants, the capitalist class. Shall you, men of Ireland, remain behind in the great struggle that labour is making for its emancipation?⁽³⁰⁾

The National Labour League was followed by a variety of socialist clubs and debating societies and, later, by the Irish Socialist Union whose members played a significant role in introducing 'new unionism' into Ireland. Despite setbacks and seemingly insuperable difficulties these socialists struggled on and laid the foundations for whatever exists of socialism in today's Ireland. They displayed tenacity and, within their groups, they also displayed an acceptance of political diversity in the socialist movement.

In 1888 John O'Gorman wrote of Ireland as a "shuttlecock between the political tricksters", this despite the fact that "the condition of the country is getting worse every day; thousands are out of employment in Dublin and all the towns; [and] the cry of distress is heard on every side."⁽³¹⁾ O'Gorman and his friends believed that socialism could provide an alternative to this misery.

Note: Fintan Lane is a historian and the author of a recent study of Irish socialism entitled: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN IRISH SOCIALISM, 1881-1896. It is published (May 1st 1997) by Cork University Press, Cork.

References: Available from the author.



Anarchists & Trade Unions

Be active - Be involved

Anarchists are anarchists because we want to bring about a wholesale change in the way society is administered. For us, therefore, a crucial question is “How can such a change be brought about?” or - to put it more pertinently - “Who can change society?” This question must be posed in a historical context and the lessons of that history transferred to present times.



At every single stage in the development of society - from ancient times through feudalism up to the present day - society has comprised two distinct groups : an oppressed class and a ruling class. These two classes have been allotted very specific roles. The oppressed class has been the one whose labour has created the wealth of society, the ruling class has controlled and exploited that wealth. This social division has not always been readily accepted. At almost every stage in society's development, the oppressed class (or sections of it) have fought back. Examples include the slave revolts of ancient Greece and Rome, the peasant uprisings of the Middle Ages and the social revolutions of the 1600s and 1700s.

These struggles have all been different in nature but they have always had one thing in common. They ended with one set of rulers being replaced by another set of equally parasitic rulers. Whilst a slight realignment in society's make-up often occurred, there was no **fundamental** change. The new society which emerged was divided along the old familiar lines - rulers and oppressed.

The failure of the oppressed classes to maintain control of the revolutions they fought in can be explained by two principal factors - the generally low level of wealth in society and the fact that the everyday lives of the people did not prepare them to run society. The majority were illiterate peas-

ants who had no idea what life was like outside their own locality. Their everyday lives divided them from each other. Each peasant had to worry about his own plot of land, hoping to enlarge it. Each craftsman had to worry about his own business. To varying degrees each peasant and craftsman was in competition with his fellows, not united with them. There was no thought of “class unity”.

Collective Oppression

The emergence of capitalism in the early 19th century changed this. Firstly, under capitalism, the workers began to create enough wealth to feed and clothe the world and still have plenty left for science, culture, leisure activities, etc. Secondly - and more importantly - the everyday lives of the oppressed class under capitalism prepares them to take over the running of society.

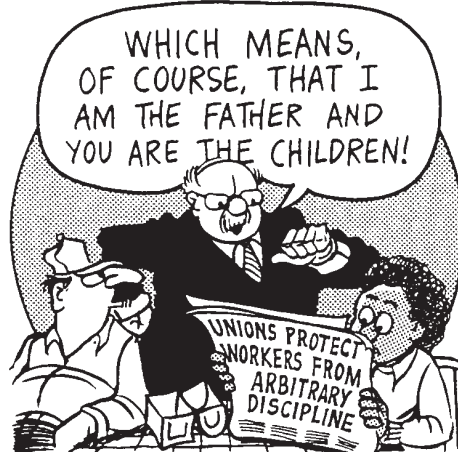
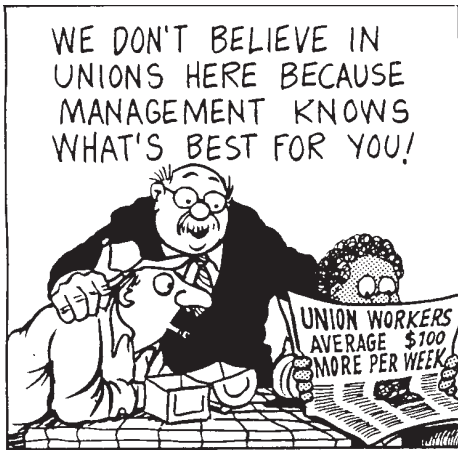
Capitalism brings workers together in large workplaces and into large towns and cities - it makes us co-operate every day at work. On the factory floor each person has to do his/her bit so that the person at the next stage of production can continue the process. The services sector requires similar levels of co-operation. From office to hospital to school to fast-food outlet, workers must co-operate with each other to get the job done. This level of co-operation and mutual dependency makes it possible to envisage a revolution which will involve

the oppressed class taking over the entire running of society. Workers' many talents will then be used to develop new societal structures which will do away with the need for rulers.

Those who administer and benefit from the capitalist system are only too well aware of this fact. That is why we are told again and again that such co-operation and mutual dependency is not possible. From an early age we are led to believe that the way in which society is currently structured is the only one possible. The need for rulers and ruled goes unquestioned. The fact that people die of hunger in one part of the world while, in another part, farmers are actually paid grants not to produce food; the fact that some people are forced to live in cardboard boxes while others live in mansions; the fact that governments can spend billions of dollars on weapons of mass destruction while at the same time cutting back spending on health, education and welfare..... These are all passed off as natural phenomena. The possibility that the working class would have the wish never mind the ability to run society in all our interests is never considered. This is hardly surprising given that the media - which essentially controls the majority of political debate - is owned and controlled by either governments or big business. It certainly would not be in the interests of either Rupert Murdoch or Tony O'Reilly to question the basis of the society which sees them sitting on top of the pile. Neither are we likely to see Dick Spring, Tony Blair or any other of our wannabe 'leaders' quoting from Proudhon's 1849 writings when he said - among other things

“When left to their own instincts the people almost always see better than when guided by the policy of leaders.”(1)

Individuals who might feel that a 'fairer' or 'more just' system would be desirable (doesn't practically everyone you know?) are overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. They feel isolated and powerless. This sense of powerlessness can however be turned on its head. When the co-operation or collective power described above which is used to run the factories, shops, schools, offices etc. is used to stop them from functioning, small glimpses of the potential emerge. Workers involved in strikes, whether they involve small numbers (eg, the Early Learning Centre strike in Cork last year), or larger numbers of workers (as in the Liverpool Dockers' strike, or - even more so - the wave of strikes in France in December 1995, for example), get a glimpse of the potential of their own



manner (eg, the British miners' strike in the 1980s).

Central to anarchist politics is the contention of our forerunners in the First International that "The emancipation of the working class can only be brought about by the working class themselves". It is only the self-activity of the mass of workers that is capable of mounting an effective challenge to the bosses and their State. The trade union movement is the most important mass movement the working class has built. For anarchists, activity within the unions should be one of the most important ongoing activities.

The bureaucracy

As all trade union activists know, the unions are dominated by an all-embracing bureaucracy. This is a collection of (usually unelected) full-time officials with too much power and undue influence. They are only responsible to the members in the most formal sense. They may - when it suits them - take the side of the members, but they do not have to. They are not under the control of the members, they earn much more than those they 'represent' (Billy Attley, general president of SIPTU(2) earns £85,000 per annum, while a SIPTU member in the catering industry can earn as little as £3.50 an hour). Or they may sit alongside the bosses and the government on commissions and on the boards of semi-state companies (Philip Flynn, former general secretary of Impact(3), has been appointed by the government as chairman of the state-owned ICC Bank; David Begg, general secretary of the CWU(4), is a member of the board of directors of the Central Bank). In short, they enjoy a lifestyle quite different to that of the people they are supposed to be working for.

power, their own ability to decide how things should be and to fight for that vision. Similarly the tens of thousands of people who refused to pay the Poll Tax in Britain and who fought the successful battle against service charges in Ireland saw that solidarity is indeed strength.

Collective Power

While both the anti-Poll Tax and anti-service charge campaigns succeeded - for the most part - despite rather than because of the trade union leaderships (an honourable exception being the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union in Dublin), it is fair to say that it is through their trade union that most workers get their first glimpse of collective power in action. From their early beginnings, nearly 300 years ago, one thing is clear - for a worker to join a trade union is a recognition, to some degree at least, that he/she has different interests to the boss. The very survival of trade unions over the centuries is testament to the reality that there are different class interests in a capitalist society. Yes, conservatism, bureaucracy and backwardness are often - in fact nearly always - the hallmark of modern trade unions at their leadership level but even this cannot hide the essential fact that workers understand that to promote their own interests they have to organise along class lines.

This is not to suggest that trade unions are in any sense revolutionary organisations. They may go through periods of intense militancy from time to time (eg, 1913 in Dublin) but at the end of the day trade

unions were formed to defend and improve the lot of workers under capitalism, not to challenge the existence of capitalism itself.

Nevertheless, for anarchists, trade union campaigns and activity are extremely important. We view our work within our unions not just as another sphere of activity, but as an absolute necessity. In the course of workplace struggle - whether to improve pay and conditions or to defend existing conditions - workers may begin to identify their potential power. Such struggles also open up the possibility of further radicalisation and the potential for bringing those involved into the revolutionary movement.

After all, when we get down to basics, what is anarchism other than workers, acting collectively, running a free society? What is a strike other than workers acting collectively towards a common goal? This is not to suggest that strikers set out with anarchist goals or even anarchist tactics in mind. They don't. But collective action is indeed the only weapon with which a strike can be successful so the logic of the workers' position - collective action in production, collective action in struggle does lead in an anarchist direction. And once in struggle, the potential for people's ideas to change is enormous. Workers involved in a strike gain confidence in their own abilities, they are also exposed to the naked face of capitalism in action. In many instances, for example, workers going on strike believe in the 'impartiality' of the police force, the judiciary and other arms of the state apparatus only to have this 'impartiality' exposed to them in a brutal

It is not that the current crop of officials are a nasty bunch of individuals

More and more, the job of a trade union official is seen as a career, with many of the newer officials having come through college with a degree in 'industrial relations' and never having worked in an ordinary job. More than a few of them change sides during their careers, taking jobs with employers' or state organisations. For example, the chief executive of the Labour Relations Commission, Kieran Mulvey, is a former general secretary of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI). These officials - especially now in the context of 'social partnership' - see their role as that of conciliator, "fixer",

negotiator - the term representative does not seem to appear in the job description. Peter Cassells, ICTU general secretary, is regularly called in to disputes to force a settlement on workers. This was most clearly seen in the TEAM Aer Lingus dispute in 1994.

Members of the bureaucracy rarely lead or initiate strikes but are more often found pulling out all the stops to avoid any action. They will drag groups of workers back and forth to the Labour Court, the Employer-Labour Conference, the Labour Relations Commission, Rights Commissioners and every other talking shop they can find. They will negotiate forever in the hope of finding a 'reasonable' solution. Striking, in their book, is very much a last resort. Indeed Joe O'Toole, general secretary of the INTO(5), is on record as saying that he views it as a defeat to have to resort to the strike weapon. And, of course, unofficial action - action which has not been sanctioned by them - will be condemned out of hand by all bureaucrats.

It is not that the current crop of officials are a nasty bunch of individuals. Rather the old adage comes into play: "*Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely*". The structure of the unions gives far too much power to the bureaucrats and it is inevitable that no matter how radical or left-wing they might be when they get the job their role sucks them into the business of conciliation. After all, the officials must be able to prove that they control their members - in other words, stop them fighting the bosses - if they are to have anything to sell at the negotiating table. If such control cannot be promised, why should an employer bother to negotiate?

As a whole, the bureaucracy swings between the position of mediator and that of defender of the status quo. As a grouping they can't obviously go over completely to defending the bosses' interests. To at least some degree they have to respond to the members' demands because they are after all employed by workers' organisations. Likewise, they cannot become totally responsive to their members' demands because that would see the end of their role, their power and their careers. There may be a few individual exceptions to this rule but, as a collective grouping, this remains the case. By its very nature, the bureaucracy has to be opposed to workers' self-activity on most occasions. It is without doubt authoritarian in its very structures.

How to respond

Several different solutions/responses to the problem of bureaucratic strangulation of the trade union movement have been put forward. The most often heard of these is propagated to varying degrees by almost all of the 'left' - from social democrats to Stalinists to Trotskyists. According to this theory what we have to do is to elect and/or appoint 'better' officials. They see the problem primarily in terms of the individuals who hold the posts. This view of

the situation stems directly from their conception of socialism. They see socialism as some sort of giant state enterprise bureaucracy where things are done 'for the workers'. They see the role of socialists/socialist organisations as being to organise a revolution/change of society on behalf of the working class. Workers' self-activity occupies no leading role in their scheme of things, just as real workers' control is not

Workers' self-activity occupies no leading role...

part of their plan for a 'socialist' society. According to this theory, if the officials were more 'left-wing' they would be more willing to fight for the demands of their members. The theory ignores however the fundamental core of the problem - it is not the individuals but the structures which are at fault.

Another view which is sometimes put forward is that new 'left-wing' unions should be formed by breakaway groups of radical workers. The principal effect of this, however, would usually be to take the minority of combative/radical workers out of the old union leaving it totally at the mercy of the bureaucrats whose antics had initially provoked the split. Such radical workers would use their energies much more effectively by staying within the union and fighting to win over the broader membership to their radical ideas. At any rate, breakaway unions offer little alternative in the long run with the problems which led to their formation soon appearing in the new union. There are numerous examples of this in Ireland's labour history. The ITGWU(6), the FWUI(7) - both of which merged to form SIPTU(8) - and the NBRU(9) were all born as 'left breakaway' unions. Ultimately, of course, it is the workers themselves who have the right to make the decision on such

an issue, but without a radical overhaul of the structures the breakaway will soon become a smaller mirror image of its parent.

Anarcho-syndicalism

Syndicalism, and especially anarcho-syndicalism, has been and remains an important current within the trade union movement, particularly in Southern Europe and Latin America. The basic ideas of syndicalism revolve around the organisation of all workers into 'one big union', the maintenance of control in the hands of the rank-and-file and opposition to all attempts to create a bureaucracy of unaccountable full-timers. The principal difference between anarcho-syndicalist unions and other trade unions is their belief that the union can be used not only to win reforms from the bosses, but also to overthrow the capitalist system. They further believe that the principal reason why most workers are not revolutionaries is because the structures of their unions take the initiative away from the rank-and-file. The alternative, as they see it, is to organise all workers in one big union in preparation for the revolutionary general strike. The biggest problem - according to this analysis - is the structure of the existing unions.

As unions, syndicalist organisations have certainly proved effective. This is why people join them. They have proved themselves to be democratic, radical and combative. In fact there has been a considerable growth in membership of syndicalist unions in recent times. In France, for example, the syndicalist CNT-F witnessed a rapid growth in membership following the December '95 strike.

It is as a form of **political** organisation that syndicalism fails the acid test. Syndicalism creates industrial unions - not revolutionary organisations. The anarcho-syndicalist union organises all workers regardless of their politics. This obviously leaves open the possibility of the appearance of reformist tendencies within



the ranks of the organisation. The weaknesses which anarchist-communists see in syndicalism have been dealt with in detail on many occasions⁽¹⁰⁾ and it is not proposed to outline them again in this article. We do, however, recognise that the syndicalist unions, where they exist, are far more progressive than any other union. Not only do they create democratic unions and establish an atmosphere where anarchist ideas are listened to with respect but they also organise and fight in a way that breaks down the divisions into leaders and led, doers and watchers.

Political levy

In Ireland - and indeed in many other countries - the trade unions have formal links with social democratic parties. The largest general unions in Ireland are affiliated to the Labour Party. In truth however the Labour Party has never enjoyed the electoral support of the majority of trade unionists. Properly speaking it is the party not of trade unionists but of the trade union bureaucracy.

Such political affiliation usually has the effect of aiding and abetting passivity, with the union leaderships unwilling to take action against a government such as the current coalition because of the Labour Party's position in government. During times when the Labour Party is in opposition they can argue against taking up issues outside the workplace on the grounds that 'that is what the Labour Party is for'.

The concept, however, of a political levy is not one with which we would disagree. However, instead of being paid into the coffers of a political party which does nothing to advance the interests of the working class, the money raised by this levy should remain under the control of the rank-and-file to be used to fund direct action on political issues. We seek at all times to mobilise the strength of the trade union movement on such issues. This involves the raising of political issues at section and branch level through arguing for sponsorship of/support for specific demonstrations. It also means proposing resolutions on issues such as repressive legislation/Travellers' rights/gay rights, etc. This has the dual effect of raising issues, thus confronting some of those misconceptions/conservative ideas which many trade union members might have on some of these issues, and also raising the profile of particular campaigns. It might prove easier to build support for a particular demonstration/picket, for example, if it has the formal backing of a local Trades Council. It is important however that the raising of such issues does not become a ritualistic game between competing left groups each trying to 'out-radical' the other. Such resolutions



I'm afraid we will all have to tighten our belts

should be linked to some action, no matter how minimal it may be.

Building opposition

As I have said earlier in the article, WSM members see trade union activity as one of our most important ongoing activities. Our perspectives for activity within the unions are centred on encouraging workers to take up the fight against the bosses, against state interference and against the trade union bureaucracy. Therefore the most important area of our activity is at rank-and-file level. No member of the WSM would, for example, accept any unelected position which would entail having power over the membership. Members who are elected as shop stewards view that role as that of delegate rather than 'representative' and would look for a mandate from the members on all issues.

Within the current structure of the trade union movement, the most effective way of building an effective opposition to the bureaucrats is through the building of a rank-and-file movement - a movement within the unions of militant workers who are prepared to fight independently of the bureaucracy and against it if necessary. Such a movement cannot however be willed into existence. If it could be so, or if ritualistic calls for its creation were sufficient, a rank-and-file movement capable of taking on the bureaucracy would surely exist in Ireland. Practically all groups/parties on the left have at one time or another issued strident calls for the creation of a rank-

and-file movement. However, particularly at times such as this when the level of rank-and-file activity is probably at an all-time low, there is a need to do more than simply issue calls for its creation.

What is needed in the here-and-now is the building of a solidarity network, in essence the laying of the foundation for a rank-and-file movement. A political reality which is often ignored is the fact that a rank-and-file movement - one with real bite and a genuine base - only comes about as a result of rank-and-file activity and confidence, not the other way around.⁽¹¹⁾

To sum up, trade unions are not and were never set up to be revolutionary organisations. However, from within trade union struggle will arise the embryo of the workers' councils of the future. Towards this end we push all the time for rank-and-file independence from the bureaucracy.

We see our role in trade union struggle as being working for the unification of the different sectional struggles into an awareness of the overall class struggle. Further tasks are to act as a collective memory for the movement (i.e., learning from and being able to explain the lessons of past struggles), to challenge the politics of reformism and Leninism within the movement and to explain and popularise anarcho-communist ideas. In addition, we extend solidarity to groups of workers in struggles, at all times encouraging self-activity and helping to develop workers' confidence in their own abilities. In short, our role is that of a 'leadership of ideas', as opposed to a leadership of elite individuals.

Footnotes

- (1) Quoted in "Anarchism" by Daniel Guerin, P.34
- (2) SIPTU = Services Industrial Professional Technical Union, Ireland's largest trade union
- (3) Impact = Ireland's largest public sector trade union
- (4) CWU = Communications Workers Union
- (5) INTO = Irish National Teachers Organisation
- (6) ITGWU = Irish Transport and General Workers Union
- (7) FWUI = Federated Workers Union of Ireland which split from the ITGWU in 1922. The ITGWU and the FWUI merged to form SIPTU in 1990
- (8) SIPTU is the most bureaucratic and least democratic union in Ireland, its formation in 1990 was a model in how it should be done - from the bureaucrats' point of view!
- (9) NBRU = National Bus and Railworkers Union
- (10) See, for example, "Syndicalism - its strengths and weaknesses" in "Red and Black Revolution 1" (October '94)
- (11) For a fuller analysis of our position on this, see "Trade Union Fightback - the lessons to be learned", in "Red and Black Revolution 1"

Constructive Anarchism: The Debate On The Platform

This pamphlet from Monty Miller Press in Australia gathers together some of the early documents that emerged in the anarchist movement in response to the publication in 1926 of *The Organisation Platform Of The Libertarian Communists*. The *Platform*, as it was to become known, was written and produced in Paris by the Dielo Truda (Workers' Cause) Group, among whose members were Nester Makhno, Ida Mett and Peter Arshinoff. Makhno, Arshinoff and Mett were by that time in exile in Paris from the repression and persecution that had followed the Bolsheviks' rise to power in Russia. All had fought and participated in the Russian Revolution.

Though written with this in mind, the *Platform* did not seek to address the specific problems experienced in Russia. Rather it concerned itself in the main with the realities of the then existing anarchist movement. The opening paragraph described its predicament as follows:

"It's very significant that in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas...and...the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for libertarian communism, the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything, and has appeared very often in the history of working class struggles as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor."

It went on, in the next paragraph, to pointedly state:

"This contradiction ...has its explanation in a number of causes, of which the most important... is the absence of organisational principles and practices in the... movement."

As the other documents in this pamphlet show *The Platform* became, almost immediately, a subject for debate. Though written by persons who, undoubtedly, had the best interests of the movement at heart, it nevertheless became an object of scorn and was attacked. Maximoff, another Russian exile and author of the longest (and most long-winded) reply to the *Platform* (included in this Monty Miller edition), was careful to use words such as 'childish' and 'primitive' in his descriptions of the arguments made by the Platformists. In doing this he hardly served his cause well, and his contribution, to my mind, is by far the weakest, and of little value even now. The other two main 'views' (also included here) are that of Malatesta, the Italian anarchist (then imprisoned by Mussolini), and that of another grouping of Russian exiles among whom was Voline. Though both Malatesta and this group did oppose the main thrust of *The Platform*, they did so in a well-intentioned and informative way.

So what were the issues that *The Platform* raised, and why were they so contentious?

Though the *Platform* was written with a practical agenda in mind, it is concerned throughout with questions of a theoretical nature, and with the implications of these. These theoretical questions have either not been addressed adequately in the anarchist movement in the past or they have not been addressed at all. One of the key questions is this: If, as anarchists, we are primarily concerned with achieving a free socialist society, then how can we proceed towards achieving this aim without abandoning our libertarian character? Since organisation is indispensable to achieve any real results, how do we preserve libertarian politics in an organisation and at the same time move forward?

Such a question is far from mute. And the question, moreover, is of importance not just to anarchists but to all libertarian socialists. Revolution raises special problems for libertarian **as opposed to** authoritarian socialists, a point that has become plainly obvious with the defeat of the two key revolutions of this century: Russia and Spain.

The Platformists were committed anarchists. As such they were concerned with an issue that almost always comes to the fore in any revolutionary situation. This is the relationship between the revolutionary minority and the mass of people. Firstly is such a distinction valid i.e. between the revolutionary minority and the large mass of people? The Platformists say yes. How is the relationship to be described? Would it be possible to ignore it? If not what is important in it, relative to the overall aim of a revolution: freedom?

There are other questions too: What ideas do people take into a revolution with them? Does everyone overnight become spontaneously anti-authoritarian or must a struggle 'to win hearts and minds' take place even within a fully fledged revolution? How should anarchists deal with profoundly authoritarian ideas that also appear to be revolutionary (Leninism)? Should it ig-

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more such ideas? Should it confront them? If anarchists confront them, is that method of action in itself authoritarian, and counterproductive to the spirit of the revolution?

These questions are crucial issues of revolution, according to the Platformists - and they are right of course. The issue of preserving the libertarian character of revolution while at the same time putting in place a new means for economic and social administration is **the main problem** not yet solved in any revolution, this century or any other. Mass movements constantly throw up forms of grass-roots democracy that could indeed be the basis for a new society: the Factory Committees in Russia, the collectives in Spain, etc. Yet, time and again, these forms of revolutionary organisation have been overrun before their existence has been consolidated and extended.

Perhaps because of their experience in Russia, the Platformists were unashamedly pro-anarchist. One of their key conclusions (in the *Platform*) goes as follows:

"More than any other concept, anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution, for it is only on the theoretical base of anarchism that the social revolution can succeed in the complete emancipation of labour".

The basis for this claim, that was in effect to become a key contention of the *Platform*,

**ORGANISATIONAL
PLATFORM OF
THE LIBERTARIAN
COMMUNISTS**





Makhno and Alexander Berkman in Paris in 1927

is that anarchist ideas articulate crucial aspects of revolutionary method: in terms of advocating self-management, in terms of linking means and ends, and in terms of advocating participatory or grass-roots democracy. For these reasons, the Platformists argued, anarchist ideas are the most advanced ideas of revolutions (or to put it another way the practical tools necessary to win revolution). This claim - by no means trivial - earned the Platformists the ignominy of being described as 'Bolsheviks', or 'bolshevised-anarchists' - slurs without parallel in the anarchist movement (it must be said).

How is this central assertion of the Platformists - that "*anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution*" - to be judged? Is it un-anarchist? Is it arrogant? Is it a recipe for authoritarianism? Though Malatesta, Voline and others accepted that the Platformists were 'sincere' in their polemic and, to a point, honest about the state of the anarchist movement, they nevertheless saw in this claim of the *Platform's* an attempt to 'lead the masses'. This remains a central issue in the dispute - even today.

It is rarely said - except by the obtuse - that the Platformists were consciously authoritarian; such a reading of their efforts cannot, in any case, be borne out. What is more usually claimed however is that the Platformists were 'enamoured with' or perhaps 'unduly affected' by authoritarian notions - perhaps because of their 'close encounter' with Bolshevism during the Russian Revolution. We cannot know for sure - not now anyway. However, what we can know - or, at least, can still discover - is what was at issue in the debate in the past. This is illuminating to say the least! Today, in some quarters, the Platformists are often dismissed as 'want-to-be leaders'. Yet this was not where Malatesta took issue - he accepted that anarchists should take the lead. The question, as Malatesta saw it, was not *whether* to lead, but rather *how* you should lead - a fairly important dis-

inction in the argument. Malatesta posed two 'alternatives': Either we "*provide leadership by counsel and example leaving people themselves to... quite freely adopt our methods and solutions...*" or we "*can also lead by taking command, that is, by becoming the government...*" He asked the Platformists, "*In which manner do you wish to lead?*"

Despite many efforts and many letters on the subject (in particular between Malatesta and Makhno) this question could not be clarified to either side's satisfaction, in part because there was an additional issue for dispute - this was the issue of organisation principles (which in themselves make up a significant part of the original *Platform* document). In his letter of reply to Makhno, Malatesta stated (Document 3):

"...it is clear that to attain their ends the anarchist organisations must, in their constitution and operation, be in harmony with the principles of anarchism, that is, they must in no way be polluted by authoritarianism..."

A statement that was in effect to become the nub of the debate: did the organisational form that the Platformists propose contradict basic anarchist ideas?

The Platformists were without any doubt intensely focused in their objectives, and it was this as much as any experience in Russia that was to mark out their proposals about actual organisation. As they saw it, The General Union of Anarchists - the title they chose for their organisation - should be a collective body of anarchists in spirit as well as in operation; the GUA should clearly distinguish between collective activity and individual acts of rebellion (indeed it should have no part in the latter, they argued); and it should seek to operate efficiently and democratically. In single-mindedly adopting this framework the Platformists - in effect - rejected the notion that efficiency, democracy, and a unity of theory and practice were un-anar-

chist ideas and incompatible with anarchist organisation. They said: *we can be efficient and effective, and we can be libertarian, at the same time - there is no contradiction.* The debate, oddly enough, still rages.

There is a final matter that is not touched on in this Rebel Worker publication, though it is, of course, central: this is Spain. Written ten years before the events of the Spanish Revolution, the *Platform* appears on first reading to be contradicted by what was to occur there. Indeed the *Platform's* opening description about the 'state of the anarchist movement' appears in sharp contrast to the mass movement that was then emerging in Spain, and that was to flower in '36. Moreover the 'mass' nature of the Spanish anarchist movement and its broad basis in the working-class seem if anything to be the antithesis of what the Platformists were arguing was the norm. How are we to view the *Platform* against the example of Spain?

As the Monty Miller Press Introduction points out, there *were* certain aspects of the Russian anarchist movement that marked the *Platform*, in terms of its overall prognosis. Anarcho-syndicalism which had only shallow roots in the Russian working-class was already by 1926 deeply embedded in Spain. Anarcho-syndicalism was, by virtue of its membership, organisationally driven and clear in terms of its objectives. It succeeded because of this. However if wrong in an important way about Spain, the *Platform* was right in a crucial way. The eventual outcome of the revolution of '36 clearly brought home the very deficiencies the *Platform* had underlined: *make anarchism the leading ideas of the revolution or lose.* It was a choice the CNT-FAI could not make in the end.

The importance of the *Platform* as a document of revolutionary anarchism has become lost in invective over the years. It is a poor reward that we have for Makhno, Archinoff and Mett! Monty Miller Press are to be commended for this re-issue, but also for including the various replies and letters that followed on its heels. The debate is important still, and lest we forget why, consider, on this the anniversary of 1937 - the year of defeat for the Spanish Revolution - the conclusion of Jose Perriats, the anarchist historian aligned with the CNT. In *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* he says:

"Anarchism is largely responsible for its own bad reputation in the world. It did not consider the thorny problem of means and ends. In their writing, many anarchists conceived of a miraculous solution to the problems of revolution. We fell easily into this trap in Spain. We believed that once the dog is dead, the rabies is over. We proclaimed a full-blown revolution without worrying about the many complex problems that revolution brings with it"

The Platformists, it has to be said, would probably have agreed.

The Labour Movement & the Internet



(1997 Pluto Press) £14.99
paperback, £45.00 hardback

For business, international solidarity is not a far off dream but an integral part of its day to day existence. In capitalism there is, of course, competition, but it is in all their interests to promote low wages, high unemployment, ease of movement of currency and so forth. These days production is located where it is cheapest and products are sold where they will make the most. They have access to communication and information exchange beyond the dreams of most people and they can move millions of pounds at the touch of a button. They make good use of their international banking 'solidarity' to maintain an impressively stable climate where the rich get more powerful and the vast majority become more dis-empowered. They are numerically much smaller than us but extremely well organised, well informed and -most importantly- aware of their own interests as a class.

Ordinary folk on the other hand remain trapped. We are trapped by our lack of access and control, lack of access to media, means of communication and the ears of government. We are also divided by multiple practical, ideological and cultural differences. It is possible, occasionally, to get really impressive solidarity, for example the Liverpool docks' strike(1) but to make this permanent and on-going is much more difficult.

The Internet

The internet opens new vistas for cheap communication, conferencing and publishing. Eric Lee poses the question: can this be used to reinvigorate the world "labour movement."?(2)

He first goes through the various tools available; E-mail, on-line databases, discussion groups, usenet news groups, on line chat and publishing, including the World Wide Web. As this article is not an explanation of the internet, I certainly won't intimidate you by going into any of these in any more detail. Suffice to say that his introduction is precise and easy to grasp, better written than many textbooks on the net are.

Pioneers

The book then deals with the history of how "telematics"(3) have been used by the labour movement. This was new and fascinating territory for this reviewer. Our bosses love to give the impression that workers react to new technology with mistrust and suspicion. What would they say about a character like Chip Levinson?

Levinson was the general secretary of the International Chemical Workers' Federation in the 1970s.(4) He spent much time wrestling with the problem of the growing power of transnational corporations (TNCs). In 1972 the internet was a top secret military project known as ARPNET (The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) linking a few military and sci-

ence research institutes in the U.S. Knowing nothing of its existence didn't stop Levinson speculating on the idea of internationally linking unions using computers. In his book *International Trade Unionism* he wrote that;

"Only a computerised information bank could



possibly keep bargainers and union strategists tuned into the strengths and weaknesses of companies and provide them with the current data on financial facts and figures, productions, inventories, wages, hours of work, vacations, pensions and all the other factors involved."

Though the technology still hadn't come on stream (he hoped to use telex machines(5)), like a true pioneer he was already formulating concepts that could only become reality in the future.

The first practical, working "Labournet" was set up in 1981 by Larry Kuehn. He was the president of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, a union representing 40,000 secondary and primary teachers across a sprawling province in Canada. Kuehn and Arnie Mayers, the union's communication officer, bought 11 "dumb" terminals for the 11 members of the union's executive. These were just keyboards and thermal printers (no screens even) connected by 300 bytes per second modems (about 1% of the speed of a typical 1990's

modem). After 2 years all the union's locals(6) were hooked up and the system stayed in operation until 1990.

It got plenty of use. The union launched a province wide strike in 1983. Strike news rushed up and down the lines, got printed and photocopied and handed to picketers. The teachers quickly found themselves to be much better informed than their bosses, discussions and conferences could be held over the lines and a news service (which could be given on disk to local papers) and contract database were launched province wide. The system proved so effective that the bosses paid it the ultimate inverse tribute, quickly rushing out to get one of their own!

The Present; onto the infobahn

Many such networks and bulletin boards were set up in the 1980s and plenty are still going strong. Initially all these networks were closed and served by central computer(s) or servers which had information and space for conferences and news groups. Bulletin boards like this are dialled through a modem and telephone line, generally for the price of a local call. Many, like Fidonet in America, now also have links to the internet.

Since about 1988/89 more and more people are dialling into the internet itself through "service providers." You dial directly to these organisations and they, for a charge over and above your phone call, hook you into the net.

OK, a very brief technical explanation. The Internet is not thousands of computers linked by modems and phone line. The net itself has a massive thick fiber optic backbone capable of conveying millions of messages including sound and video images at extremely high speeds. Your phone call connects you to your "service provider" who then has a direct line onto the internet. Most modern use of electronic communication focuses on the internet itself, though thousands of local networks exist independently of it and some can hook into, it though they may not get all the available services.

The author discusses some of the current internet use by unions and union federations and also how it has been used by strikers to explain their case and has often led to real solidarity actions in other countries. Eric Lee himself set up "New International Review" in 1977, but his politics would appear to be, at best, social democratic to judge from his occasional dispar-

aging use of the term "hard left". So there is no information here on revolutionary or syndicalist union federations. Unfortunately, he focuses entirely on the large reformist federations. None the less there are some startling examples of how much can be done with the new technology.

One such is the International Transport Workers' Federation. This London based Federation is made up of 400 unions in 100 countries, representing about 5 million workers. It was one of the first to adopt E-mail and use on-line databases in the mid 1980s. They have gone to the time and expense of leasing their own internet connection and could set up as service providers in their own right. ITF inspectors can now telenet into their on-line database from any net connected machine and get information on ships covered by ITF agreements. They were also the first international secretariat with their own web page (<http://www.itf.org.uk>). Their monthly publication is now available to download in 5 languages. They also use the page to publicise major disputes involving other unions as they happen.

The Federation is now in negotiations with the International Marine Satellite Organisation to lease satellite time allowing internet access to seamen in virtually every cargo ship in the world!(7)

Web strikes

There are now several examples of use of the internet, especially the Web, in disputes. The Liverpool dockers web site is perhaps the best known example. This was set up for the dockers by Greg Coyne, the moderator of the Union-d(8) list in Britain. Initially he says in the book, it was:

"more of a stunt than an organising tool."

However the site has been a success bringing in not just solidarity mentions but action by the likes of the Japanese dockers' union and the San Francisco Longshoresmen's union local.

Problems and Possibilities

There is little doubt that the internet offers massive advantages for transnational organisation. The bosses have not been slow to grasp this. These advantages are mainly to do with cheapness and potentially high circulation.

On-line publishing simply involves getting space on an internet connected server and then adding some "tags" to your text graphic and sound files. Gone are the cost of paper, printing and circulation.(9)

A second area which is rapidly becoming a reality is cheap on-line conferencing, where international meetings can be held without the time and expense of travel. It is already possible to have live discussions using Inter Relay Chat (IRC) software. With cheap digital cameras, faster connection speeds and cheap software, face to face video conferencing won't just be the property of big business.

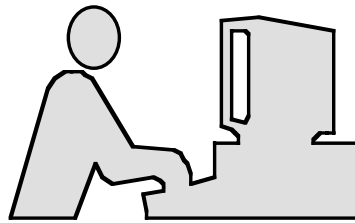
It is, of course, only fair to point out two drawbacks to the net. Firstly, transmission is insecure and most messages are easily traceable.(10) Secondly, and probably more importantly, the internet is very much a plaything of the well off and middle class, with the USA being hugely over-represented and many parts of the world hardly getting a look in. Even in those countries where there is good connectivity it is still very much a plaything of college kids.

The Future

The author has some grand visions for the years to come. One is the idea of an on-line daily labour paper with archiving and a live discussion forum. He also dreams of an accredited Labour University offering courses from negotiating a contract to labour law and history.

As union rights are under attack all over the world, unions have to respond promptly to violations and in a co-ordinated way, like Amnesty International's "Urgent Action Network".

He gives an example of how this might work. A trade union activist employed by a leading TNC disappears, presumed kidnapped, in Brazil. His union send all his details and a photo to HQ in Rio. The



photograph is scanned, and the information entered into a standard form, and the lot is emailed to the International Secretariat in Europe. The information is sent to two mailing lists. One is for all Portuguese speaking unions world wide, the second for workers in the TNC concerned. Letters are sent and articles are written, phone calls are made, Company HQ is picketed. Within hours a phone call is made to someone in Brazil and the activist appears bruised and battered but alive.

Pipedreams? Perhaps, however email is already used in this way (though without quite such speed and co-ordination). The net was central to highlighting the case of the EZLN who otherwise might have been wiped out quite early on in their history.

The Verdict

A book combining the Labour Movement and the internet could be a potentially boring one! This certainly isn't the case with Eric Lee's book, it is well written and non-technical. The slant though is reformist throughout, and he always makes great play on the role of leaders and executives.(11)

Overall, though, a good and important read. If you haven't the £15.00 handy why not get your union branch or local library to

order it for you and have a look at the Web site (<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2808/>)

FOOTNOTES

(1) An even more impressive example was the International Gathering in Chiapas in the Mexican Jungle last Summer. This was facilitated by ordinary poor peasants in Chiapas who, despite living in appalling conditions themselves, took the time to feed, accommodate and organise all facilities for 3000 people from all over the world to talk about capitalism and how to beat it!

(2) His term!

(3) "The interaction of all types of data-processing, electronic information and communication" is how he defines this term in the glossary at the back.

(4) This is one of the secretariats which are the global organisations of national trade unions. The ICF no longer exists having since been incorporated into the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (<http://www.icem.org>).

(5) "Through a compatible programme these data banks could be linked by telex to ICF headquarters and information rapidly transmitted to affiliates on request.": Charles Levinson "International Trade Unionism"(1972)

(6) Union branches in USA and Canada

(7) This use of satellites is also a possibility for unions in developing countries - it's expensive but cheaper than building a telephone network from scratch.

(8) There are many such discussion groups on the internet. Some are open Usenet groups, available to anyone with the right software. Better discussion is to be had on closed groups of which Union-d is one. On these lists the groups are moderated and you have to subscribe. The discussion is E-mailed to participants and is usually much more in-depth than on the open news groups which tend to have a lot of noise but little discussion. For details on anarchist discussion groups see the WSM site (<http://www.Geocities.com/CapitolHill/2149>).

(9) The key to high circulation is to do a good "advertising" job for your new site.

(10) There is free software available such as PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) but it's not that user-friendly and most people wouldn't be bothered. Encryption is a big issue on the net as governments, like the US government, demand the keys to the encryption codes.

(11) For example, on page 103 he tells us that (in the USA) "more important, at the end of 1995, a new leadership was elected in the national trade union centre, the AFL-CIO, which promises to organise millions of workers into trade unions and restore Labour's power and prestige".....Don't hold your breath Eric!

Anarchism on the Internet

PDF version prepared
from 1997 files in Feb
2001

<http://surf.to/anarchism>

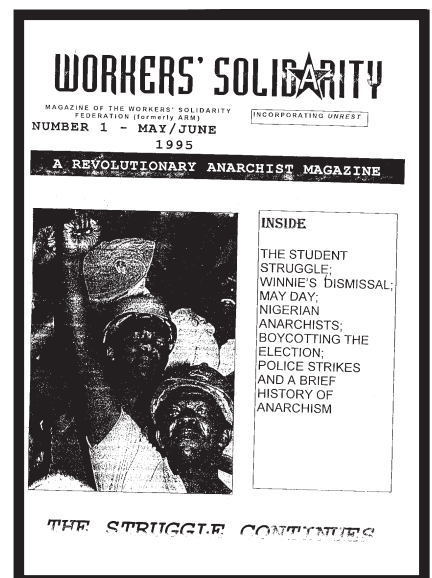
Anarchism & the 'new' South Africa

An interview with the South African Workers Solidarity Federation

and which incorporated the remnants of the Industrial Workers of Africa) adopted the famous IWW preamble that a struggle must go on between the working class and the employing class until the workers seize the means of production through their industrial organisations. This is not to say that the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union was anarcho-syndicalist, it was not. The Union was dominated by a clique who used it as a platform for their nationalist politics and capitalist aspirations (and activities) and who expelled all Communist Party members in 1926 (after a campaign of 'white-baiting'). As far as we know, it was only in the 1990s that anarchist and syndicalist ideas re-emerged in an explicit and organised form in South Africa.

Q. So let's talk about the 1990s. What was your attitude to the elections in 1994? Did you see them as a landmark in South African history?

A. Definitely. It was Bakunin who said, "*It is true that the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy, for at least in the republic there are moments when, though always exploited, the people are not oppressed, while in monarchies they are never anything else*". Bakunin's statements are as relevant to the South African today as they were over a hundred years ago when he wrote them. Under apartheid the black working class and poor were always op-



Q. Most readers of *Red and Black Revolution* will be familiar with the main organisations on the left in South Africa, such as the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Can you tell us something about the tradition of libertarian ideas and struggle?

A. Anarchism and Syndicalism do (or at least did) have an important place in South African history, although this is typically hidden or obscured by official and "radical" versions of the past. Before the founding of the SACP in 1921, libertarian ideas were common on the revolutionary left. A section of the US syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World, was established here in 1911, growing out of an organisation called the Industrial Workers Union. The Industrial Workers Union, in turn, was set up by the conservative craft-dominated (and, one must add, racist) Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council (WTLC) at the behest of Tom Mann, the British revolutionary, who visited South Africa in 1910. The IWW (SA) was aligned to the Chicago (anti-parliamentary section) of the IWW (US), and the *Voice of Labour* - a radical local paper with which it was closely associated - carried articles by American anarchist-syndicalists like Vincent St. John. The IWW (SA) mainly organised amongst unskilled poor Whites (and also among groups like the bookmakers). They launched several strikes but collapsed in or about 1913. Some syndicalists were also active **within** the WTLC, although it must be stressed that they opposed that organisation's racist politics - for example, they organised amongst Black miners as well as White.

With the outbreak of the First World War, a number of revolutionary socialists, including anarchists and syndicalists, came together to form the International Socialist League, a body which opposed the pro-war stance of the Second International (represented in SA by the racist Labour Party). Although the International Socialist League (ISL) is typically seen as a Marxist party, and as the forerunner of the SACP, its internal politics were far more complex. For example, the ISL's paper carried advertisements for Kropotkin's

Conquest of Bread and other non-Marxist socialist writings, yet none for works by Marx or Engels. The dominant position in the ISL seems to have been "DeLeonite", that is syndicalism which supports **both** revolutionary trade unionism and participation in parliament. This sort of chameleon-like ideology probably provided a basis for unity amongst the ISL's diverse membership, which included a vociferous anarchist-anarcho-syndicalist grouping which opposed all involvement in capitalist elections. Between 1917-8, the DeLeonites and anarchist-syndicalists took the initiative in organising the Industrial Workers of Africa (initially called the IWW) which was the first Black trade union in South African history.

The remnants of the Industrial Workers of Africa played an important role in the Black worker struggles of 1919-20. In about 1918 or 1919, the anarchist-syndicalists left the ISL and set up the Industrial Socialist League, which was mainly based near Cape Town. The Industrial Socialist League seems to have had some success organising amongst non-White workers in this area, and it maintained an office in the ghettos of the Cape Flats. In Durban, syndicalists were involved in a successful attempt to organise workers of Asian descent. Ironically, despite its libertarian politics, the Industrial Socialist League renamed itself the Communist Party of South Africa in 1920 and applied for affiliation to the Third International, as did the ISL. However, the Industrial Socialist League failed to accept the Third International's conditions for membership which included a willingness to engage in electoral activity and work within reformist unions. The Industrial Socialist League eventually merged (a few militants excepted) with the ISL to form the official SACP.

Once the SACP got established in 1921, Marxist ideas came to predominate on the revolutionary left, although echoes of the older libertarian movement could still be found. For example, the 1925 constitution of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (a massive Black trade union that dominated the political scene in the 1920s

pressed. Since the April 1994 elections, we are able to experience moments of limited freedoms. While we consider the current government to be an improvement on the racist apartheid regime, as anarchists we also realise that as long as we are ruled by governments and capitalists, the working class and the poor will never be free; they will remain enslaved. Bakunin went on to say, *"But whilst giving preference to the republic we are nevertheless forced to recognise and proclaim that, whatever the form of government, whilst human society remains divided into different classes because of the hereditary inequality of occupations, wealth, education and privileges, there will always be minority government and the inevitable exploitation of the majority by that minority."* That is the situation in South Africa today.

Q. The official result of the election was a resounding win for the ANC - they obtained 63% of the vote. There must have been high hopes at the time?

A. Yes. The high voter turnout (estimates say that 96% of people voted!) indicated a great degree of confidence in the vote to bring about change in South Africa. When the election results were announced, massive parties were held to celebrate the political changes. Perhaps of more significance, the move towards a democracy greatly increased the confidence of the black working class. In the month following the election, South Africa was rocked by a strike wave which effected just about every section of the economy from mining to communications, transport, clothing, food, commercial, and the public sector. In most of these strikes workers clearly displayed that were unwilling to accept racist practices on the shop-floor such as wage inequalities and racist supervisors.

Q. How did the Government respond to such optimism and direct action?

A. Well, to take the Pick n' Pay strike as just one example. The police shot at striking workers, let their dogs loose into the crowd, and heartily beat workers without any provocation. There were also reports that the police tortured some of the women workers. The police attacks on workers were backed up by court injunctions against the union. And then there were mass arrests on charges of trespassing!

Q. An argument is often made - at least over here, anyway - that the ANC has had its hands tied in terms of opting for any real 'radical solutions' to the problems of South Africa. For instance, it is said that the ANC has no option but to obey the 'financial markets' and that if it doesn't there will a run on the South African Rand and so forth. What's your response to this?

A. The problem with this kind of argument is that it suggests that the ANC has some sort of radical programme of redistribution which has had to go on the back-burner because of this or that constraint. But the ANC cannot claim that 'the economy made them do it'. The ANC was not, and is not,

anti-capitalist or anti-business. In fact they are ardent free marketeers. As Thabo Mbeki 'joked' at the launch of a recent macro-economic plan : *"call me a Thatcherite"*!! Another example of this is that the ANC government is implementing GATT policies faster than the GATT actually requires the South African government to do so.

Q. Yet Nelson Mandela was talking about 'transforming' South Africa if he won the election. Clearly he had something else in mind - maybe it was electricity transformers!

A. It is necessary to consider to what extent the ANC planned to redistribute wealth in the first place. The ANC historically called for some welfare measures, but never claimed to be anti-capitalist. At its most "radical", the ANC was in favour of nothing more than a mixed economy. In the 1950s, Mandela countered claims by anti-communists in the ANC that the Freedom Charter was a "socialist document" alien to African nationalism by stating

...the ANC has shifted from a welfarist mixed economy position to an increasingly blatant ... neo-liberal position

that while *"the Charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature it [was]... a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis"*, and that the dispossession of the "mining kings" and "land barons" would open up *"fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class"* who will for the *"first time... have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mines and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."*

Q. What was your attitude to the ANC during the anti-apartheid years?

A. While the ANC was still a fighting mass movement, we defended it as a progressive force but we never had illusions in it - we see the need to build an independent political alternative to the ANC tradition. It is important to note that the hard-line anti-communists in the ANC later went on to form the Pan-Africanist Congress, often seen as the militant wing of the anti-apartheid movement!

With reference to the ANC's lack of delivery in terms of the provision of housing, land and job creation, the ANC **does** argue that it is constrained by the massive legacy

of apartheid and economic conditions. It also continually stresses that global economic competitiveness, foreign investment, and economic growth, are important pre-conditions for being able to address inequality and poverty, and raise the standard of living of the poor and working class.

However it needs to be noted that since the start of the 1990s, the ANC has shifted from a welfarist mixed economy position to an increasingly blatant free-market or neo-liberal position. Its main idea is that if we all participate in making the economy grow, by, for example, accepting low wages and unsafe working conditions, the bosses will get richer, and a few crumbs will eventually fall to the poor and the working class. On several occasions Mandela himself has told workers to *"tighten their belts"* in order to facilitate economic growth. Therefore the ANC-led government blames limited economic growth, the country's inability to compete globally and low worker productivity for their failure to deliver.

Q. So lots of promises before the elections but little of any substance afterwards? It sounds familiar.

A. There has definitely been a lot of disappointment on the ground. The RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) is a bit of a joke, and the politicians have gone to pains to stave off criticisms that nothing has happened. They point to a few projects here and there where there has been electrification or the like.

Unfortunately, disappointment does not always translate into anger. Instead, there is a definite tendency towards demoralisation and political apathy on the part of the working-class. Struggles do continue to break out - that is inherent in a racist-capitalist system - but these are often fragmented, and also often trapped within the symbols and traditions of mainstream organisations like the ANC. This reflects the absence of a clear ideological alternative.

Q. How have the South African Communist Party reacted to the ANC's imposition of austerity measures and to the lack of wealth re-distribution?

A. The SACP remains a very loyal partner to the ANC. In fact they have argued that they are the left wing of the ANC and boasted at their 75th anniversary that their policies are the same as those of the ANC *"only five degrees to the left"*! But in practice the SACP has accepted a two stage theory of socialism since the 1920s. They consider the ANC government to be in the process of the so-called "National Democratic Revolution" which is seen as a necessary step towards socialism. As a result the SACP does not really offer any fundamental criticism or alternative to the ANC. SACP members on the whole are fairly demobilised and direction-less at present; when they are active, it's basically to support ANC reforms which are seen as inherently progressive and as laying the basis

for more radical change later.

As for socialism itself? The SACP lacks any clear vision of a non-capitalist society right now. Its latest policy documents claim that there will be *no* rupture between capitalism and socialism - one will just sort of slide into the other through the "*deepening of democratic reforms*". Clearly, the SACP has moved from a Stalinist position to social democracy (although of course it denies it!).

Q. It would seem from what you are saying that the position of the large majority will probably worsen in the coming years. Even relatively minor reform appears to have stalled.

A. We have no illusions that capitalism is going to help the workers and the poor out - that must be emphasised. Capitalism, in its racist apartheid form, was the main cause of the conditions that the majority of the population live in. Capitalism in South Africa was built on the genocide, enslavement and super-exploitation of the Asian and African people of this country. It is impossible to deal with the massive inequalities within South Africa through the market, that is, without radically transforming society. It is only with an economy geared towards people's needs, rather than profit, that we will be able to solve poverty, the housing shortage, and the supply of essential services, etc. Capitalism and the State are the main cause of racism, and they always create new forms of racism: for example, there are current attempts to whip up a tide of xenophobia against immigrants from other African countries. Clearly, the solution to this situation is a revolutionary class struggle by the Black working-class and that minority of white workers who adopt progressive positions against the ruling-class, which now of course includes the emerging Black bourgeoisie. That is why we raise the slogan, "*Black Liberation Through Class War*".

Q. As a matter of interest how large are class differences within the various colour groups?

A. Class divisions are immense within each race: the richest 20% of African households increased their real incomes by over 40% between 1975 and 1991, whilst the incomes of the poorest 40% of African households decreased by nearly 40% over the same period (These figures come from the *Mail and Guardian*). A similar decrease in incomes was reported for the poorest 40% of Whites. According to another estimate, the wealthiest 10% of African households have incomes over 60 times those of the poorest 10%, compared to ratios of roughly 30 times amongst Whites, Coloureds and Indians (SA Institute of Race Relations 1996). The idea that all Black people share the same interests and conditions is a myth peddled by the nationalist leaders and the bourgeois press.

Q. What about Cyril Ramaphosa, the former head of the mineworkers union and COSATU? He's in business now, isn't he?



How has news of this been received in the townships? It must make for a lot of cynicism!?

A. No, there hasn't been much cynicism concerning Cyril Ramaphosa's move into business. Ramaphosa has justified his move into the business sector as a step towards "*black empowerment*". The notion of "*black empowerment*" is generally accepted as a means to overcome the apartheid legacy and is broad enough to incorporate a number of different interpretations. The illusions in "*our own*" bourgeoisie operating in the best interests of the masses are fostered by nationalist politics which claim that race, rather than class is the key division in society. His move into business (heavily sponsored by White capital, it should be said) has not been problematic. Like the rest of the rapidly emerging Black bourgeoisie, Ramaphosa claims that his own enrichment is part of Black liberation, and that it will benefit Black working and poor people.

This is nonsense, of course. Capital accumulation can only benefit the few at the expense of the many who produce the wealth in the first place. The WSF is against "*black empowerment*" which is reserved for black people in the middle and upper classes. This kind of "*empowerment*" is built on the exploitation of the majority of the Black population - the working-class. "*Black empowerment*" should mean an improvement in the lives of the majority of black people - that is the poor and the workers. And "*black empowerment*" for the working-class can only come about through the abolition of capitalism

and the State and the establishment of libertarian communism/ Anarchism.

Q. Just to conclude on this particular area. How has the largely White business sector taken to the changes since 1994? I'm talking about the big mine-owners here - the Oppenheims and so on.

A. The White-dominated business sector love the ANC and Mandela. There was and is a ridiculous illusion amongst parts of the left that capital favoured the historically white political parties and feared the ANC. This is nonsense. The ANC is the party of capital in the very real sense that, firstly, its policies promote business interests and, secondly, a substantial number of ANC leaders (like Ramaphosa and Winnie Mandela) are busying themselves accumulating capital.

Q. Before we go on, you mentioned the land question earlier. Can you tell us a little about this?

A. The land question is a key one. Since 1652, the colonial and apartheid governments have dispossessed the indigenous people of the land in favour of rich White farmers. The bulk of the land, at present, is owned by about 120,000 White farmers. At the same time, 68% of the rural population (mainly African and Coloured working-class people) live in extreme poverty. Conditions on the farms for the working-class and for other exploited categories such as labour tenants, sharecroppers and the remnants of the peasantry are abysmal. Labour control is extremely violent and unions rare - in fact, unionisation was illegal in the agricultural sector before 1995!



Unemployment in rural areas is also very high, and getting worse as machines are used to replace workers. In the old homelands - now integrated into the rest of the country - land is controlled by chiefs - so-called "traditional authorities" - who use this power to extract labour and taxes from working and poor people. They use their connections with the government to enrich themselves and enforce their rule. Women are denied access to land on the grounds of so-called tradition. And heavy use of chemicals on the "White" farms, and land shortages in the reserves, have led to massive environmental degradation.

Despite these terrible conditions, the ANC's land reform policy promises to deliver very little. It is totally inadequate. The land reform policy has three main elements. The first is the establishment of a Land Claims Court to allow people dispossessed by racist laws or "corrupt practices" after 1913 to try to claim their land back. The problem with this plan is that about 90% of the land had already been stolen by this point! Also, many people dispossessed after 1913 are scattered across the country and lack documents to prove their claims. Even worse, the government has promised to buy-out the farmers who lose out in the Land Claims Court.

The second element of the reform programme, ironically called "land redistribution", is based on the so-called "willing-buyer-willing-seller" approach. This means land must be bought on the market when it is available. The State will provide households with a R15,000 subsidy to help buy land. This figure is ludicrously low and will mean that only the emerging Black bourgeoisie will be able to obtain land. In addition, the subsidy is likely to be targeted towards wealthy black farmers and peasants as they are generally regarded by the decision makers as more skilled etc. And land sold on the market will in any case tend to be low quality.

The third, and last, aspect of the land reform programme is "tenure reform". Basically, what this means is that labour tenants and traditional communities will have more secure rights to stay on the land. While more protection for tenants against the constant threat of evictions is clearly a good thing, this kind of reform does nothing to deal with the basic problems of land redistribution, poverty and women's oppression.

The WSF believes the land reform policy will deliver almost nothing to the working-class, although it is quite in line with the interests of White farmers, chiefs, and Black capitalists. We need mass organising on the land to fight for better living and working conditions, and to secure land redistribution.

Q. The youth and school students were very militant over the years in the fight against apartheid. How have they dealt with the lack of real change, and with the disappointments of the last three years?

A. Ever since the 1976 Soweto uprising, school students were most certainly a very militant section of the broader working-class and its struggle against apartheid. Unfortunately, the high school student movement has experienced a deep crisis since the elections, and high school organisations, such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the ANC Youth League, are very weak and directionless today. For example, there are hardly any strongly organised ANCYL branches operating in Soweto today. The student and youth movements are not therefore in a position to adequately respond to the lack of changes. There are some cases of mobilisation and struggle, for example around issues of racist schooling admissions (when joint actions have been organised with teachers' unions), but compared to previous periods, the overall level of action is minimal.

An important exception to these trends has been the student movement in univer-

sities and technical colleges. They have remained very militant and students have consistently fought for the transformation of tertiary education. Black students, who are committed to democratic and equal education for all, have not hesitated to take up mass action against the authoritarian university and technical administrations. In the last year, we have again seen students from all over the country take up the battle against on going racism on campus, financial exclusions, and increasing fees. This sort of activity took a very advanced form at the University of Durban Westville (UDW) where students joined with workers and staff in protest against unfair dismissals. The highest point of the UDW struggle was when workers and students successfully expelled the university management and ran the university for 48 hours.

While the ANC claims to recognise that tertiary education needs to be transformed, they have condemned these student protests. Despite this, the South African Student Congress (SASCO), the spearhead of the militant and progressive student struggle, remains very loyal to the ANC. As a result, there are indications that the SASCO leadership is becoming more reformist and that it has accepted the ANC's reasons for the lack of change within tertiary institutions. For instance, the SASCO leadership have accepted the Education Department's argument that the government will not be able to provide free tertiary education because there are not enough resources.

The WSF believe that as long as SASCO remains tied to the ANC these reformist tendencies within SASCO will continue to grow. We favour the formation of a broad Black-centred student union by progressive student organisations in place of student structures which function as party wings on campuses.

Q. On May Day last year there was a general strike against the ANC government's attempts to introduce some laws that would have curbed trade union power. What has been the outcome of this confrontation?

A. A 24 hour general strike was held on the 30th April (May Day is a public holiday) in protest over the attempt to include the bosses' "right" to lock-out and because of a clause protecting private property in the new constitution. The lock-out is a strategy that bosses use to undermine workers' power by locking striking workers out of the factory/ plant/ shop and hiring scabs. While the right to strike is included in the constitution, workers felt that it was unfair if the lock-out was also included. The

PDF version note

The WSF dissolved in 1999, see <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/africa.html>
PDF version prepared from 1997 files in Feb 2001
<http://surf.to/anarchism>

“right” to lock-out, further extends bosses’ power by directly undermining strikes.

In the case of the property clause, workers felt that as long as private property was protected under the constitution, land redistribution would be undermined as land would have to be bought on the market or the owners compensated at a market price. It has been estimated that up to 90% of workers in some areas participated in the strike, which demonstrates organised workers’ continued willingness to take up the fight against both the bosses and the State (itself a large employer). While workers won their main demand for the lock-out clause to be dropped from the constitution, they lost their demand for the private property clause to be dropped.

Q. What are your impressions of rank and file militancy in South Africa at present? Much of the COSATU leadership are tied to the ANC - I realise that - but what is the grass-roots organisation like?

A. The unions and union federations, especially COSATU, continue to be one of the most powerful forces, apart from the State and capital, within South Africa. This is despite a concerted media campaign portraying organised workers as ‘an elite’.

Just to give some background: There is a high level of unionisation - about 60% of the workforce (outside agriculture) are unionised. There are five main union federations in South Africa, the most important of which are the ANC aligned Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU); the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) which is loosely linked to Africanism/ Black consciousness, and the Federation of South African Labour (FEDSAL), which is mostly white and organises white collar workers. Outside of these you find centres like the South African Confederation of Labour (SACOL), which is the rump of the old racist White-only trade union movement, and the United Workers Union of South Africa, the industrial wing of the reactionary tribalist Inkatha Freedom Party. However, SACOL and UWUSA, with about 50,000 members each are dwarfed by the larger federations: NACTU has about 350,000 members, FEDSAL about 300,000 and COSATU has a massive 1.6 million members. In addition, COSATU is typically much better organised than the other centres, and its affiliates have reasonably strong shop-steward structures.

It is true that COSATU leaders are tied to the ANC. However, these leaders do not necessarily toe the ANC’s neo-liberal line and have adopted a more social democratic approach. COSATU leaders have also been critical of some of the ANC’s policies and have called for mass action against the policies that they disagree with. There are, however, indications that COSATU is becoming more bureaucratic and the leaders more reformist. One example of this, last year, was when COSATU backed down on its threat to call a general strike against

privatisation when the government made some vague promise to consult the trade unions in its “restructuring” of public assets. Needless to say, privatisation has gone ahead anyway. This sort of compromise reflects partly the innate conservatism of paid union officials as a distinct stratum. It also reflects the dominant politics within the unions - COSATU favours a corporatist strategy, a social contract in which it will work alongside the bosses and the State to reconstruct the economy.

only the emerging Black bourgeoisie will be able to obtain land

Q. Sounds awful but very familiar.

A. It is a recipe for disaster, as it will not only drastically increase bureaucratisation in the unions, but it will also tie them into restructuring the capitalist economy (something which can only be done at the expense of ordinary workers). This will further demobilise and demoralise rank-and-file union members. We believe that the unions must remain autonomous of all corporatist and tripartite arrangements. A large section of rank and file workers remain loyal to the ANC. However, this has not necessarily dampened their militancy. Workers have consistently showed a willingness to fight the bosses and the state, even when their unions do not support their strikes. There are also various socialist currents operating in the unions, although it must be admitted that the SACP commands incredible influence and is playing a leading role in tying workers to the ANC and to the union leadership’s corporatist agenda.

Q. In a general sense anarchists are split on the issue of involvement in a union such as COSATU. What position does the WSF take?

A. As we see it the trade union question is a key one for revolutionaries, and it is often dealt with in a very problematic way by libertarian revolutionaries. Many anarchists take a wholly dismissive attitude to the existing unions, and propose that we build brand new revolutionary unions. This is based on the idea that the unions are irredeemably reformist and bureaucratic.

What this argument misses is the class nature of the trade unions. The unions were built to defend and advance the class interests of the workers and the poor. Even the most bureaucratic and reformist union must defend its members’ interests or it will collapse. The unions have massive potential power because they can disrupt production, the source of the bosses’ wealth. They promote class consciousness, solidarity, and confidence because they organise people to fight as working and poor people against the bosses and rulers. It is incorrect to say that the unions ‘serve’ the bosses or capitalism. Even the most ‘progressive’ boss will oppose the unions because they are a challenge to his exploitation of workers. Even the most reformist union cannot be totally ‘incorporated’ into capitalism because capitalism cannot satisfy the needs of workers.

This is not say that the unions as they exist now are perfect - far from it. To a greater or a lesser degree, most have a strong bureaucracy of paid officials and leaders. This group is better paid than ordinary workers and has many privileges. Because of these conditions they develop different interests to ordinary union members. Ordinary workers need to take action to improve their conditions, but bureaucrats want the unions to avoid struggles and spend their time negotiating with the bosses. We oppose the union bureaucracy because it undermines union struggle and because it is

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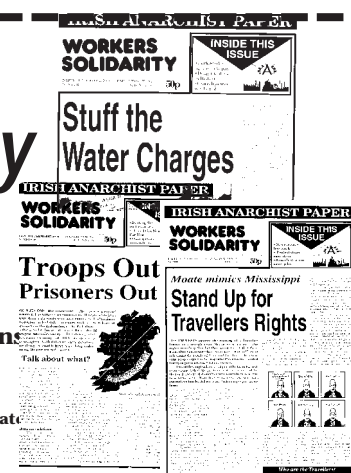
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from inside back page

a threat to union democracy.

But the existence of a bureaucracy is not inevitable. The Spanish CNT had a million and a half members but only two elected full-time officials. The argument that the unions cannot be changed makes the false and very dangerous assumption that the trade union bureaucracy is invincible, when it is not. This anti-union view in fact begs the question of how we are ever going to beat the bosses if we supposedly cannot even defeat conservative officials within our own class organisations. Practically all unions today are also dominated by backward reformist ideas, such as the notion that capitalism and the State can be changed to look after the needs of the workers and poor. We reject these ideas. As we see it there are two issues: union bureaucracy and reformism.

We must do two things if we want the unions to play a revolutionary role. First, get rid of the union bureaucracy and make sure that the unions are controlled by the membership. Second, win the union membership over to anarchist-sindicalist ideas. As we see it we must work within **existing** unions to achieve these goals. Leaving the mainstream unions to form new "pure" revolutionary unions has serious consequences. It withdraws militants from the unions, leaving them at the mercy of bureaucrats and reformists. It isolates militants in tiny splinter unions because the masses prefer to join large, established unions. Small groups of revolutionaries working inside established unions can achieve impressive results. For example, the main French (CGT) and Argentinean (FORA) union federations were won over to anarchist-sindicalism in this way in the early twentieth century. We think in terms of two strategies to reach our goals in the unions:

(1) work alongside other militants of various political stripes to build a rank-and-

file movement in the unions that fight the union bureaucracy as much as the bosses, and

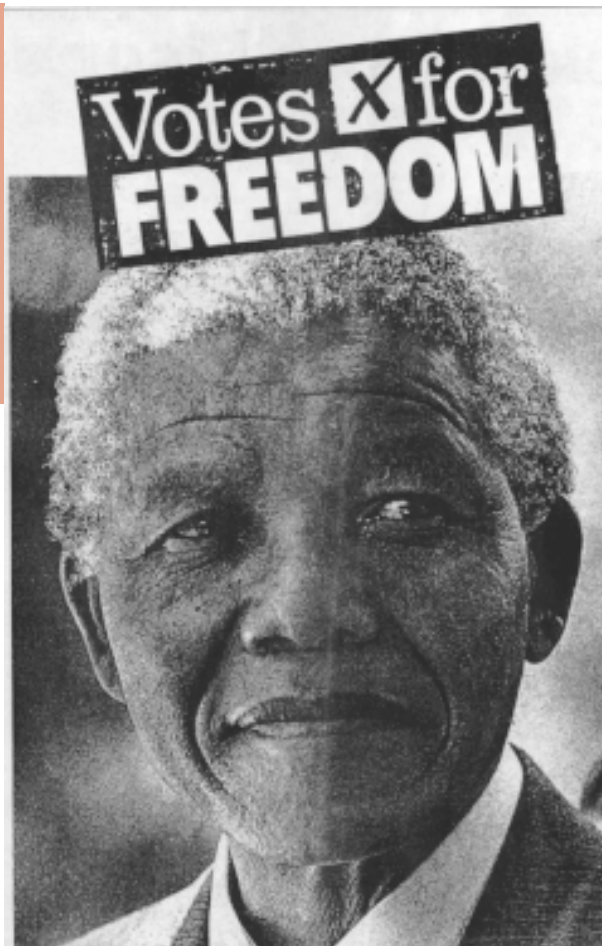
(2) build anarchist affinity groups in the unions which aim to win the battle of ideas, and which are part of an anarchist political organisation with theoretical and tactical unity.

Q. Anarchists stress direct action and not parliamentary activity as the key way forward. This must have a lot of resonance in a country where so much was gained by direct struggle? The defeat of Apartheid was one of the great victories of recent times.

A. Definitely. For centuries the Black working-class has only had mass struggle as a way to win anything from the ruling class. And it has won victories. This tradition, and the confidence generated by many small gains, means that people have a high level of faith in mobilisation as a tactic. Of course, this doesn't mean that there aren't illusions in parliament and the like, but it does mean people are willing to go onto the street to secure their demands. This is seen as a major problem by the new managers of the State - for example, the new Labour Relations Act places a heavy emphasis on promoting mediation and penalising 'un-procedural' strikes, whilst consistent attempts are made to either repress or co-opt militant struggles elsewhere (such as in the universities).

Q. How do you feel about the current situation? Are you hopeful?

A. Yes we are hopeful for the future and we believe that Anarchism has great potential to grow within South Africa, and Africa in general. The WSF, as you know, emerged out of the Anarchist Revolutionary Movement in the early part of 1995. We consider ourselves to be anarchist-sindicalists and



are committed to the tradition of class struggle anarchism. We strongly believe that the workers and the poor should lead the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the state through democratic means. In place of the grotesque capitalist system and government, which thrive on exploitation and oppression, we wish to see the implementation of an anarchist society.

Q. What assistance can anarchists and socialists outside Africa give you?

A. In our first year of existence we concentrated on internal education and drawing up our position papers. This year we have made substantial progress and have learnt a lot about the practicalities of organising and recruiting members. We would greatly appreciate the assistance and the support of other anarchist and socialist organisations. In particular, there are very few anarchist materials and resources available within South Africa such as books and magazines and due to the exchange rate (for example, one Irish pound costs about R7.80 in our currency) it is very difficult for our organisation to buy or import anarchist material from overseas. We would like to make a special appeal for donations in the form of anarchist books, pamphlets, tapes and videos. Financial donations would also be welcome. We are setting up a resource centre and would appreciate all possible help.

Inside: Organisation, Internet, Italy, unions...