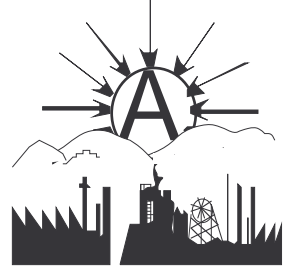


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Red & Black *Revolution*

A magazine of libertarian communism

Number 4

Anarchism or barbarism?



The
choice is
yours!

Rebellion
in Ireland

1798

Racism & Class
Struggle

A Comment A

Welcome to issue 4 of "Red and Black Revolution".

In this issue, we follow in the footsteps of the 3 previous issues' with a balance of articles of historical and present-day interest.

The 1798 rebellion in Ireland has been marked throughout Ireland in this, the year of its 200th anniversary, with the launch of pamphlets, T.V. programmes, Summer Schools and re-enactments of battles. In the context of the Irish 'peace process' and the Good Friday Agreement, the 1798 commemorations have taken on added significance. We look at how 1798 is remembered, and indeed how large parts of its legacy are deliberately forgotten or distorted. We also take a look at how the left in Ireland have reacted to recent events in the North and

the 'window of opportunity' which has opened up with the silencing of the guns.

Ireland 1998 has seen a huge growth in naked racism. The arrival on the shores of the 'Celtic Tiger' of a few thousand asylum seekers has been met by hysteria about "scroungers" and a naked attempt by sections of the media and the political establishment to whip up racism. This is of course not a uniquely Irish phenomenon, so we are delighted to carry an article from the *Workers Solidarity Federation* in South Africa, which looks at their analysis and experiences of fighting racism.

Since the launch of *Red & Black Revolution*, we have attempted to analyse past and current developments in anarchism. In this tradition, we look at the

Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, both in a historical context and in the context of its relevance today. We also carry an interview with the *Solidarita* organisation in the Czech Republic about their experiences in developing anarchism in the post-Soviet era.

We hope that you will find something of interest to you in this edition. We don't claim to know all the answers, rather we are attempting to provoke and stimulate debate on some of the crucial questions facing us. If there is anything you agree or disagree with, we would love to hear from you. It is through debate and discussion that ideas can be developed.

This is our contribution to that development of ideas. Read and enjoy!

Back Issues

A limited number of copies of Issue 1, 2 & 3 are still available.

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R & B R 1 featured articles on the collapse of the left, Russia 1917-21, Marx & the state, the EZLN & more.

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

R & BR3 included Anarchism in South Africa and Italy, The anti Water Charges struggle, the early Irish left etc

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About the WSM

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

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



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Red & Black Revolution is published by the Workers Solidarity Movement. The deadline for the next issue is April 1999. 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.

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Anarchism with a future

- the Czech Republic -



Kevin Doyle talks to Vadim Barák of the *Solidarita* organisation in the Czech Republic about the problems and possibilities facing anarchists in the process of rebuilding a revolutionary movement.

Q: What's your view of the old 'Communist' system that existed in the Czech Republic until 1989? Had it any positive features?

It should be remembered that unlike in Hungary, Poland and Eastern Germany where the Communist Party (CP) were installed into government by the Soviet military forces, here in Czechoslovakia they came to power by winning democratic elections with an overwhelming majority of votes. But what you call the 'old Communist system' had nothing in common with true socialism. The regime we had until 1989 had all the faults that the Czech Anarchists at the beginning of the century predicted it would have. The Communist Party bureaucracy took over the state power in the name of workers. They slaughtered left and right oppositions, destroyed basic civil and human rights to prevent ordinary people from organising themselves independent of the Party and from expressing opinions hostile to "the most perfect democracy in the world". Industries were not nationalised under workers' control but under central bureaucratic management. Agriculture was collectivised with brutal force. The centralised undemocratic planning that became the norm here, fulfilled the interests of the nomenklatura' and not that of the whole society. As time went on it became more and more inefficient.

Q: Was there anarchist activity in Czechoslovakia in the lead up to the Velvet Revolution (1989)?

A: Yes, there was an anarchist minority in an illegal party called the Left Alternative. This party was very small and composed mainly of intellectuals and students who belonged to various currents of democratic and revolutionary socialism. They opposed the Communist regime and pursued a programme of socialism based on workers' self-management and direct democracy. As freedom of speech and association did not exist, the LA remained confined to being a more or less discussional platform, not an organisation active among working class people.

During the Velvet Revolution the LA gained some credibility among ordinary people,

and in Prague - the centre of the revolution - it made significant steps to becoming a real working-class alternative. In the first local elections, 10,000 people voted for the LA in Prague. But by then the revolution had been usurped by careerist dissident intellectuals and former Communist bureaucrats. They took over a movement of Citizens' Forums and the state apparatus, and by means of a massive propaganda campaign succeeded in persuading people that we could not have socialism with democracy - that the only way was the western 'market economy' idea.

This new situation saw the LA once more in a position of isolated discussional circles. This time it was fatal. Some of its leading figures were moving towards a pro-market position, sectarianism occurred and in the end its internal conflicts destroyed it.

Q: What sort of history do anarchist ideas have in the Czech Republic?

Anarchism started here in the 1880s as a youth section of a patriotic and liberal movement against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. When the Social Democratic Party was established, its left wing was represented by Libertarian Socialists, but after several years they were forced to break away. Until WW1 the most powerful current of Libertarianism was Anarcho-Syndicalist. A stronghold of Czech Anarcho-Syndicalism was in the Northern Bohemian mining regions. Anarcho-Syndicalists were soon organising their own union federation, the Czech General Union Federation (the CGUF). Repression by the state strangled the CGUF in 1908, but could not destroy the Syndicalist spirit among workers and new Syndicalist unions like the Regional Miners Unity were formed.

By 1914 the Federation of Czech Anarcho-Communists (the FCAC) was also well established among Czech workers. Syndicalists and Anarchists published a lot of papers such as *The Proletarian*. Anarchists established some consumers' co-ops. During WW1 there was a general clampdown on the Czech Libertarian movement - a lot of militants were either jailed or marched to the front; many were killed.

Unlike Syndicalism the FCAC survived the war.

In 1918, on 14th October, the FCAC's militants, together with left Social Democrats, organised a 24-hour general strike that in fact marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire's domination of our nation. This event made Czech nationalist politicians, who did not want to break away from the empire until that moment, start negotiations with the empire about our independence. Strikers were demanding our right to national independence and a creation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. After a day the strike was called off by the Social Democratic leadership. On 28th October ordinary people - mainly in Prague - rose up again to finish off the decaying Austro-Hungarian authorities.

At that time the leading Anarchist-Communist intellectuals were already moving towards Leninism. One of them became an MP in the parliament of the new republic and another was a minister of the first government. On the other hand it tells a lot about Anarchist-Communist influence at the time. In 1918 the Anarchist-Communists became the left wing of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party (the CSSP). In 1923 Anarchist-Communists were expelled from the CSSP and their leaders manoeuvred them into a last step before an open unification with the CP, which had already been established in 1921 by left Social Democrats and left Anarchist-Communists, who openly converted to Bolshevism. (In fact they were the first here to translate Lenin's works.) This last step led to the formation of the Independent Socialist Party (the ISP). In 1925 the ISP, despite resistance from the last remnants of syndicalism - the Association of Czechoslovak Miners, which was tied to the Anarchist-Communists - abandoned federalism and other Anarchist principles and joined the CP.

Q: Tell us a little about your formation. Is Solidarita a completely new organisation or did you develop from another organisation?

Solidarita developed from the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (the ASF), whose roots reach to the LA. After 1990, in a time of greatest illusions about the market economy and consequently the greatest isolation of the left (no matter whether pro-

market or socialist), the ASF sank into a deep sectarianism and dogmatism - which it has not recovered from yet.

But after this interval, there was a change: The first union struggles occurred; students fought back against the introduction of fees for education at universities; there was more and more support among people for environmentalist campaigns; in general the discontent of the working population was growing. A minority in the ASF did its best to be involved in this ferment and tried to translate its experience from those struggles into an internal debate in the ASF. That debate should have changed the ASF into an active and effective libertarian organisation. However, the majority in the ASF refused to discuss our proposals and we had to leave. Since that time (1996) Solidarita has been working to build itself. Our theoretical and organisational development is not finished yet. Through continuous involvement in local as well as national struggles of workers and young people, and through discussions, we are accumulating experience and clarifying our ideas. We describe ourselves either as anarcho-syndicalists or Libertarian Socialists.

Q: What other Anarchist organisations are there?

In the last while there has been quite a bit of change. Until about a year ago, there were three main organisations - the newly formed Northern Bohemian Libertarian Federation (NBLF), the Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation (the CSAF) and the Czechoslovak Federation of Revolutionary Anarchists (the CSFRA).

The CSFRA derives from the ASF (who I mentioned above). As far as we are concerned it is an organisation riven with dogmatists and sectarianism. The CSFRA doesn't base its politics on reality, so we don't have much to do with it.

In contrast both the NBLF and the CSAF were federations that sought to unite various currents of anarchism. This is one important difference we in Solidarita had with these groups. Solidarita is an organisation united in its theory and practice. We are pulled together by a common programme and we are all equally responsible for implementation of our organisation's politics. But there was some overlap between Solidarita and both of these organisations - the NBLF and CSAF - joint membership for example.

Last year the CSAF split, giving rise to a new group called the FSA - the Federation of Social Anarchists. Since then the FSA has gone through a significant development. They've adopted the Platform² as an important part of their political attitudes. This puts them in a similar position to Solidarita. The FSA carries out intensive propaganda work and are currently involved in ongoing discussion with us and other Czech syndicalists with a view to uniting. Also involved in these discussions are a number of ex members of the NBLF

(The NBLF ceased to exist because of a spilt between syndicalists and green anarchists).

The outcome of all this may well be a new anarcho-syndicalist organisation, which would be a major step forward for class-struggle anarchism.

Q: What sort of unions exist in the Czech Republic at the moment?

We have standard bureaucratic pro-market unions that believe in social partnership. They rely on endless and mostly fruitless negotiations with the government and employers. They organise about 40% of our workforce and are divided into several union federations that come from the old Communist Revolutionary Union Movement. The CP still has a small union federation, but it is absolutely passive and unimportant. Now the most powerful federation is the Czech and Moravian Chamber of Trade Unions (the CMCTU). A smaller federation worth mentioning is the Trade Union of Agricultural Workers. All the CMCTU's unions claim to be independent of all political parties, but the CMCTU's leadership admits that its politics are close to those of Social Democracy. A good number (of the leadership) also ran as candidates of Social Democracy in elections to both houses of parliament.

The remarkable exception to all this is Trade Union Association of Railway Workers (the TUARW), which is really inde-

pendent of political parties and says "No!" to the introduction of market principles into public services and to privatisation of the railways. In February 1997 the TUARW led the most important strike in the post-1989 period and are surely the most advanced union in our country. The CMCTU's leadership has accused the TUARW of being Anarcho-Syndicalist! Other living unions in the CMCTU which are getting more and more able and ready to fight back, are the miners, steelworkers and teachers' unions.

The rest are dying unions, which still behave like the old Communist unions. Their only concern is to collect enough money to feed the bureaucracy and to buy Christmas presents and holiday trips for their rank and file. For example in Health Care. Right now the government wants to close 20% of hospitals and decrease wages, but the Health Care Workers Trade Union (HCWTU) will not do anything about it. They will just join the CMCTU's demonstration against the government's austerity politics, but no more. No wonder workers are deserting them! In fact there is no tradition of self-activity for decades in the CP unions - people wait on their leaders to do something for them and, as I said, the HCWTU leaders do nothing.

Q: What is Solidarita's position relative to the unions? Do you favour the formation of new syndicalist unions?



Solidarita
Anarchosyndikalistická organizace

'Free-Market' Madness in the Czech Republic

- Increases in rents and the price of electricity, gas and heating, announced on July 1st 1998 has put two-thirds of the Czech population (2m households) on the poverty line.
- Unemployment has now climbed from zero to 7% (350,000), and is set to worsen further.
- New interest rates forced through by the Czech Republic's IMF 'managers' earlier in the year will cause the collapse of 40-60% of Czech enterprises over the next year.



Despite all the problems with the present unions - some of which I've outlined above - we believe in working inside them. We believe they are real working class organisations. Within them we argue for a syndicalist alternative of combative and democratic unions run 'by workers for workers', where all delegates would be immediately recallable so that workers would control their own struggles. Unions should be active not only in a workplace, but also in communities. They should take part in struggle against racism and fascism, in environmental campaigns. Their final goal should be transformation of this society of market dictatorship into a Libertarian Socialist society of social justice, workers' self-management and grassroots democracy.

That kind of union can come into existence only through our active participation in present day unions and through a rank and file movement in these unions for control over their organisations and fights.

It is also interesting to note that the organisation I mentioned above, the FSA, has also moved towards a position where it sees the necessity of working within the 'here and now' unions. This is an important development.

Q: How has the change to a 'market-style economy' affected Czech workers?

The market economy has not fulfilled any of people's hopes for a decent and free life. Sure we can buy more products and now there are no shortages of essential goods like bread or toilet paper, but everything is very expensive. Generally our living standard is worse than it was under the Communist dictatorship. Our wages and pensions are lower than in 1990 - when economic transformation started - and we have to pay high taxes. Besides, now we also have to pay for many services that used to be paid for from taxes e.g. a lot of medicines, textbooks for children, dentist treatment etc. Till [shop] prices are growing faster than incomes. An average wage is about

£200 a month, but 62% of workers get wages lower than the average and only 5% get wages higher than £400 per month - these are the managers and the directors of companies.

Q: There has also been a massive round of privatisation. What has happened here?

Working class people were persuaded by pro-market political forces that privatisation would solve all the problems and would bring about a society where everybody is a rich share-holder. Everyone was going to become prosperous and production would be ecologically harmless! Nothing of that sort has happened. Privatised companies either ended up in hands of state-owned banks or in the hands of foreign investors, who bought only the best enterprises (i.e. those which were highly profitable even under the Communist state management; e.g. Volkswagen bought Skoda). But many companies also ended up in the hands of 'a new aggressive class of owners'. These people gained enormous wealth from, basically, stealing. The government has been turning a blind eye on this. I am talking about the people who were charged with managing banks, industries and privatisation funds. The amount of stolen property arising from privatisation is estimated to be in the region of hundreds of billions of Czech Crowns. Just to give you an idea of how large an amount of capital this is, it should be enough to say that the Czech GMP is CC1600 billion.

It also needs to be said that the government is following the advice of the IMF to restrict spending on public services, on doles, pensions and all social benefits. The IMF/Government has also cancelled subsidies towards heating, electricity and gas for households. They have pushed for a decrease in wages and for structural adjustments of industry. This means that tens of thousands of public sector workers will lose their jobs; hospitals, schools and railways are being closed down; unemployment is growing. No wonder that more than 50% of the population believe that the Stalinist economy was bad, but that the free market one is not much better!

Q: In what way have people resisted the attack on living standards

The CMLIU organised a big demonstration against the government's austerity policy in Nov. 1997. But the attack on living standards was also one of the principal reasons why this right-wing government of Klaus got kicked out of office earlier in the year. But while people might be looking for some solution electorally - it won't come. The Social Democrats have abandoned all of its radical promises, and in fact only just won in the most recent parliamentary elections despite the huge dissatisfaction with Klaus. In the aftermath of that election the SDs entered into an 'alliance' with Klaus and his free-market cronies - which was a huge stab in the

back for those people who had voted for the SDs in good faith.

There is a long way to go but we see our role as one of getting involved. We've been involved in the initiative for a General Strike (the IGS) launched by a number of socialist groups. We've also been doing work on the matter of rent increases. Solidarita has distributed leaflets calling for the non-payment of higher rents against government and local councils that are increasing rents. As we get more of a base in the larger towns and cities, more opportunities will arise for us to be effective in this regard. It is important to recognise that people in communities here are atomised and without any tradition of self-activity - from the years of Stalinism. There is much work to be done, but we are hopeful while being realistic.

Q: How is anarchism seen in the Czech Republic? Are you ever confused with the old Communists!

Yes, quite often, but people soon realise that we are different. But also, now it isn't so much the big problem it used to be [being confused with the CP]. Pro-market illusions are heavily shattered here now, and anti-Communist hysteria is gone. People are willing to consider your ideas and activities with respect even if they presume you are a Communist. A lot of people seem to believe that the only positive thing about capitalism is its relative freedom, but from an economic point of view it does not matter whether you live under Communism or Capitalism. Solidarita believes libertarian socialism is a clear alternative: freedom + socialism. We fight hard to get its ideas of social justice, workers' self-management and grassroots democracy over to ordinary people.

Our colleagues, classmates and neighbours see the difference: "You are active among us, you really try to do something; the CP is just sitting in the parliament!" We stand a good chance to gain a leading position for anarchist ideas if we can be even more active, doing clear and reasonable libertarian politics.

SOLIDARITA can be contacted at PO Box 13, Cerná Hora, 67921, The CZECH REPUBLIC. To obtain a copy of their international newsletter, enclose a donation.

¹ The extended hierarchy of the Communist Party. The name *nomenklatura* derives from the system adopted at the 9th Party Congress of the CPSU (Bolsheviks) which put in place a system where the party would keep a list of those whom it considered 'suitable' for office. In time, the *nomenklatura* system came to represent those who were in the Party and/or followed its orders.

² *The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists* - a pamphlet written in the mid 20s by anarchists who had fought in the Russian Revolution. It argues for the unity of theory and practice in the anarchist organisation, and for collective responsibility around a definite programme. (See page 29)

Anarchism & Environmental Survival

Graham Purchase is one of the most prolific writers in the Australian anarchist movement, and in books such as 'Anarchist Society & its Practical Realisation', has made a serious contribution to the debate on the future of the anarchist movement, and how our ideas can best be put into practice today. Here, we review his latest book, 'Anarchism and Environmental Survival'.

Alongside the classical anarchist structures of unions and traditionally 'political' organisations, anarchists are increasingly to be found in the environmental movement. This is hardly surprising given that, although one wing of the green movement has entered mainstream parliamentary politics, there is still a wide base of grassroots activism some of which, in its methods and organisation, is very close to anarchism. What's more, the more radical environmentalists are becoming aware that their demands cannot be accommodated by capitalism, and are beginning to make connections between their campaigns and other issues. Why then are the links between anarchism and environmentalism not much stronger? And what are the issues that still divide them?

Mutineers on the Titanic?

Most anarchists have some idea of the serious state of environmental degradation caused by capitalism. You don't have to be politically active to know about the hole in the ozone layer, or the chopping down of the rainforest, and the pollution caused by a transport system based on cars is obvious to anyone who lives in a city. Anarchist groups rarely see these as issues to be campaigned on, like women's rights or trade union struggles. But environmental issues affect the working class disproportionately. They are the least able to escape the effects of environmental damage, and the most likely to bear the brunt in terms of disease, malnutrition and so on. We know that poverty-level wages and poor housing in the developing world are a result of capitalism. The fact that the slums this creates are the hardest hit by flooding, for example, is another symptom of capitalism putting profits before people. But campaigns against this sort of indirect oppression are thin on the ground.

One possible reason why anarchists don't campaign as much on environmental issues is the gradual nature of environmental problems. Unlike other struggles where there is a clear line that is crossed, an obvious point to focus on - whether it be a repressive piece of legislation or a strike - pollution, for example, is incremental. The problem is generally not that one factory opens and suddenly the air is visibly polluted. The level of pollution tends to increase steadily over time, and it is hard to get excited over a difference that you can't

see. Of course there are exceptions - a few years ago in Cork a particularly bad toxic spill led to calls for stricter controls on chemical production and safety (see *Workers Solidarity* 41 for details). But, in general, we become accustomed to the degradation of our environment if it happens slowly enough.

The final, and most important problem, for anarchists in tackling environmental issues is that we disagree with most of the solutions on offer. The mainstream green line on the environment is that we are all, more or less equally, to blame for its destruction, and we must all, again more or less equally, make sacrifices if the ecosystem is to survive - this when the poorest 20% of the population produce only 3% of carbon dioxide emissions. Even more radical greens, though they do realise that corporations and capitalism are doing most of the damage, insist that we must all reduce our consumption and simplify our lives. They also say that industrialisation, in itself, is a bad thing, no matter who is in control. Anarchists, on the other hand, think that everyone should have more of what they want, not less. There are problems with how production is organised, and certainly if things are produced for need and not profit a lot of waste will be cut out. But most of the world has a standard of living far below what westerners would take for granted and, as an absolute minimum, this has to be addressed.

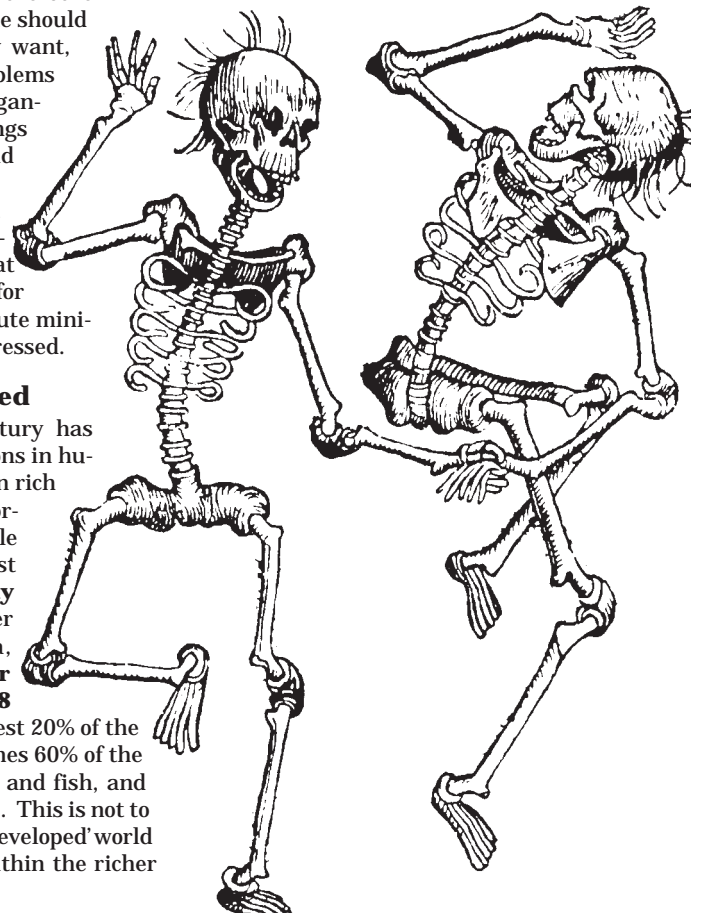
A World Divided

The history of this century has been of deepening divisions in humanity. The gap between rich and poor has widened enormously, today 225 people own more than the poorest 50% earn in a year. **Eighty four** people are together wealthier than China, **three people wealthier than the poorest 48 countries.** The wealthiest 20% of the global population consumes 60% of the energy, 45% of the meat and fish, and owns 87% of the vehicles¹. This is not to say that everyone in the 'developed' world is well off, of course. Within the richer

countries the gap between rich and poor is also growing, with the figures for homelessness, unemployment and malnutrition rising all the time. In the last decade, diseases like tuberculosis, caused essentially by poverty, have reappeared, having been eradicated earlier this century. The US may be the world's biggest consumer, but it also has the highest per capita prison population, and 16.5% of its population lives in poverty.

On a global level, the picture is of a southern hemisphere owned, controlled and exploited by the north. Raw materials - minerals and food - are produced in the south and consumed in the north. The environmental problems in the north/west are mainly those caused by over a century of industrial production - pollution has become a fact of life. The earth, the air, the rain, all have been contaminated.

The south may not have as long a history of industrialisation as the north, but as far as environmental damage goes it is gaining rapidly. When a corporation shifts production to the developing world, it does so to escape not just trade unions, but also environmental regulations. Workers in the south are not just lower-paid, they're subject to much more dangerous working conditions, and much more damage to their



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environment, than workers in the north. As well as industry, agriculture is made more damaging. Leaving aside the use of insecticides and fertilisers that have been banned in the north, the trend towards large-scale monoculture farming means the soil becomes exhausted and prone to erosion. The need to expand the area of land under cultivation means the destruction of wilderness areas and deforestation, which also causes soil erosion. This in turn causes flooding, which destroys people's homes and crops under cultivation, leading to more pressure on the land.

The worldwide increase in the human population and the level of (industrial and agri-

cultural) production means that the potential impact of humanity on the environment continues to grow. At the moment, this impact is enormous because, often, the people who are making environmentally sensitive decisions are shielded from the results. Whether this is because of money or distance, the end result is that, no matter how damaging their decisions may be, they can be sure the damage will be to someone else, and so are free to continue their pursuit of profit.

Making the Connections

Graham Purchase's book, *Anarchism and Environmental Survival*, is an attempt to bring anarchist and green theories to-

gether, and propose a model for a possible post-revolutionary society. His anarchism is based on the idea that decisions must be made by those who are effected by them. The basic social unit of society, then, is the community. Your community is where you live and work, the particular area you identify yourself with. Depending on the context, this could be your immediate surroundings - a village or suburb - or an extended area - a county or city.

Each community is linked to a particular place, although the borders of this region are rarely clearly defined. You could draw the limits of a town where its buildings end, or include land cultivated by its inhabitants. Sometimes these are useful definitions, but the people themselves, when talking about 'their land' may include nearby forests, lakes or mountains (and again, since the size of a community varies depending on the context, this region can also vary in size). Communities are made up, then, not just of relationships between people, but of the relation-



Meat 'n' Veg 'n' Microlivestock

Vegetarianism and environmentalism often go hand in hand. This is partly because the consumption of large livestock has itself an effect on the environment. It takes seven pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef - if we were all to become vegetarian, so the argument goes, much less land would have to be used for agriculture. This is true to a certain extent, but the grain:meat ratio leaves out many things. For example, a cow produces not just meat, but milk, leather and dung (a fertiliser, soil stabiliser, and even fuel source). Wool, feathers and eggs are all useful 'by-products' of animal husbandry that have to taken into account.

Even so, raising animals is not the most efficient use of agricultural land. But a lot of land is not suitable for other forms of agriculture. Animals can be raised in forests, or on the side of mountains, and in areas where the soil is too poor for crop

production. Many animals can be reared alongside crops, and others, like poultry, are well suited to small scale farming. Turning over whole prairies to cows for grazing is certainly inefficient, but that's not the only way to farm animals.

The tendency in agriculture (as in industry) in the last century has been for specialisation, and for the production of smaller herds, made up of larger animals. Purchase goes into some detail on the virtues of microlivestock - smaller, more adaptable, and generally hardier versions of the more common modern animals. Such animals are more productive - the greater number that can be raised on a given area of land makes up for their small size - and it's easier to match the size of the herd to the land available. All of these factors make them ideal for the kind of small-scale mixed farming he proposes should be

(re-)introduced to our cities.

The question of efficiency is not the only reason so many environmentalists are also vegetarian. After all, the battery farm is perhaps the epitome of efficiency, and that has few friends in the green movement. There is also a moral argument, that we should try to reduce the effects of humanity on the planet, and on the animals that live alongside us. Purchase quotes Elisee Reclus, a well known anarchist of the 19th century, "for the great majority of vegetarians...the important point is the recognition of the bond of affection and goodwill that links man to the so-called lower animals, and the extension to these our brothers of the sentiment which has already put a stop to cannibalism among men"¹. You will have to judge the merits of this argument for yourself, Purchase shows that it is not necessarily relevant to a discussion of the environment, and that a meat-eating society can still be green.

¹ "On Vegetarianism", 1901

ship between the people and the land. This, Purchase feels, is the key to environmental protection.

With the globalisation of the economy, and society in general, the current trend is to tackle environmental problems on a global level. This appears to make sense with an issue like the destruction of the ozone layer, but it can often become ridiculous - as when the Earth Summit's decision to fix the level of global emissions merely led to the creation of a new market. Developing countries can now sell some of their 'pollution quota' to richer countries. Most problems, says Purchase, are better tackled at the local level, but this means some changes in the way production is organised. Earlier I talked about how money can shield you from the effects of environmental damage - the same is true of distance. Those of us who live in urban areas know the problems that industrial concentration has caused locally, but only get second or third-hand reports of the problems of intensive food production, for example.

Small is Beautiful?

If you think of the global economy as a factory, with each worker/community making only one part of a complex machine, and depending on the others to make all the other parts, you can see how difficult it is for one worker/community to change what they're doing. Purchase proposes that we shift from the current, locally specialised and globally interdependent society, to a society made up of more balanced, self-sufficient communities (individual artisans, if you like). Thus we would immediately deal with some of the problems overconcentrated production has caused, like pollution and soil erosion. We would eliminate some, at least, of the costs of transport between these production centres. We would also make it easier for each community to deal with the problems that arise in their own region.

When Purchase talks of increasing local independence in this way, he does not mean these communities would be entirely self-sufficient. The fact that some areas are richer in minerals, or more suited to growing certain foods, means there will always be a certain degree of specialisation. Nor does it follow that, if there is a shift towards food production in urban areas, for example, that each rural area has to include a certain amount of factories. Finally, self-sufficiency should not be confused with isolationism - the communities Purchase describes are starting points for federations, not a return to feudalism. Even if it is just on the basis of common environmental influences, a shared river, or mountain range, or coastline, communities would obviously come together to discuss things that affect them in common. And in an anarchist society, based on the idea of our common humanity, there would surely be an abundance of regional, continental and global projects, covering every aspect of science and culture.

Cities of the future?

Purchase's proposal for more ecologically integrated communities usually meets with most scepticism when it is imagined applied to cities. Even a relatively small city, like Dublin, is almost completely dependent on food from neighbouring regions, and its ecosystem is made up of cars, people and concrete. If a city like New York or Mexico was sealed off from the rest of the world, it would die within days; the only question is whether it would be from starvation or asphyxiation. Given the number of such large cities around the world, and the fact that, even if it were possible, given the size of the earth's population, for everyone to live in small towns and rural communities, many would not want to, how can cities be accommodated within an environmentally sound anarchist society?

It's an obvious point, but cities did not spring into existence fully formed, with all their support networks intact. Like any community, initially they produced most of their food themselves, but as the industrial base increased, the demand for land for industry and accommodation for the workforce grew, forcing food production into the hinterland. Most cities, even up to recently, would have had small farms comparatively close to the town centre. The supercities of today are only possible because of advances in food preservation (through chemical additives and refrigeration) and transport. Before these advances, the pressure for a city to grow in size was met by the necessity to have enough farms, near enough, to produce the food. Nor is the ejection of agriculture from the city irreversible - during the Second World War, for example, food shortages in Britain led to an immense drive towards small-plot urban farming, something of which has continued to this day

in the 'allotments' scheme.

Cities, in Purchase's model would continue to exist, but agriculture would be reintroduced to the residential/commercial mix. There are different ways of doing this - you could divide the city into sectors, with each concentrating on a particular use of the land, aiming at sufficiency on a city-wide scale. Or, and this is more in line with the overall project, each sector would be a community in itself, diversity being brought down to a more local level. ('Sufficiency' is used here as an ideal, not expected to be reached. Cities would still be more densely populated than other areas, and so more likely to be a base for industry and other labour-intensive activities, the aim is to reduce the dependence on other areas for food.) Food production would be integrated into the city - cattle grazing on green spaces, lawns turned into vegetable patches, small neighbourhood farms. Between the demands of industry and accommodation, argues Purchase, there are spaces which in a properly planned city could be filled with life.

The immediate question is whether this could ever be more than a gesture. Sure, some farming could be integrated into urban life, but could it ever come close to meeting the needs of those who live in the city? If we are to continue to have the same population density, and the same concentration of industry in our cities, can these urban farms ever be more than a supplement to large-scale farming elsewhere, a token 'greening' of the city? If cities were to seriously approach self-sufficiency, wouldn't this necessitate a huge expansion in their size, or a fundamental change in the nature of urban life? Do we want, or need, such a change?



Equal Wealth, not Shared Poverty

There is still a clear sticking point in any attempt to integrate anarchist and environmental positions, and that is the question of levels of production. Depending on how far down the path of self-sufficiency you go, you rule out more concentrated, specialised production, and so reduce the possible output. (Or at least, reduce efficiency - you can build a train in a workshop, but it's a lot easier to do it in a factory). In an anarchist society, a lot of work will be recognised as socially unnecessary, and it's hard to overestimate how much effort goes into keeping the apparatus of international capitalism and the nation state going. When money goes, we get rid of the banking industry and financial exchanges. Without states, there is no need for armies and the whole weapons industry - a sizeable part of most western economies - becomes defunct. When production is based on need, we will be rid of most advertising, and the useless duplication of identical goods it was created to hide. There will be no more built-in obsolescence, because who would build something they know is going to fall apart rather than something that will last, if it wasn't for their boss's desire for higher profits.

The production that remains will be changed. No rational society would base their transport system on cars. A good public transport system would improve the quality of most people's lives immeasurably. The benefits in terms of lives saved, public health, and countless other areas are obvious, and well-known. Overdependence on cars is a result of the pursuit of profit, and it is profit that makes our industries so polluting. Cleaner sources of energy, like solar and wind power, are available but not profitable. Scrubbers and filters for chemical outflows, biodegradable, recycled and non-toxic materials, all of these could be used in most of our factories. But as long as control of production is in the hands of those who do not feel the effects of pollution, they will be overlooked in favour of the cheaper, more profitable alternative.

By eliminating, or greening, all of these processes, we would go a long way to reducing our ecological footprint. But eliminating useless production is only part of the story, an anarchist society would also increase useful production. Even in the developed West, far too many fall below the poverty line - we need more homes, more schools, more hospitals, enough to meet everyone's basic needs - and then we must go further. An anarchist society will want to have more than just the bare essentials, surely we want to improve everyone's standard of living. Some may choose to live a life of austerity, but most of us want a new world because we want more of the good things in life, not less.

In the developing world, the gap between what people have and what they need is

even bigger. The southern hemisphere has been exploited ruthlessly by the north, one of the first priorities for an anarchist society must be to redress that balance, and the enormity of that task cannot be underestimated. Millions of people don't even have a clean source of drinking water, we want **everyone** to have a standard of living *beyond* the current average for an industrialised country. There is no way this can be accomplished without *increasing* current levels of production.

These are major problems with the idea of self-sufficient communities. On the one hand, we need a globally integrated economy, for the foreseeable future at least, because of the vast gap between the wealth of a community in Namibia, for example, and one in Oregon. At the same time, we can't afford the relative inefficiency that small-scale, localised production implies. Even if we decide that decentralising production is a good thing, it can't be our first priority. And is it necessary?

A World Without Borders

Anarchism has always been international, has always stressed the importance of our shared humanity over all those things - nationality, language, race, religion, gender - the ruling class tries to use to divide us. We stress the importance of democracy, of people having a say in the decisions that affect them. We also realise that some decisions are too far-ranging in their effects, too intertwined with the situations of others to be made at a local level. That is why large anarchist groups often operate as federations, and a lot of thought has gone into creating structures - like mandating delegates, rotating positions, minimising the need for full-time bureaucrats - that allow decisions to be made democratically, with mass participation, involving thousands, or millions, of people.

After all, there will always be a clash between the needs of society and the needs of a particular area, the only question is about how to balance them. Factories have to be built, and food grown, somewhere. Nuclear power may be unnecessary, but gold isn't², and you can't mine it without damaging the local environment. We will always have to walk the line between decisions being made by groups far removed from their effects, and the NIMBY tendency - do what you like, but not in my backyard. The difference, in an anarchist society, is in who makes the decisions, and why.

Capitalism is notoriously short-termist,

decisions are made based on their immediate profitability, thinking even a few years ahead is unusual. What other kind of society would build nuclear power stations without knowing how to dispose of the waste safely? Why else would the economy be based on non-renewable fossil fuels, when the only question is when, not if, they will run out? If the earth is an uninhabitable wasteland in 100 years, what does it matter, as long as the profits are good? All the green consumerism in the world won't fix this insane system, if we want a rational economy we're going to have to run it ourselves.

Agriculture and industry need not be as damaging to the environment as they are at the moment - we already know of cleaner and safer ways of doing things, that aren't used because they aren't profitable. How much can we change things if, as well as using the technology we know of now, science is directed towards cleaning up pollution instead of weapons research? If research was done on minimising the damage of intensive farming, instead of developing 'Terminator' genes? We don't have to believe that science has all the answers to know that there is a lot of room for improvement.

As anarchists we have always argued that, from union struggles to environmental protest, from community organising to revolution, the best way to victory is through mass participation and democracy. Whenever they seize the opportunity, people are well capable of organising their own lives, and their own movements, better than any 'wise' leader, or 'benevolent' dictator. We should be more confident that a free and democratic society will handle the problems of environmental damage, and the questions of local autonomy and global interdependence, in a just and fair way. After the anarchist revolution, do we really need a green revolution?

¹ United Nations Human Development report, 1998

² *ibid*

³ Gold is not just decorative, it has many important industrial uses, but you must use cyanide in the mining and purification process.



Racism & Class struggle

Racial oppression remains a defining feature of the modern capitalist world. It is manifest most spectacularly in violent attacks on immigrants and minorities by fascist gangs. More important to the fate of these communities has been the systematic and increasing discrimination by capitalist states, manifest in attacks on the rights of immigrants, cuts in welfare services, and racist police and court systems.

How can racism be defeated?

An answer to this question requires an examination of the forces which gave rise to, and continue to reproduce, racism. It also requires a careful analysis of which social forces benefit from racial oppression.

By racism is meant either an attitude denying the equality of all human beings, or economic, political and social discrimination against racial groups.

The roots of racism

Capitalism developed as a world system based on the exploitation of workers, slaves and peasants - black, brown, yellow, and white. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the young capitalist system centred mainly on western Europe and the Americas. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Africa and Asia were brought increasingly into the ambit of capitalist power.

In the Americas, vast plantation systems were set up. Based on slavery, they were capitalist enterprises exporting agricultural goods.

It was in the system of slavery that the genesis of racism is to be found. In the words of Caribbean scholar, Eric Williams, *"Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery"*.

Initially, the slave plantations were not organised on racial lines.

Although the first slaves in the Spanish possessions in the Americas were generally native Americans, slavery was restricted (at least officially) to those who did not convert to Christianity.

The native Americans were succeeded by poor Europeans. Many of these workers were only enslaved for a limited period, as indentured servants serving contracts of up to ten or more years. Others were convicts sentenced for crimes such as stealing cloth, or prisoners of war from uprisings and the colonisation of areas such as Ireland and Scotland. However, there were

also a substantial number of life-long European slaves, and even amongst the indentured a substantial number had been kidnapped and sold into bondage.²

Conditions on the *"Middle Passage"* (the trip across the Atlantic) for these indentured servants and slaves were, in Williams' words, so bad that they should *"banish any ideas that the horrors of the slave ship are to be in any way accounted for by the fact that the victims were Negroes"*.

More than half the English immigrants to the American colonies in the sixteenth century were indentured servants⁴, and until the 1690s there were still far more unfree Europeans on the plantations of the American South than Black slaves⁵.

Racist ideas were developed in the context of the slave trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this period, African people came to be the main source of slaves for the plantations.

The systems of social control established for American and European unfree labour was now applied to the Africans.

The main reason for this shift to African slaves was that such slaves were obtained cheaply enough, and in sufficient numbers, to meet the expanding needs of the plantation capitalists⁶. African ruling classes played a central role in the highly profitable slave trade: *"The trade was... an African trade until it reached the coast. Only very rarely were Europeans directly involved in procuring slaves, and that largely in Angola"*⁷.

It in the seventeenth century that racist ideology began to be developed for the first time by such groups as *"British sugar planters in the Caribbean, and their mouthpieces in Britain"* who fastened onto differences in physical appearance to develop the myth that Black people were sub-human and deserved to be enslaved: *"here is an ideology, a system of false ideas serving class interests"*⁸.

Racism was used to justify the capture and perpetual enslavement of millions of people for the purposes of capitalism. The enslavement of native Americans had been justified as being on the grounds of their heathen beliefs; European servitude was justified as being the lot of





inferiors; Black slavery was justified through racism.

Once developed, racist ideas came to be used more broadly as a justification for oppression. Jewish people, for example, came to be oppressed as a racial minority rather than as a religious group.

The beneficiaries of slavery were not Europeans in general, but the capitalist ruling classes of western Europe. African ruling classes also received substantial benefits. There were of course the vast numbers of Europeans indentured or enslaved. There were also the sailors on the "Middle Passage" whose conditions, according to Williams, were themselves scarcely distinguishable from slavery. Finally, there were vast numbers of "poor White" peasant farmers of the Americas (some of whom were former indentured servants) who were out-competed and driven to the margins by the giant slave plantations.⁹ The vast majority of Europeans never owned slaves: only 6 per cent of whites owned slaves in the American South in 1860.¹⁰ There were also African-American and native American slave-owners.

Race and Empire

Racism was thus born of the slavery of early capitalism. However, having been once created, subsequent developments in capitalism would sustain and rear this creature of the ruling class.

The extension of capitalist power over Africa and Asia took place largely from the seventeenth century onwards in the form of imperialism¹¹. Initially, imperial conquest was often undertaken directly by large corporations such as the British East India Company (in India) and the Dutch East India Company (in South Africa, among other places). Later capitalist governments took a direct hand, notably in the conquest of most of Africa from the 1880s.

Imperialism in this period was driven by the search for profits: initially, profits from control of trade; later by big corporations'

need for cheap sources of labour and raw materials, and by the need to find new markets to sell manufactured goods.

Racist ideas were again pressed into service to justify the process of imperial conquest and rule. Imperial control was justified on the supposed grounds that Africans and Asians (and for that matter other colonised peoples such as the Irish) were unable to govern or develop themselves, and needed to be ruled by external forces - namely the ruling classes of western Europe and Japan¹². Equal rights were not seen as even being possible in this world view.

Empire did not benefit workers in the colonies, nor in the imperialist countries. The profits of empire accrued to the capitalist class¹³. Meanwhile, the methods and forces of colonial repression were deployed against workers in the imperialist countries (most notably, the use of colonial troops to crush the Spanish Revolution), whilst lives and material resources were wasted on imperial adventures. Today, multi-national companies cut jobs and wages by shifting to repressive Third World client regimes.

Racism today

Clearly, capitalism gave birth to racism. Racism as an idea helped justify empire and slavery. Racism as a form of discrimination or oppression facilitated high levels of exploitation, and has thus been an important factor in the development of capitalism.

Today, both slavery and the formal empires have been overthrown - this has largely been the result of struggles by millions of workers, peasants and slaves against oppression. Slave revolts are part of the history of class struggle against capitalism. Peasant and worker resistance to colonialism are equally so, although it must be noted that most anti-colonial struggles were prevented from reaching their necessary conclusion- socialist revolution- by the determination of local elites

to reach a deal with capitalism and imperialism.

However, although these struggles removed the formally racist structures of slavery and empire they have not buried racism.

Racism -as an idea and as a practice- continues to serve two key functions under capitalism.

First, it allows the capitalists to secure sources of cheap, unorganised, and highly exploitable labour. Key examples are immigrants and minorities. Subject to racist discrimination, they form a segment of the working class that has been described as "super-exploited", providing high levels of profit for capitalists. In times of capitalist crisis (such as today) these segments are most readily deprived of political and social rights, the first to fall in the overall assault on the working class that takes place.

Secondly, racism allows the capitalist ruling class to divide and rule the exploited classes.

Across the planet, billions of workers and peasants suffer the lashes of capitalism. Racism is used to foster divisions within the working class to help keep the ruling class in power.

Praxedis Guerrero, a great Mexican anarchist, described the process as follows¹⁴:

"Racial prejudice and nationality, clearly managed by the capitalist and tyrants, prevent peoples living side by side in a fraternal manner..."

A river, a mountain, a line of small monuments suffice to maintain foreigners and make enemies of two peoples, both living in mistrust and envy of one another because of the acts of past generations. Each nationality pretends to be above the other in some kind of way, and the dominating classes, the keepers of education and the wealth of nations, feed the proletariat with the belief of stupid superiority and pride to make impossible the union of all nations who are separately fighting to free themselves from Capital....

If all the workers of the different ... nations had direct participation in all questions of social importance which affect one or more proletarian groups these questions would be happily and promptly solved by the workers themselves."

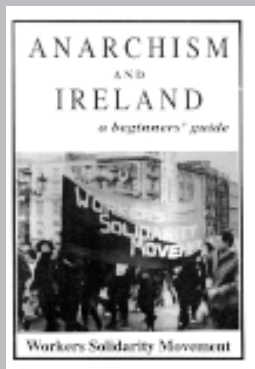
It happens between majority populations and super-exploited minorities, but also between the working classes of different countries. Workers are told to blame and hate other workers- distinguished by culture, language, skin colour, or some other arbitrary feature- for their misery. A classic example is the scape-goating of immigrants and refugees for "taking away jobs and housing".

In this way, workers' anger is deflected onto other workers (with whom they have almost everything in common) rather than being directed against capitalists (with whom workers have nothing in common). An appearance of common interest is created between workers and bosses of a given race or nation.

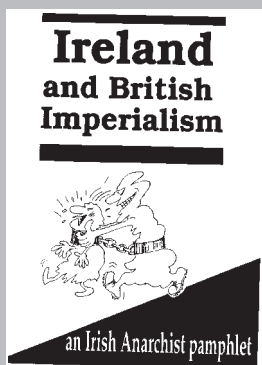
Who benefits?

Racism does not benefit any workers. Even workers who are not themselves directly oppressed by racism lose out from racism because it divides the working class. White American workers, for example, in no way benefit from the existence of an impoverished and oppressed minority of African American workers who can be used to undercut wages, and working and living conditions.

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In addition, racist attitudes make it very difficult to unite workers against the capitalists to challenge the overall distribution of wealth and power in society. Racism has been used again and again to break workers' struggles.

The more the working class is divided, the worse its overall condition will be. This point, which was repeatedly made by the classical anarchist movement¹⁵, has been confirmed in a study by an American sociologist who set out to test the proposition that white workers gain from racism¹⁶.

Comparing the situation of White and Black workers in all fifty US states, he found, firstly, that the less wage discrimination there was against Black workers, the better were the wages that White workers received. Secondly, he found that the existence of a substantial nationally oppressed group of poor workers reduced the wages of White workers (but did not affect the earnings of middle and upper-class Whites very much). Finally, he found that the more intense racial discrimination was, the more poverty there was for lower class Whites.

Such facts fly in the face of political strategies which claim that majority population workers receive material benefits from racism. The logic of this argument is that these privileges must be "renounced" before working class unity is possible. Such an argument assumes that capitalists would adopt a strategy that systematically benefits the majority of workers, a most unlikely (and as we saw above, unsustainable) notion. In addition, this argument implies that the immediate political task is a redistribution of wealth among workers as opposed to a class struggle against capitalism. That is to say, it calls on the majority of workers to fight on principle for worse conditions.

Finally, this approach mixes up two very different things: oppression and privilege. While it is obviously true that some workers do not directly experience racial oppression, it does not follow that they benefit from it. The two terms are distinct: while it is oppressive to be subject to low wages, it is not a privilege to have a living wage.

Why racist ideas are accepted

None of the arguments made so far in this article deny the possibility that minorities of the working class may receive temporary benefits from racial oppression in specific circumstances. A case in point would be the small white working class in South Africa between the 1920s and the 1980s, which received real benefits from apartheid. But, as a general rule, racial oppression is fundamentally against the interests of the majority of workers of all colours.

To recognise the primary role of capitalist ruling classes (aided by their states) in promoting and benefiting from racial oppression is not to deny that many working class people often support racism. Racism is often very widespread. However, such



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support for racism is an example of working class people acting against their own interests, rather than evidence that workers benefit from racism.

However, if racism provides no benefits for workers, how can we explain such support for the essentially irrational ideas of racism?

The answer is that there are very real material forces in capitalist society which operate to foster support for these ideas.

The first factor is capitalist control over ideas. Capitalists do not simply rule by force, they also rule by promoting a capitalist world-view. Here we must consider, as Praxedis argued above, how "the dominating classes, the keepers of education and the wealth of nations" ... "feed the proletariat with the belief of stupid superiority and pride": the role of the schools, the media, literature and so forth. The impact of this propaganda cannot be underestimated.

The second factor is the material conditions of the working class itself. Under capitalism, the working class suffers poverty, alienation and misery. In the same way that workers may take solace from religion, they may also seek the imaginary compensation of supposed racial superiority, "the belief of stupid superiority and pride" (in Praxedis' words).

In addition, working class people are locked in bitter competition for a limited amount of jobs, housing and other resources. In this situation, they may blame other groups in the working class for their plight. Where the other groups are culturally or physically distinct in appearance, this resentment and competition may be expressed in racist terms. Hence the view, for example,

that 'they' are 'taking our jobs'.

The Oppressed divided

From the above, it is clear that racism is a product of capitalism, and fundamentally against the interests of the working class and peasantry.

Are capitalists from oppressed groups reliable allies in the struggle against racism? The short answer is, no, they are not.

The effects of racism are fundamentally mediated by class position. Taking the case of the United States: although national averages of White and Black incomes show a vast gulf between the two, when class is taken into account the material inequalities between White and Black workers are shown to be quite limited; taken from another angle, the gap between the conditions of both sets of workers, on one side, and those of the upper class, on the other, are yawning¹⁷.

Michael Jackson may still face racism, but his wealth and power as a capitalist shields him from the worst effects of racism. Private schools, lawyers, high incomes - all these factors cannot be ignored.

Perhaps more importantly, the class interests of such elites tie them into supporting the capitalist system itself. Black police chiefs, mayors, and army officers are as much defenders of capitalism as their White counterparts. Such strata will readily compromise with the powers-that-be if it will give them a chance to be 'in the racket and in the running'.

Fighting racism

It is capitalism that continually generates the conditions for racist oppression and ideology. It follows that the struggle against racism can only be consistently carried out by the working class and peasantry: the only forces capable of overthrowing the capitalist system. The overthrow of capitalism will in and of itself fundamentally undermine the social sources of racism. The overthrow of capitalism however, requires the unification of the working class and peasantry internationally, across all lines of colour and nationality.

In addition, the crushing of capitalism, and the establishment of libertarian socialism will allow the vast resources currently chained to the needs of profiteering by a

rich few to be placed under the control of the working and poor people of the whole globe. Under libertarian communism it will be possible to use these resources to create social and economic equality for all, thus finally enabling the disfigurements of racial oppression to be scoured from the face of the earth.

However, this article is in no way arguing that the fight against racism must be deferred until after the revolution. Instead, it is arguing that on the one hand, only a united working class can defeat racism and capitalism; on the other, a united working class can only be built on the basis of opposing all forms of oppression and prejudice, thereby winning the support of all sectors of the broad working class.

Firstly, it is clear that racism can only be fought on a class basis. It is in the interest of all workers to support the struggle against racism. Racism is a working class issue because it affects the conditions of all workers, because most people affected by racism are working class, and because, as indicated above, it is the working class members of racially oppressed groups who are the most severely affected by racism.

Working class unity is also in the interests of racially oppressed segments of the working class, as alliances with the broader working class not only strengthen their own position, but also help lay the basis for the assault on capitalism. Without denying in the least the heroism, and, in some cases, radicalising role played by minority movements, it is quite obvious that a minority of, say, 10 per cent of the population lacks the ability to overthrow the existing conditions on its own¹⁸. Such unity is particularly vital in the workplace, where it is almost impossible for unions of minority workers to function.

Secondly, working class unity can, however, clearly only be built on the basis of a resolute opposition to all forms of racism. If other sections of the working class do not oppose racism, they create a situation in which nationalists can tie racially oppressed segments to Black and other minority capitalists in the futile games of 'Buy Black' campaigns and voting blocs. Class-based and anarchist alternatives must present a viable alternative if they are to win support.

Our tasks

Anti-racist work should occupy a high priority in the activities of all class struggle anarchists. This is important not simply because we always oppose all oppression, and because anarchists have long been opponents of racism. It is also because such work is an essential to the vital task of unifying and conscientising the working class - a unity without which neither racism nor capitalism can be consigned to the history books.

At a general level, we can approach these tasks by active work in anti-racist struggles and campaigns, including work alongside non-anarchist forces (without, of course, surrendering our political independence), and by continual propaganda against racism in our publications, workplaces, unions and communities.

The workplace and the union are particularly important sites for activity: it is here that capitalism creates the greatest pressure for workers' unity across all barriers, and it is here that the workers' movement stands or falls on the basis of its ability to address the needs of its whole constituency.

We can approach these tasks by raising, on the one hand, demands that apply equally to all workers (better wages, full union rights, opposition to social partnership etc.), and by raising, on the other, demands which specifically address the needs of racially oppressed segments of the working class (equal schooling, equal housing, no to colour bars in industry etc.). Thus, we should fight for "*Better Housing for All! No to Segregation!*", to take one example. The target of such demands would, of course, be the bosses, although in no case whatsoever should the tiniest concession be made to racial prejudices on the part of any workers.

There is no contradiction between the class struggle and the struggle against racism. Neither can succeed without the other.

1 Eric Williams, 1944, *Capitalism and Slavery*. Andre Deutsch. p. 17. See also Peter Fryer, 1988, *Black People in the British Empire*. Pluto Press. chapter 11.

2 Williams does not take sufficient account of the institution of life-long slavery among Whites.

3 Williams, p. 14.

4 Williams, p. 10.

5 Leo Huberman, 1947, *We, the People: the drama of America*. Monthly Review Press. p. 161.

6 Williams, pp. 18-9, 23-29.

7 Bill Freund, 1984, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: the development of African society since 1800*. Indiana University Press. p. 51.

8 Fryer, p. 64.

9 Williams, pp. 23-6; Huberman, p. 167-8.

10 Huberman, p. 167.

11 See Freund for a discussion of the African experience.

12 Fryer, pp. 61-81; Freund.

13 And not to workers as Fryer claims, pp. 54-5.

These arguments are criticised in greater detail in the WSF Position Paper on "Anti-Imperialism", online at <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/africa.html>.

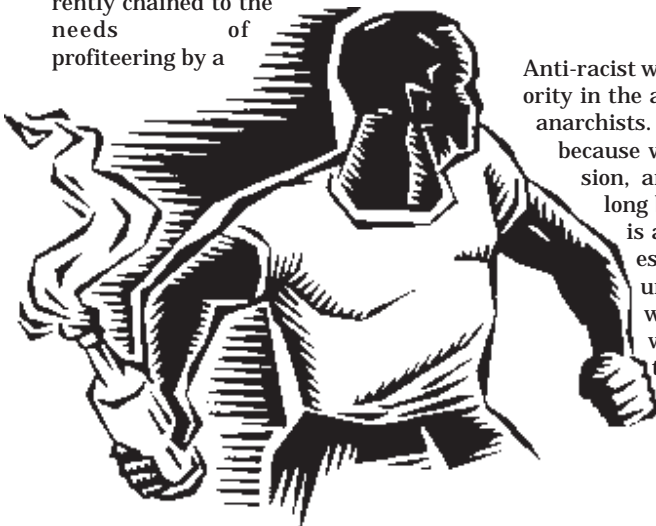
14 Programa de la Liga Pan-Americana del Trabajo in *Articulos de Combate*, p. 124-5, cited in D. Poole, "The Anarchists and the Mexican Revolution, part 2: Praxedis G. Geurrero 1882-1910", *Anarchist Review*. No. 4. Cienfuegos Press.

15 For example, Ricardo Flores Magon and others, *To the Workers of the United States*, November 1914, reproduced as Appendix A, in Colin Maclachlan, 1991, *Anarchism and the Mexican Revolution: the political trials of Ricardo Flores Magon in the United States*. University of California Press. p. 123.

16 Al Szymanski, 1976, "Racial Discrimination and White Gain", in *American Sociological Review*, 41.

17 N. Chomsky, 1994, *Keeping the Rabble in Line*. AK Press. pp. 105-6.

18 See on this point, "Race, Class and Organisation: the view from the Workers Solidarity Federation (South Africa)", 1997, *Black Flag*, no. 212. Online at http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/africa/wsfother/bf_race_org.html



The Bolsheviks' pet anarchist

THE LIFE, TIMES & CONFESSIONS OF VICTOR SERGE

Leninists are fond of quoting from the writing of Victor Serge, as a means of getting a libertarian rubber stamp for the actions of the Bolsheviks during the October revolution and the subsequent events. In his keynote article "In defence of October"¹ John Rees uses no less than 8 quotes from Serge's writings within the space of 70 pages. Poor old Lenin only managed to clock up 4 original quotes, while Tony Cliff's dubious interpretation of all these events manages to get more quotes in than one could possibly count. To a certain extent, what the Leninists of today are trying to tell us is that Serge was a practical man, and he knew that the only way for the revolution to succeed was to row in behind the Bolsheviks. So, with this in mind, we take a look at Serge's autobiography "Memoirs of a Revolutionary".

Serge was born in 1890 and rapidly became a self educator and socialist joining the Jeuns-Grades - a Belgium federation of Socialist youth groups. Serge eventually ended up in Paris, which was the scene of a huge demonstration (over 500,000 people) when the working class learned of the execution of Francisco Ferrer². "It was a time of pot-bellied peace; the atmosphere was strangely electric, the calm before the storm of 1914."³ Serge was at this time involved in publishing a journal in Paris. Subsequent to the riots at the time of the demonstrations his house was raided, the police found weapons there, two of his comrades were sentenced to death by the guillotine, and he got 5 years in prison. Nasty times to be living in if the state considered you to be a revolutionary. But they were about to get worse. While in prison, the Great War broke out in all its futility, all over Europe sending young men to their deaths. Most of the mainstream left parties turned towards fratricidal patriotism causing mass confusion in the movement. The young imprisoned Serge found the whole situation incomprehensible.

Dawn and Decline

Following his release, Serge ended up in Petrograd at the start of 1919. He was not the only young revolutionary to be drawn to Mother Russia during her famous date with destiny. One of the first people he met while there was Maxim Gorky. Gorky, apart from being famous both at home and abroad as a major writer, was also a respected political figure in Russia. He'd been a champion of change for a long time, and his opinion was one that was respected by many.

Gorky had witnessed the early days of the revolution and reported that the Bolsheviks were "drunk with authority"⁴. But, after a brief time, Serge made his own mind up about the whole matter. "I was neither against the Bolsheviks nor neutral; I was with them, albeit independently, without renouncing thought or critical sense.

*Certainly on several essential points they were mistaken: in their intolerance, in their faith in stratification, in their leaning towards centralism and administrative techniques*⁵. In spite of these reservations he threw himself into working alongside the Bolsheviks. He was invited to be a Petrograd representative at the founding meeting of the Communist International (Third International) initiated by Lenin in Moscow.

All this work for the Party brought with it special rations. Such was the wide sweeping famine in Russia at the time that, even with these rations, Serge wrote "I would have died of hunger without the sordid manipulations of the black market, where we traded the petty possessions we had brought in from France."⁶ The Central Committee, however, suffered none of these hardships. Living in the Hotel Astoria, they dined on soup and "delicious horsemeat"⁷ in comparative warmth, overlooking the dark public squares. Serge even calls this place the "hotel of the dicta-

tors"⁸

The Winter of 1919 was a cold and bitter one. Civil War raged, exiled Russian Aristocrats traded currency with the Tsar still on it, while the Bolsheviks printed it like it was going out of fashion and used it to procure arms. That's right, the Bolsheviks printed money with the Tsar's image on it. As Serge says "we used to print them for the poor fools (Russian Exiles)"⁹. The widespread cloak of hunger hung over the whole country. In the midst of this mess, the infamous Bolshevik secret police, the Chekas carried out their dastardly work. The telephone rapidly became an enemy of any sympathetic official and Serge was no exception. He writes "At every hour it brought me voices of panic-stricken women who spoke of arrests, imminent executions, and injustice, and begged me to intervene at once, for the love of God!"¹⁰. At this stage the custom of arresting and executing hostages had become "generalised and legal."¹¹

The mere existence of a secret police is a rapid insight into the nature of the Party's politics at the time. From 1918 onwards the leadership, from Lenin downwards, had become increasingly more paranoid and saw plots and treachery everywhere. The Cheka were formed to counteract this but as Serge writes he believed it "was one of the gravest and most impermissible errors that the Bolshevik leaders committed in 1918."¹² He claimed that revolutionary tribunals, letting in defensive evidence and functioning in the clear light of day rather



One of nine Rolls Royce cars ordered for Lenin at the 1920 London Motor Show

than the cloak of the night, would have functioned efficiently with "far less abuse and depravity."¹³ When Serge brought up Zinoviev (Lenin's appointed President of the Third International and member of the Politbureau) around this time in a conversation with Gorky, Gorky shouted out "Don't talk to me of that beast ever again - tell him that his torturers are a disgrace to the human image."¹⁴

By early 1920, it appeared that the Civil War was coming to an end, and the idea of normality returning to Mother Russia was gaining popularity. By January of 1920 Dzerzhinsky (People's Commissar for the Interior), with the backing of Lenin and Trotsky, recommended the abolition of the death sentence - except in areas where there were still military operations being carried out. Hope sprang up immediately amongst the thousands of suspects in the crammed prisons as the decree was passed by the Government and signed by Lenin. But the executioners of the Cheka were busy that night, as 200 people were driven outside of Petrograd and shot. Over 300 in Moscow. Relatives scraped at the mass burial grounds looking for relics of their dead loved ones. Serge actually met one of the grim reapers who worked in the Petrograd Cheka, who said of that time "We thought that if the People's Commissars were getting converted to Humanitarianism, that was their business. Our business was to crush the counter-revolution for ever, and they could shoot us afterwards if they like!"¹⁵ The work of the Cheka, although well recognised, was never spoken of. No one was disciplined for this slaughter, implying that their dirty work met with the approval of the Bolsheviks.

The enemies within ?

By 1920 opinions were rampant and divided about the Soviets. The Mensheviks were outright opponents, the Left Social-Revolutionaries first boycotted them and then collaborated with them. The anarchists were divided into pro-soviet and anti-soviet. Serge called all the people outside the party view of the time "dissidents of the revolution" who were "right on many points."¹⁶ But the dissidents had a fundamental point which had to be admitted, which was above all the right of the people of Russia "for freedom of expression and the restoration of liberty in the soviets."¹⁷ The Soviets of 1917 had been the workers' councils which had been composed of the workers and soldiers' delegates who wished to disband the bad old society and bring about the dawn of a new age of freedom for mankind. But with the suppression of all opposition to the viewpoints of the Bolsheviks, Serge writes "In practice they (the soviets) represented nothing but the local Party Committees."¹⁸ The Party at this time had been practically invaded, according to Serge, by careerists, mercenary elements who came over in swarms to the side with power. Bureaucratism was rampant. It comes as no surprise that the

Party that would bring about the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was now full of little dictators who "possessed no initiative".¹⁹ After all, the nature of their politics was to have a small number of people making decisions for the majority.

The search for the enemies within was growing, mainly driven from the top (secretaries) downwards through the Party and exercised by the Cheka. Of the many anarchists in prison at this time, Lenin said they "were not true anarchists nor idealists - just bandits" and anyway "The State is a machine for which we are answerable and we cannot allow its operation to be frustrated."²⁰ By this stage, the Bolsheviks were determined that this revolution was theirs alone and anyone who held an alternative opinion was labeled against the party - and therefore against the revolution. Any opposition to the will of the party was seen as a threat as the Bolsheviks wrestled for a grip on the monopoly of power. They were hanging onto it by their fingertips and any threat was dealt with in a severe manner. As one party member wrote in an official trade union journal at the time 'Professional'ny Vestnik' "the destruction of newspapers, the annihilation of freedom of agitation for the socialist and democratic parties is inadmissible. The....violence against strikers, etc. irritated open wounds. There has been too much of this type of memory of the Russian toiling masses and this can lead to an analogy deadly to the Soviet power."²¹ The Bolsheviks were holding onto State power irrespective of costs, ideals or lives.

Anarchists were arrested en masse by the Cheka in November 1920, as they prepared for their congress. Serge speaks, at this time, of being horrified at witnessing the rigging of elections so that Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority' opinion would win. Lenin said the trade unions should organise autonomously from the state (an improvement from Trotsky's position which said they should be merged) but they must be subordinate to the Party. 'All power to the Party' would have been a much more accurate slogan at this time. Incidents

happened all the time in factories. The Party was becoming less and less popular, and strikes were on the increase. This was in the November and December of 1920. The atmosphere was building towards a confrontation between the Party and those who were pro-revolution, but not pro the Bolshevik version they were being served. That confrontation would burst into the open at Kronstadt and Serge was one of the witnesses.

Whose Revolution is this ?

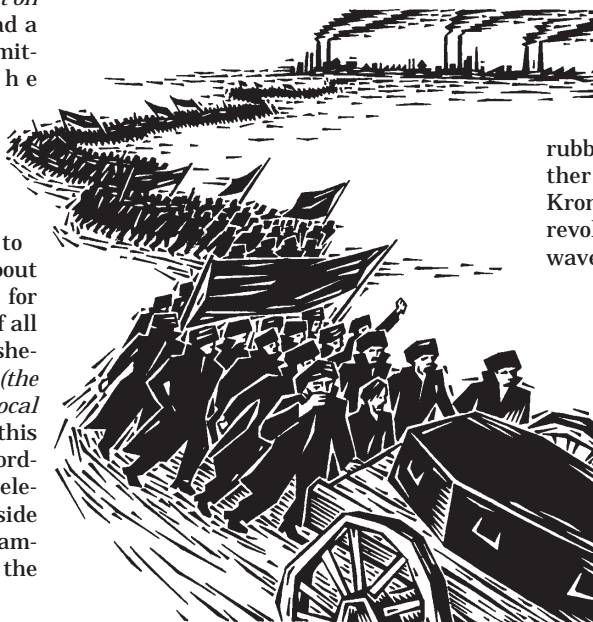
Kropotkin, the best known anarchist in Russia and worldwide at the time, died. The anarchists, including a number who were temporarily released from Bolshevik jails in order to attend, turned his funeral into a massive show of strength and a "denunciation of all tyranny"²². Behind the coffin marched thousands of mourners hand in hand, carrying the black flags of anarchism. The Cheka's presence at the funeral added to the atmosphere of tension. Many anarchists were arrested straight after the burial of the old man, only to disappear to prisons from which they would never re-emerge. Just as the old man lay in the ground, many were to join him and with them went the hopes for socialism and freedom.

18 days later, Serge was awoken in the Astoria Hotel with the news that "Kronstadt is in the hands of the Whites."²³ Later on the next day other comrades told him "the sailors have mutinied"²⁴ and that what he'd heard previously was nothing but an atrocious lie. Serge writes "We were paralysed by official falsehoods. It had never happened before that our Party should lie to us like this."²⁵ It was in fact a naval revolt, led by the local Soviet.

The battle lines were drawn, this was a battle for power. Who was really in charge of the Soviets, the people themselves or a Party already rampant with bureaucrats and careerists? Lenin had written in 1918 that "The irrefutable experience of history has shown that....the dictatorship of individual persons was very often the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes."²⁶ What this meant in reality was that the make-up of the Soviets had to change and was changed from the freely elected delegates to submissive party hacks who rubber stamped the decisions made further up the hierarchy. The battle at Kronstadt was fought to either bring the revolution back towards the people or to wave good-bye to it all.

The killing of hope in Kronstadt

Serge wrote of the demands of the Kronstadt rebels. "Pamphlets distributed in the working class areas... It was a programme for the renewal of the Revolution ... re-election of the Soviets by secret ballot; freedom of the spoken and printed word for all revolutionary parties and groupings;





freedom for the trade unions; the release of revolutionary political prisoners; abolition of official propaganda; an end to requisitioning in the countryside; freedom for the artisan class; immediate suppression of the barrier squads that were stopping the people from getting their food as they pleased.²⁷ The crews of the First and Second Naval Squadrons, along with the garrison and the Soviet in Kronstadt, were fighting for the triumph of the above demands.

A delegation from Kronstadt which was dispatched to Petrograd to explain the uprising ended up in the hands of the Cheka. Most of those who mediated on the sailors' behalf ended up being arrested. Serge justifies the whole incident and his own siding with the Party in this way "Kronstadt had right on its side. Kronstadt was the beginning of a fresh liberating revolution for popular democracy ... However, the country was absolutely exhausted, and production practically at a standstill; there were no reserves of any kind, not even reserves of stamina in the hearts of the masses. ...Soviet democracy lacked leadership, institutions and inspiration; at its back there were only masses of starving and desperate men."²⁸ That was his reason. He saw no hope for the people to take the de-railed revolution and put it back on track. Serge puts it more bluntly in his propaganda of the time when he wrote "Despite its mistakes and abuses the Bolshevik Party is at present the supremely organised, intelligent and stable force which deserves our confidence. The Revolution has no other mainstay, and is no longer capable of any thorough going regeneration."²⁹ It was with these words that Serge kissed the idea of freedom good-bye, and held up his arms in a shrug which said there was nothing better.

The anarchists and the Menshevik Social Democrats were outlawed, along with anybody else who didn't give absolute loyalty to Lenin's dictatorship. Charged with all sorts of "odious terms"³⁰, Serge himself writes "The Cheka is mad!"³¹ In Moscow at the same time Lenin was proclaiming the "New Economic Policy". Lenin, in his own written words, described this: "Socialism is merely the next step forward from State capitalist monopoly. Or in other words,

socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly."³² At the same congress, a party faction known as the Workers' Opposition was outlawed and denounced as "anarcho-syndicalist" because they wished management of production to be handed over to the trade unions. This history of events displays that the Bolsheviks could not accept any threat to their monopoly of power. The threat at that time was on the cold winds of change blowing from the port of Kronstadt.

Do not mourn - Organise !

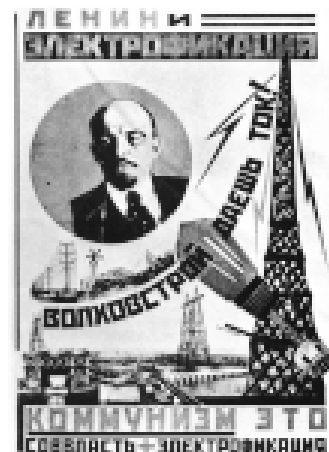
Serge has been championed for a long time by various Trotskyists and Leninists as the former Libertarian who saw the Bolshevik example and followed it. He was a practical man, they'll say, an example of an anarchist who saw sense in that time of revolt. Read his book and listen to his story. He was a man who was courageous and strong and fought for what he believed. But at one point a light was extinguished in him, and he just kept on pushing for the programme being put forth by the party. That light that went out was his belief that you could win freedom, he thought that what the working class had to do was trust in and obey the 'revolutionary party'. Unfortunately, when they did that they were left in a position of hoping the party would deliver that freedom. Too late did they realise that the emancipation of the working class is the job of the working class itself, the party isn't going to deliver it.

This battle was lost in Kronstadt, and that's why anarchists throughout the world celebrated when we saw those joyous faces on the other side as the Berlin wall was smacked over. Then the Party had won the battle and formed in its wake a viciously authoritarian state - where the will of the people was crushed beneath the wheels of interest of the Bolsheviks. So we did not mourn the passing of the Bolshevik dictatorship, socialism's chance in Russia passed when the blood of the sailors was spilled by the Red Army on the ice of Kronstadt. Serge wrote his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* - and in it he displays how the means determine the end. Leninists have failed to make a revolution based on freedom and equality because it cannot be built on suppression. Bakunin wrote with a clarity that Serge only found out though experience "Only the practice of social revolution, great new historical experiences, the logic of events can bring them around, sooner or later, to a common solution: and strong in our belief in the validity of our principle.....the workers...., not their leaders, will then end by joining with us to tear down these prisons called States and to condemn politics, which is in fact nothing more than the art of dominating and fleecing the masses."³³ It's imperative that a social revolution is built on freedom, as any anarchist will tell you. When it is, that revolution will not fail, and that is a truth

that we are here to build for.

References

- ¹ In "International Socialism No. 52" a journal published by the Socialist Workers Party in Britain
- ² *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* by Victor Serge
- ³ An anarcho-syndicalist and educational reformer. In Barcelona he translated French Syndicalist material and founded the journal *Solidaridad Obrera*. He was vilified and hated by the Catholic Church and the right because he established libertarian schools for the education of working class children. His respect within the working class was such that his death in Spain brought half a million people out to demonstrate on the streets of Paris.
- ⁴ *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, page 73, Quote attributed to Maxim Gorky
- ⁵ *ibid* page 76
- ⁶ *ibid* page 79
- ⁷ *ibid* page 79
- ⁸ *ibid* page 79
- ⁹ *ibid* page 86
- ¹⁰ *ibid* page 80
- ¹¹ *ibid* page 80
- ¹² *ibid* page 80-81
- ¹³ *ibid* page 81
- ¹⁴ *ibid* page 82
- ¹⁵ *ibid* page 99, Quote attributed to a man called Leonidov - his real name was never written by Serge - a man who took part in the execution of hundreds of people outside Petrograd.
- ¹⁶ *ibid* page 118
- ¹⁷ *ibid* page 119
- ¹⁸ *ibid* page 118
- ¹⁹ *ibid* page 118
- ²⁰ *Anarchists behind bars* (Summer 1921) - Lenin quoted when asked about imprisoned anarchists like Voline
- ²¹ *The Bolsheviks & Workers Control*, page 28, Quote from Party member Lovosky
- ²² *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, *ibid* page 121
- ²³ *ibid* page 124
- ²⁴ *ibid* page 125
- ²⁵ *ibid* page 125
- ²⁶ Lenin's article 'The immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government' published in *Isvestiya*
- ²⁷ *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, *ibid* page 126
- ²⁸ *ibid* page 128
- ²⁹ *ibid* page 129
- ³⁰ *ibid* page 129
- ³¹ *ibid* page 129
- ³² Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 25, page 358
- ³³ *No Gods, No Masters: Vol. 2*, ed Daniel Guerin, page 161 - Bakunin letter to La Liberte Oct 5th 1872





1798



In 1798 Ireland was shook by a mass rebellion for democratic rights and against British rule. 200 years later 1798 continues to loom over Irish politics. The bi-centenary, co-inciding with the 'Peace process', has attracted considerable discussion, with the formation of local history groups, the holding of conferences and a high level of interest in the TV documentaries and books published around the event.

It is rightly said that history is written by the victors. The British and loyalist historians who wrote the initial histories of the rising portrayed it as little more than the actions of a sectarian mob intent on massacring all Protestants. Later reformers sought to hide the program of 1798 to unite Irishmen regardless of creed. After 1798 they turned to the confessional politics of mobilising Catholics alone. Daniel O'Connell, the main architect of this policy, went so far in 1841 as to denounce the United Irishmen as "... wicked and villianously designing wretches who fomented the rebellion".¹

So the first response to the Loyalist history in Ireland was an alternative but parallel history produced to suit a Catholic nationalist agenda. Both of these agendas neatly dovetailed in showing the rising as a fight for "faith and fatherland". This is illustrated by the treatment of two portraits of prominent figures in the rebellion. Lord Edward Fitzgerald had his red cravat² painted out and replaced with a white one. Father Murphy had his cravat painted out and replaced with a priest's collar! Within parts of republicanism and the left there have been attempts to rescue this history, starting with the memoirs of United Irishmen like Myles Byrne who chose exile over compromise. But, all too often, this history has been crushed beneath histories designed to fulfil the needs of the British and

Irish ruling class.

James Connolly neatly described the Irish nationalist version of 1798 thus

"The middle class "patriotic" historians, orators, and journalists of Ireland have ever vied with one another in enthusiastic descriptions of their military exploits on land and sea, their hairbreadth escapes and heroic martyrdom, but have resolutely suppressed or distorted their writings, songs and manifestos."³

In short, although the name of the United Irishmen was honoured, their democratic ideas were buried even before the formation of the 26 county state.

In the 1840's Ireland once again fell under the influence of a wave of international radicalism. They sought to uncover the real aims of the 1798 rebellion. The republican organisation of the 1840's, the Young Irelanders "celebrated the United Irishmen not as passive victims or reluctant rebels, but as ideologically committed revolutionaries with a coherent political strategy".⁴ They placed a marker on the grave of the key United Irishmen leader, Wolfe Tone, at Bodenstown. Paying homage at the grave is an essential annual rite for any party wishing to claim the republican legacy.

These different histories mean that even within republicanism there was little agree-

ment about what the real legacy of 1798 was. In 1934 when Protestant members of the Republican Congress arrived at Bodenstown with a banner proclaiming 'Break the connection with capitalism' they were physically assaulted and driven off by IRA members.

Of particular note is the way the women of 1798 have either been written out of history altogether or exist only as the faithful wives of the nationalist histories and the blood crazed witches of the loyalist accounts. Like other republicans of that period the United Irishmen - for the most part - did not see a role for women, although "one proposal was made that women should have the vote as well"⁵. Nevertheless a number of women, including Mary Ann McCracken, played an important role from an early period in promoting the organisation, and a Society of United Irishwomen was established in 1796.⁶

In the run up to the rebellion, women were particularly active in subverting the Militia. They would swear in soldiers and also spread rumours that the troops were going to be sent abroad. Women were active in the rebellion, not just in 'traditional roles' of medical aid etc., but also in quite a number of cases as combatants. However, almost all of these roles seem to be ones that individual women demanded and fought for, there is little evidence of any serious effort on the part of the United Irishmen to mobilise women.

An overview of the Rebellion

In the Autumn of 1791, societies of United Irishmen were formed in Belfast and Dublin. Initially the organisation limited itself to calling for democratic reforms including Catholic emancipation⁷. In response to popular pressure, the British government - which effectively ruled Ireland - initially granted some reforms. This period of reform ended in 1793, when war broke out between revolutionary France and Britain.

In December of 1796 the United Irishmen came the nearest they would to victory, when 15,000 French troops arrived off Bantry Bay. Bad weather prevented the landing and saved Britain from defeat. After Bantry Bay, Irish society was bitterly polarised as loyalists flocked to join the British army and the United Irishmen's numbers swelled massively.

By the Spring of 1798, a campaign of British terror was destroying the United Irishmen organisation and many of the leaders



had been arrested. The remaining leaders felt forced to call an immediate rising, even though this would be before French aid could arrive. The date was set for May 23rd. A number of factors undermined the rising in Dublin. However major risings occurred in Wexford in the south, and Antrim and Down in the north. Elsewhere there were minor skirmishes. By the autumn - despite a small French landing - the rebellion had been defeated, tens of thousands were dead and a reign of terror had spread over the country.

Origins of the rising

The 1798 rising occurred at a unique moment in world politics, the point at which parliamentary democracy (and capitalism) was replacing absolute monarchy (and feudalism). The American Revolution of 1771-81 and the French Revolution of 1789 were the key inspirations for those who were to lead the rebellion in Ireland. Wolfe Tone described how *"the French Revolution became the test of every man's political creed, and the nation was fairly divided into two great parties - the aristocracy and democrats"*.⁸

To this was added the severe oppression the majority of Irish people lived under. The country was bitterly divided, two wars had been fought in the previous century with the combatants split along religious lines. The native Catholic landowning class had been forced either to surrender their lands or to convert to the Anglican religion. In parts of the country, in particular the North-East, even the ordinary Catholic tenants had been forced off the land, to be replaced with Presbyterian 'planters' brought over from Scotland. This left a legacy of sectarian rivalry which helped the British to 'divide and rule'.

Although some reforms had been won, the situation by the 1780's was that the country was ruled by Anglican **landowners**, with Presbyterian landowners having only limited political power, and Catholic landowners none. Beyond this, the mass of the population, Catholic, Protestant (Anglican) and Dissenter (Presbyterian) had virtually no rights at all. In 1831 there were 6,000 absentee landlords, who owned over 7,000,000 acres.

The complete subjection the peasantry were subjected to is hinted by a traveller through Ireland at the time who wrote

*"A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order which a servant, labourer, or cottier dares to refuse to execute. ... A poor man would have his bones broken if he offered to lift a hand in his own defence. . . . Landlords of consequence have assured me that many of their cottiers would think themselves honoured by having their wives and daughters sent for to the bed of their master."*⁹

There were famines in 1740, '57, '65 and '70. The first of these alone killed 400,000.¹⁰

The arrival of capitalism had seen the beginnings of a working class. There were

at least 27 labour disputes in Dublin from 1717 to 1800 and the formation of the early trade unions had started¹¹. *"There were 50 combinations in 27 different trades in Dublin in the period 1772-95. There were at least 30 food riots ... in the period 1772-94."*¹²

This atmosphere of revolutionary ideas on the one hand, and brutal oppression on the other, was the climate in which the United Irishmen were born in 1791. This initially reformist organisation, at first composed of the Protestant middle class was to choose within a few years to take the path of launching a democratic and anti-colonial revolution.

Leadership Vs masses

According to the *Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Lords* - shortly before the United Irishmen were founded - Tone, Samuel Neilson and others in the north circulated a *Secret Manifesto to the Friends of Freedom in Ireland*. Towards the end this contained a description of past movements that was to prove prophetic as a description of events in 1798

*"When the aristocracy come forward, the people fall backwards; when the people come forward, the aristocracy, fearful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries."*¹³

Once the United Irishmen had decided to take the direction of rebellion, they had to win the mass of the people actively to join in such a rebellion. To do this they highlighted the economic advantages of reform. Gaining the vote for rich Catholic landowners would mean little to those paying rent for this land.

Dr William James MacNeven, under interrogation by the House of Lords in 1798, when asked if Catholic emancipation or parliamentary reform mobilised 'the lower orders' said *"I am sure they do not understand it. What they very well understand is that it would be a very great advantage to them to be relieved from the payments of tithes and not to be fleeced by the landlords"*¹⁴ In 1794 they asked *"Who makes them rich? The answer is obvious - it is the industrious poor"*.

Historian Nancy Curtin points out that *"Some united Irish recruiters ... suggested that a major redistribution of land would follow a successful revolution"* and that as a result *"To a certain extent republicanism became associated in the common mind with low rents, the abolition of tithes and a tax burden borne by the wealthy and idle rather than by the poor and industrious"*¹⁵

The Union doctrine; or poor man's catechism, was published anonymously as part of this effort and read in part

"I believe in a revolution founded on the rights of man, in the natural and imprescriptable right of all citizens to all the land ... As the land and its produce was intended for the use of man 'tis

*unfair for fifty or a hundred men to possess what is for the subsistence of near five millions ..."*¹⁶

Before 1794 the role consigned by republican leaders to the masses was one of fairly passive displays of support for change. For example Illuminations (where people put lights in their windows) were important to show the level of public support.

Following the 1794 banning of the Dublin United Irishmen the masses became more actively involved. Riots were organised by the United Irishmen, particularly around the arrival of the new Viceroy, Camden, in March 1795, when aristocrats were stoned in the streets of Dublin.

As public demonstrations were banned, various ruses were used to gather United Irishmen together. Race meeting were used as pretexts for mass assemblies. Mock funerals with up to 2,000 'mourners' would be held, sometimes the coffin would actually contain arms. In the countryside mass potato diggings (often for imprisoned United Irishmen) were organised and often conducted as military drills. These were a way of seeing who would turn out and how well they would follow orders.

This following of orders was central to the preparation for rebellion, as the United Irishmen's leadership wanted to be able to control and discipline the masses in the event of a rising. This was also why a French landing was central. The French army would help not just to beat Britain, but also to control the masses. The original strategy for the rebellion was for only a few thousand United Irishmen to join the army of the French (and for these to be quickly disciplined).

This is the context in which Tone's *"Our freedom must be had at all hazards. If the men of property will not help us, they must fall; we will free ourselves by the aid of that large and respectable class of the community - the men of no property"* must be taken. Yes, the United Irishmen had turned



to the 'men of no property', but the leadership still intended to run the show, and with French help hold back the masses if necessary.

After 1794, with the turn towards revolutionary politics and the need to mobilise the masses, the class basis of the United Irishmen underwent a radical change. Dublin membership of artisans, clerks and labourers rose to nearly 50% of the total.¹⁷

Other popular political societies in Dublin in the 1790's included 'the Strugglers'. One judge referred to "the nest of clubs in the city of Dublin". Their membership was said to consist of "The younger part of the tradesmen, and in general all the apprentices". The informer Higgins described these clubs as comprising "King killers, Paineites, democrats, levellers and United Irishmen".¹⁸

The link with the 'Defenders'

A central part of the strategy for mass rebellion was to build links with the already established movements, and in particular the Defenders. The Defenders had started as a local 'faction' (gang) in Armagh and were initially non-sectarian, their first Captain being Presbyterian.¹⁹ Armagh was the scene of intense political agitation around the arming of Catholics, with the Protestant Orange Order²⁰ conducting armed attacks on Catholics. However the arming of the Catholics had "the full support of a radical section of Protestant political opinion"²¹. These origins are important, as later historians have attempted to portray the Defenders as purely a Catholic sectarian organisation, a sort of mirror image of the Orange Order.

In 1795, up to 7,000 Catholics were driven out of Armagh by Orange Order pogroms. The United Irishmen provided lawyers to prosecute on behalf of the victims of Or-

ange attacks. "Special missions were dispatched there in 1792 and again in 1795 and senior figures like Neilson, Teeling, McCracken, Quigley and Lowry worked the area ceaselessly ...".²² Many expelled Catholic families were sheltered by Presbyterian United Irishmen in Belfast, and later, Antrim and Down. These expulsions facilitated the spread of Defenderism and fear of the Orange Order to other parts of Ireland.

The Defenders were already politicised to some extent by the hope of French intervention and their anti-tax and anti-tithe propaganda. They proclaimed "We have lived long enough upon potatoes and salt; it is our turn now to eat mutton and beef"²³. Despite their rural origins the Defenders were not a peasant movement but "drawn from among weavers, labourers and tenant farmers ... and from the growing artisan class of the towns". By 1795 there were some 4000 Defenders in Dublin, closely linked with many of the republican clubs in the city. The complex nature of the Defenders is illustrated as "in Dublin there were Protestant Defenders" even though "revenge against Protestants was certainly an important element in Defender thinking"²⁴.

The Orange Order attacks had inevitably introduced sectarianism into the Defenders. But the United Irishmen saw this sectarianism as being due to the influence of priests, and directed only against Protestant landlords. This was to prove a serious under estimation, particularly outside of the north.

The Rebellion

In December of 1796, a French Fleet appeared off the shores of Bantry Bay with 15,000 French soldiers and Wolfe Tone. Rough seas and inexperienced sailors prevented a landing which would have liber-

ated the country from British rule. The British campaign of terror against the United Irishmen which followed was seriously undermining the organisation by 1798. In the Spring of 1798, pressure was mounting for a rising without the French, and after the arrest of most of the Leinster leadership a date for the rising was set by those who escaped.

The key to the rising was to be Dublin. It was intended to seize the city and trigger a message to the rest of the country by stopping the mail coaches. However, although thousands turned out for the rising in the city, it ended up as a fiasco with almost no fighting. The reasons why this happened can be found in the class basis of the leadership of the United Irishmen.

Once it was clear that the rising was going to happen without the French, it was also clear that there was no mechanism to hold back the workers and peasants from going beyond the bourgeois democratic and separatist aims of the rising. The key informer who betrayed the Dublin rising, Reynolds, had turned because of fears of his ancestral estates being confiscated.²⁵

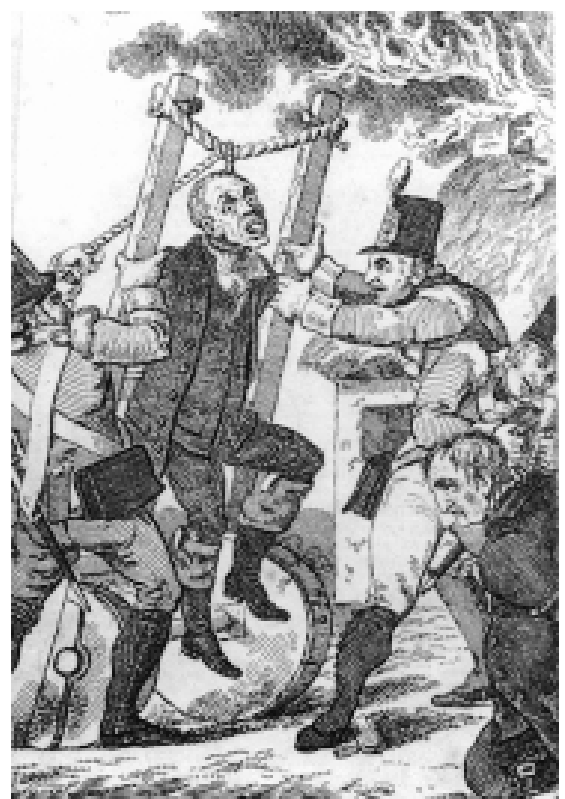
Edward Fitzgerald, Neilson and the others who planned the May 21st rising in Dublin were willing to risk this. But they were arrested and removed from the scene by May 19th. The British, on the information of informers, had seized the gathering point for the rising. In the confusion there was little chance of the rank and file of the United Irishmen gathering to create an alternative plan. And the second rank of leadership, which could have created an alternative plan, failed to do so precisely because it now feared the uncontrolled 'mob'.

Precisely as had been warned "when the people come forward, the aristocracy, fear-



Pitch capping, in which molten pitch was set alight on the victims head and the travelling gallows used to half-hang people. Tortures like these, along with flogging were used on thousands of people to try to force them to reveal the names of United Irishmen or the location of arms in 1797 and early 1798. Many died as a result of them.

They were accompanied by a general campaign of looting and rape, along with transportation of suspects to the fleet. This allowed the British forces to seriously undermine United Irishmen organisation and forced the remaining leadership to call a premature rising.



ful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries."

The Wexford Republic

A limited rising occurred around Dublin which was rapidly and brutally suppressed. Loyalists and British forces unleashed further terror in the rest of the country. In Wicklow and North Wexford this included the execution of over 50 United Irish prisoners, the murder of civilians and the burning of homes.

There was United Irishmen organisation in this area, Wexford town was considered the preferred landing place for the French. But the bulk of the 300 or so United Irishmen here do not appear to have been preparing for a rising. One historian of the rebellion, Dickson, reckons that *"without a French landing and without the compulsion applied by the magistrates and their agents... there would have been no Wexford rising at all"*.²⁶ and his account demonstrates that the early battles were spontaneous clashes. The all important initial victory was at Oulard, where there was no real rebel commander and some of the United Irishmen were armed only with stones.

The Oulard victory demonstrated that the British army were not unbeatable. This, and the increasing repression, saw hundreds and then thousands flock to join the rebel hilltop encampments. However the superior tactics, arms and training of the British forces was to prove a match for the rebels. On 4th and 5th June the rebellion suffered its most decisive defeat at the battle of New Ross, and on 9th the defeat at the battle of Arklow was the last major attempt to spread the rebellion to neighbouring counties.

Wexford town was however liberated for three weeks. At the time it was thriving and had a population of 10,000, many of whom were Protestants. After liberation, a seven man directory of the main United Irishmen and a 500 strong senate took over the running of the town. Both of these included Catholic and Protestant members. In addition each area/district had its own local committee, militia and elected leader. The time before it was retaken was not sufficient for much constructive activity beyond the printing of ration coupons. However the limited reorganisation of local government that did occur, and its success in maintaining order until just before the town fell, demonstrates the often denied political side of the Wexford rebellion.²⁷

On 21st the final major battle of the 'Wexford republic' was fought at Vinegar Hill. It had taken some 20,000 British soldiers three weeks to crush the 30,000 Wexford rebels who were *"utterly untrained, practically leaderless and miserably armed"*.²⁸

Events in Antrim/Down

The North had also seen a savage campaign of British torture which had terri-

fied, disorganised and disarmed many of the United Irishmen. General Knox had told General Lake that his methods were also intended to *"increase the animosity between the Orangemen and the United Irishmen"*. Robert Simms who was Adjacent-General of the United Irishmen in the north simply refused to acknowledge that the signal from Dublin indicated he should rise. Instead, presumably in part for the class interests already outlined, he preferred to wait for the French.

Nevertheless, the rank and file were determined there should be a rising and the lower officers with Henry Joy McCracken (who had just returned from jail in Dublin) forced Simms to resign on June 1st and got an order for a rising at a delegate meeting on June 2nd. This delay meant it was not till 5th that the rising started in Antrim, and 7th in Down. In the course of this delay, the northern rising was further weakened. Three of the United Irishmen colonels gave the plans to the British, taking away any element of surprise and allowing them to prepare for the rising.

More seriously, stories started reaching the north from the Wexford rebellion with the newspapers *"rivalling rumour in portraying in Wexford an image of Catholic massacre and plunder equalled only by legends ..."*. Many of these stories were false although some Protestant men had been killed in Enniscorthy. The distorted version that reached the north by 4 June (before the rising) was that *"at Enniscorthy in the county of Wexford every Protestant man, woman and child, even infants, have been murdered"*. Alongside this were manufactured items like a supposed Wexford Oath *"I, A.B. do solemnly swear ... that I will burn, destroy and murder all heretics up to my knees in blood"*.

Later commentaries tried to deny the scale of the Northern rising, or have claimed that many Presbyterians failed to turn out. However, given all of the above, what is truly remarkable is how little effect all this had, in particular as by 5th the Wexford rising had clearly failed to spread. Of the 31,000 United Irishmen in the area of the northern rising, 22,000 actually took part in the major battles (more turned out but missed the major battles).²⁹

Like the Wexford rising, the Northern rebels succeeded in winning mi-

Henry Joy McCracken, executed in Belfast at the age of 31.

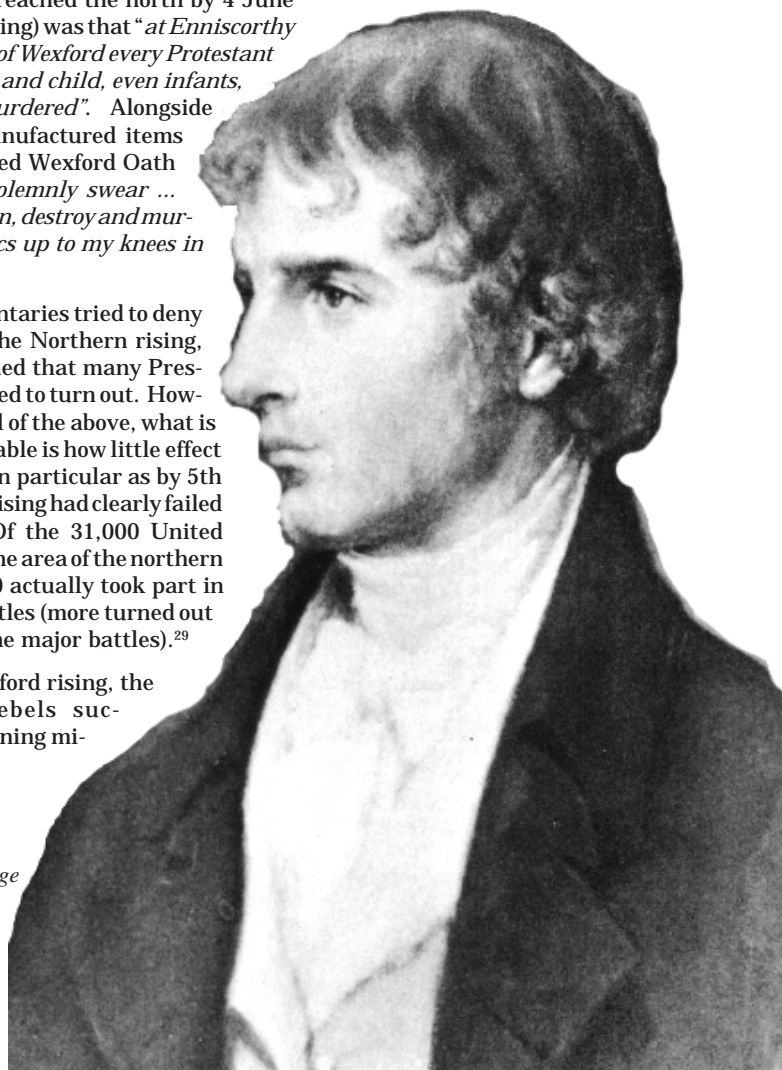
nor skirmishes against the British but were defeated in the major battles by the experienced and better equipped. As in Wexford, the British burned towns, villages and houses they considered sympathetic to the rebels and massacred both prisoners and wounded during and after the battles. After the battle of Antrim, some were buried alive.³⁰

The last major battle of the Northern rising was at Ballynahinch on 13th June. By the time the French arrived in Killala in August, it was too late, although their initial success does suggest that either the Wexford or Antrim rebels may have been much more successful if they had the benefit of even the small number of experienced French troops and arms later landed at Killala.

Some 32 United Irishmen leaders were executed in the North after the rising, including two Presbyterian ministers. Henry Joy McCracken in hiding after the rising, wrote a letter to his sister in which he sums up the cause of the failure of the rising as *"the rich always betray the poor"*. He was captured and executed in Belfast on July 16th.

Post rebellion republicans

After the rising it was in the interests of those who had led it to minimise their involvement by insisting they were ignorant dupes or forced by 'the mob' to take

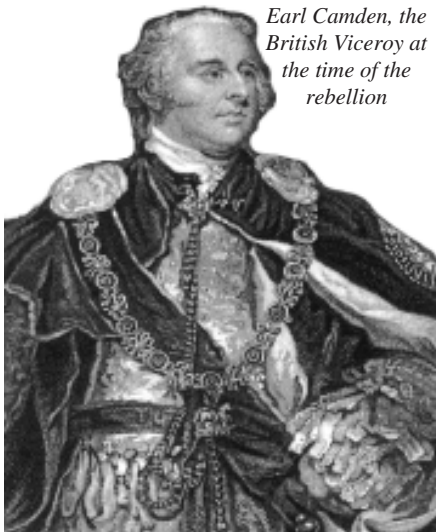


part. A song asks "Who fears to speak of '98?". People researching oral histories have indicated that the answer was 'just about everyone'. Even the year of death on the gravestones of those who died in the rising was commonly falsified. The reason was the British campaign of terror, which carried on into the following century with chapel burning's and deportations of cart loads of suspects.

In Wexford, where the death penalty still applied to anyone who had been a United Irish officer, it was a common defence for ex-leaders to claim they were forced into their role by mobs of rebels. This explanation was handy for both the official and Catholic nationalist versions of the history. It suggested that the Protestant portion of the leadership was coincidental in what was otherwise a confessional or sectarian rising, depending on your point of view. This deception was credible because the United Irishmen membership lists for Wexford were never captured. This allowed ex-rebel leaders like Edward Hay to argue that "there were fewer United Irishmen in the county of Wexford than in any other part of Ireland"³¹.

The Orange Order

On the loyalist side, the Orange Order needed to minimise Presbyterian involvement in the rising and portray it as a purely sectarian and Catholic affair. So loyalist accounts have tended to focus on the Wexford massacres, often making quite false claims about their scale, who was massacred and why they were massacred. Musgraves (the main loyalist historian) in his coverage of the rebellion gives only 2% of his writing to the Antrim and Down rebellion while 62% of his coverage concentrates on Wexford.³² The limited accounts given of the Northern rising portray it as idealistic Presbyterians being betrayed by their Catholic neighbours and so learning to become 'good loyal Orange men'. The scale of British and loyalist massacres of these Presbyterians is seldom mentioned.



Earl Camden, the British Viceroy at the time of the rebellion

The Centenary

More than anything else the Catholic nationalist history of the rising was determined by the needs of the Catholic church when faced with the socialist influenced Fenian movement one hundred years later. Patrick Kavanagh's 'A Popular history of the insurrection of 1798', published in 1870 was the major work from this perspective. This 'history' had several aims; to hide the role of the church hierarchy in condemning the rising (and instead claim that the church led the rising); to blame the failure of the rising on underground revolutionary organisation (as an attack on the Fenians); and to minimise the involvement of Northern Presbyterians and democratic ideals. In so far as they are mentioned the view is that "it was the turbulent and disorderly Presbyterians who seduced the law abiding Catholics".³³

This history has therefore emphasised the rebellion in Wexford and elevated the role of the handful of priests who played an active part. Father Murphy thus becomes the leader of the rising. The fight was for 'faith and fatherland', as a statue of a Pikeman draped in rosary beads which was erected in Enniscorthy on the hundredth anniversary of the rising proclaims. Finally, the role of the United Irishmen is minimised. The leadership role of United Irishmen like Baganal Harvey, Matthew Keogh and Edward Lough, who were Protestant, is glossed over. The failure of the rebellion is 'explained' by the inevitability of revolutionary movements being betrayed by informers. Patrick Kavanagh presents Father Murphy as the sole heart of the insurrection, and the United Irishmen as "riddled by spies, ruined by drink, with self-important leaders ...".³⁴

Issues of '98

To a large extent, these histories shaped the popular understanding of the rising. In this limited space it is impossible to address all the issues they raise. But there is a need for current revolutionary organisations in Ireland to dispel the illusions created of the past. This is particularly true with regard to Protestant workers in the north who are largely unaware that it was their forefathers who invented Irish republicanism, nor indeed that the first Republican victim of a showtrial and execution was a Presbyterian from Ballymena, Willam Orr.

The current debate on the release of political prisoners could be much informed if Orr's pre-execution words were remembered "If to have loved my country, to have known its Wrongs, to have felt the Injuries of the persecuted Catholics and to have united with them and all other Religious Persuasion in the most orderly and sanguinary means of procuring Redress - If these be Felonies I am a Felon but not otherwise ...".³⁵

The role of the Catholic church

Although, by 1898, the Catholic church would choose to pretend it had led the

Wexford rising, in 1798 nothing could be further from the truth. Dr Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, said within days of the rising (27 May 1798) that "We bitterly lament the fatal consequences of this anti-Christian conspiracy".

In fact the Catholic hierarchy was opposed to the radical ideas of the rebellion and, especially since the opening of the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, stood beside Britain and the Irish Protestant Ascendancy class. Three days after the rebellion had started, the following declaration came out of Maynooth

"We, the undersigned, his Majesty's most loyal subjects, the Roman Catholics of Ireland, think it necessary at this moment publicly to declare our firm attachment to his Majesty's royal person, and to the constitution under which we have the happiness to live ... We cannot avoid expressing to Your Excellency our regret at seeing, amid the general delusion, many, particularly of the lower orders, of our own religious persuasion engaged in unlawful associations and practises" (30 May 1798)

This was signed by the President of the Royal College of Maynooth and 2000 of the Professors and students, 4 lords and 72 baronets.³⁶ One of the Wexford rebels, Myles Byrne, wrote afterwards that "priests saved the infamous English government in Ireland from destruction".³⁷

Individual Catholic priests like Father Murphy played an important leadership role in the rising, alongside the mostly Protestant United Irishmen leaders. According to Dickson "at least eleven Catholic curates took an active part and of these three were executed".³⁸ But their own Bishop described the rebel priests after the rebellion as "excommunicated priests, drunken and profligate couple-beggars, the very faeces of the Church"³⁹. Their role in the leadership of the rising was against the wishes of the hierarchy and out of a motivation to protect their parishioners from Loyalist atrocities.

Was the rebellion Protestant in the north and Catholic in the south?

A more complex attempt to deny the legacy of 1798 is to suggest that the northern and southern risings were not really connected. That the northern rising was Presbyterian and democratic while the southern was Catholic and sectarian.

Although the population (and thus the rebels) in the north were mainly Presbyterian and those in the south mainly Catholic, both armies contained considerable number of both religions. I've already mentioned some of the Protestant leaders in the south. Indeed, if partly to head off sectarian tension within the rebel army, United Irishmen commander Roche issued a proclamation on 7th June "to my Protestant soldiers I feel much in debt for their gallant behaviour in the field". For the reasons discussed below, the Wexford ris-

ing was seriously mired by sectarianism, but right to the end there were Protestants among the rebels. It is still remembered around Carlow that after the battle Father John Murphy was hidden by a Protestant farmer, only to be betrayed by a Catholic the next day.

It is true that in the north there were sectarian tensions present, a Catholic United Irish officer urged a column of Presbyterians to "*avenge the Battle of the Boyne*"⁴⁰ just before the battle of Antrim! Also in the north, at Ballynahinch, the Defenders (who would have been overwhelmingly Catholic) fought as a distinct unit. However the figures show that thousands of Catholics and Protestants turned out and fought side by side in a series of battles, despite the obvious hopelessness of the situation.

Protestants in Wicklow and Wexford

There were stronger sectarian elements in the Wexford rising. To understand where these came from, we need to look at events immediately before the rising. About 25% of the population was Protestant, these included a few recently arrived colonies that must have displaced earlier Catholic tenants and thus caused sectarian tensions.

The high percentage of Protestants in Wexford also made it possible to construct a Militia and later Yeomanry that was extremely sectarian in composition, in the words of Dickson in Wexford "*these Yeoman were almost entirely a Protestant force*".⁴¹ This Yeomanry was responsible in part for the savage repression that preceded the rising and the initial house and chapel burning during it. Col. Hugh Pearse observed "*in Wexford at least, the misconduct of the Militia and Yeomanry ... was largely to blame for the outbreak ... it can only be said that cruelty and oppression produced a yet more savage revenge*".⁴²

When faced with a Protestant Landlord class mobilising a mainly Protestant local army to torture them and burn their chapels, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Catholics were inclined to identify Protestants as a whole as the problem. The United Irishmen organisation in the area before the rising was too small to make much progress in overcoming this feeling, and in fact one of their tactics added to the sectarian tension. There were Orange Lodges in Wexford and Wicklow. As elsewhere, there is evidence that the United Irishmen deliberately spread rumours of an Orange plot to massacre Catholics. The intention was that the Catholics would join the rebellion in greater numbers, but such rumours inevitably heightened distrust of all Protestants.

The Wexford massacres

Throughout the Wexford rising, sectarian tensions were never far from erupting. This was expressed throughout the rising as a pressure on Protestants to convert to



A loyalist cartoon of United Irishmen training

Catholicism, particularly in Wexford town where "*Among the insurgent rank and file ... heresy hunting became widespread ... Protestants found it prudent to attend mass as the only means of saving their lives*".⁴³ When the rebels carried out massacres they often had strong sectarian undertones. Loyalist historians and even Pakenham, the most widely read historian of the rising, are guilty of distorting the nature of these massacres by claiming only Protestants were executed.

The reality of the Wexford massacres was that the victims tended to be landlords, or the actual agents of British rule like magistrates and those related to them or in service to them. Anyone suspected of being an Orangeman was also liable to be executed. Massacres were also a feature of the rebellion in the north, where no sectarian motive can so easily be attached. A rebel unit near Saintfield (in the north), led by James Breeze, attacked and set fire to the home of Hugh McKee, a well known loyalist and informer, burning him, his wife, five sons, three daughters and housemaid to death.⁴⁴

Loyalist historians are also guilty of ignoring or minimising the causes of most of the massacres, the far larger massacres by British army and loyalist forces of civilians, rebel prisoners and wounded. The greatest of these was the massacres during and after the battle of New Ross where even the Loyalist historian Rev. James Gordon admits "*Have reason to think more men than fell in battle were slain in cold blood*".⁴⁵ The scale of this massacre can only be guessed at, but after the battle 3,400 rebels were buried, 62 cart loads of rebel bodies were thrown in the river and many others (particularly wounded) were burned in the houses of the town. According to many accounts the screams of wounded rebels being deliberately burned alive may have played a significant part in the murder of 100 loyalist civilian prisoners at nearby Scullabogue on the morning of the battle.

At Scullabogue around 100 were murdered, 74 were burned alive in a barn, (nine of whom were women and 8 of whom were Catholic) and 21 men were killed on the front lawn. A survivor, Frizel stated that the cause was the rumour that the military were murdering prisoners at New Ross.⁴⁶ At least three Protestants were amongst the rebels who carried out these killings. The presence of Protestants amongst the murderers and Catholics among the victims gives the lie to the claim that this was a simple sectarian massacre.

The leadership of the rebellion, both United Irishmen and the Catholic priests, tried to defuse the sectarian tension and prevent massacres. On 7th June, Edward Lough, commander of the Vinegar Hill camp, issued a proclamation "*this is not a war for religion but for liberty*".⁴⁷ Vinegar Hill was the site of many individual executions over the 23 days the rebel camp existed there. Between 300 and 400 were executed, most were Protestant although Luke Byrne, one of the organisers of the executions, is quoted as saying "*If anyone can vouch for any of the prisoners not being Orangemen, I have no objection they should be discharged*" and indeed all captured Quakers were released.⁴⁸ In general, throughout Wexford Quakers who were Protestant but not associated with loyalism were well treated by the rebels, but did suffer at the hands of the loyalists.

A proclamation from Wexford on 9th June called to "*protect the persons and properties of those of all religious persuasions who have not oppressed us*"⁴⁹ and on 14th June the United Irishmen oath was introduced to the Wexford army. None of this is to deny that there were sectarian tensions and indeed sectarian elements to the massacres, perhaps most openly after the rebel army had abandoned Wexford. Thomas Dixon and his wife then brought 70 men into the town during the night "*from the northern side of the Slaney*" and plied them with whiskey. The following day a massacre started at 14:00 and lasted over five hours. Up to 97 were murdered.

However, even here, not all the 260 prisoners from whom those massacred were selected could be described as innocent victims. One of those killed (Turner) was seen burning cabins in Oulard shortly before the battle there.⁵⁰ Another prisoner who survived was Lord Kingsborough, commander of the hated North Cork Militia and popularly regarded as having introduced the pitch cap torture, in which the victims head was set on fire.⁵¹ Most significantly this massacre happened when the rebel army had withdrawn from the town and stopped when rebel forces returned.

It is an unfortunate feature of some republican and left histories of 1798 that the sectarian nature of the Wexford massacres is either avoided or minimised. To northern Protestant workers today this merely appears to confirm an impression that this is the secret agenda of the republican movement. The stories - both true and false - of sectarian massacres in Wexford that were circulated in the North before and during the rising must have undermined the unity of the United Irishmen. Although the Wexford leadership did act to limit sectarianism, in hindsight it is obvious that the United Irishmen were complacent about sectarianism amongst the Defenders and in Wexford more could and should have been done. In particular the final and most blatantly sectarian massacre, at Wexford bridge, could probably have been avoided if the Dixons, the couple at the centre of it, had been silenced. They had spent the period of the rebellion in Wexford trying to whip up a pogrom.

1798 and Irish nationalism

The debate around nation is in itself something that divides the Irish left. In particular after the partition of Ireland in 1922, there has been a real and somewhat successful effort to divide people into two nations. One consists of all the people in the south along with northern Catholics. Catholicism is a central part of this definition, with the Catholic Church being given an informal veto for many decades over state policy in the south. To a large extent this definition is tacitly accepted by many parts of the Republican movement today. Francie Molloy's 1996 election campaign posters - based on there being 20,000 more nationalists (i.e. Catholics) than Protestants in Mid-Ulster - is a case in point. This has led to a situation where those responsible for sectarian murders of Protestants were not treated as seriously by the republican movement as informers or even those judged guilty of 'anti-social' crime.

However, the south has started to emerge from under the long dark shadow of Catholic nationalism, in the urban centres at least. De Valera's comely maids at the Crossroads and the threat of the Bishop's crosier have faded into a distant and bizarre past.

However in the north, the ideology of a 'Protestant state for a Protestant people' is still strong. Particularly in recent years, this has seen the political decision of northern loyalists to start referring to themselves as British or 'Ulster-Scots'. This is a quite remarkable robbing of even the history of loyalism, and would have been an insult to even the Orangemen of 1798, one of whom James Claudius Beresford declared he was "Proud of the name of an Irishman, I hope never to exchange it for that of a colonist".⁵²

A couple of years after the rising, Britain succeeded in forcing the Irish Parliament to pass an 'Act of Union' which effectively dissolved that parliament and replaced it with direct rule from Westminster. It is ironic that 36 Orange Lodges in Co. Armagh and 13 in Co. Fermanagh declared against this Act of Union. Lodge No. 500 declared it would "support the independence of Ireland and the constitution of 1782" and "declare as Orangemen, as Freeholders, as Irishmen that we consider the extinction of our separate legislature as the extinction of the Irish Nation".⁵³

What was the nation fought for in 1798?

The rewriting of the history of 1798 by loyalists and nationalists alike has a common purpose, which is to define being 'Irish' as containing a requirement to being a Catholic. The greatest defeat of 1798 is the success of this project, in particular after partition when the southern and northern states adopted opposed confessional definitions of themselves. One legacy of that failure is that in 1998 we not only live on a divided island but that the vast majority of our hospitals and schools are either Catholic or Protestant.

The United Irishmen's core project, to replace the name of Irishman for the labels of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter was not an abstract nationalist one. It came from a concrete analysis that unless this was done then no progress could be made because a people divided were easily ruled. Here lies the greatest gulf with 'republicans' today who reverse this process and imagine that such unity can only be the outcome rather than the cause of progress.

The rebellion of the United Irishmen was not a rebellion for four abstract green fields, free of John Bull. It was inspired by the new ideas of equality, fraternity and liberty coming out of the French revolution.

Separatism became a necessary step once it was realised that fulfilling these ideas required the ending of British rule. For many it also represented a rebellion against the ownership of land by a few, and for some a move towards an equality of property.

Those leaders who planned the rising were part of a revolutionary wave sweeping the western world, they were internationalists and indeed an agreement for distinct republics was drawn up with the United Scotsmen and the United Englishmen.⁵⁴ They corresponded with similar societies in Paris and London. Some, like Thomas Russell, were also active anti-slavery campaigners. As Connolly puts it "these men aimed at nothing less than a social and political revolution such as had been accomplished in France, or even greater".⁵⁵

None of this is to claim that socialism was on the agenda in 1798. Common ownership of the means of production would not become a logical solution for some years yet, when large numbers of people started to work in situations where they could not simply divide up their workplace. But there is no denying that radical ideas that are well in advance of today's republicans were on the agenda of many in 1798.

The central message of 1798 was not Irish unity for its own sake, indeed the strongest opponents of the British parliament had been the Irish ascendancy, terrified that direct rule might result in Catholic emancipation. Unity offered to remove the sectarian barriers that enabled a tiny ascendancy class to rule over millions without granting even a thimble full of democratic rights. The struggle has progressed since as many of these rights have been won, but in terms of creating an anarchist society the words of James Hope, the most proletarian of the 1798 leaders still apply

"Och, Paddies, my hearties, have done wid your parties. Let men of all creeds and professions agree. If Orange and Green min, no longer were seen, min. Och, naboclis, how easy ould Ireland we'd free."

This article is based on a much longer draft which includes discussion of the radical politics of the period and the pre-rebellion organisation of the United Irishmen. This can be read on the internet at <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/andrew/1798.html> or by sending £1 and a S.A.E. to WSM, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8.

¹Freeman's Journal, 22 May, 1841
²Which represented not only a revolutionary badge but a defence of the execution of the French king Louis.
³Labour and Irish History, James Connolly, ChVII
⁴The Tree of Liberty, Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760 - 1830, Kevin Whelan, p167
⁵A history of the Irish Working Class, Peter Berresford Ellis, 1972, p71
⁶The Women of 1798: Representations and realities by Dáire Keogh in 1798; 200 years of

resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen

⁷ Catholic emancipation was the demand for the removal of laws that discriminated against Catholics

⁸ quoted in *Labour and Irish History*, *ibid*, Ch VII

⁹ Arthur Young, in his *Tour of Ireland* quoted in *Labour and Irish History*, *ibid*, chap IV

¹⁰ *A history of the Irish Working Class*, *ibid*, p54

¹¹ *The United Irishmen*, Nancy Curtin, 1994, p 147

¹² *The Tree of Liberty*, *ibid*, p92

¹³ Quoted in *Labour and Irish History*, *ibid*, Chap VII

¹⁴ *The United Irishmen*, *ibid*, p28

¹⁵ *The United Irishmen*, *ibid*, p. 119 - 120

¹⁶ quoted in *1798: the United Irishmen and the early Trade Unions*, Mary Muldowney in SIPTU Fightback No 7

¹⁷ *The United Irishmen*, *ibid*, 1994

¹⁸ *The Tree of Liberty*, *ibid*, p77 - 79

¹⁹ *The United Irishmen*, *ibid*, p 149.

²⁰ Then known as the 'Peep O Day boy' after their practise of carrying out dawn raids on Catholic homes

²¹ *The Defenders*, p18, Deirdre Lindsay, in 1798 ; 200 years of resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen

²² *The Tree of Liberty*, *ibid*, p128

²³ *The Defenders*, p19, *ibid*

²⁴ *Ibid*, p20-22

²⁵ Citizen Lord : Lord Edward Fitzgerald, 1763 - 1798, Stella Tillyard, p246

²⁶ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, Charles Dickson, 1955, p36

²⁷ *The Wexford Republic of June 1798 : A story hidden from history*, Kevin Whelan in 1798 ; 200 years of resonance, Ed. Mary Cullen

²⁸ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p41

²⁹ *The United Irishmen*, *ibid*, p260 -267

³⁰ *Revolt in North*, Charles Dickson, 1960, p135

³¹ *History of the Insurrection in the county of Wexford*, 1798

³² *The Tree of Liberty*, *ibid*, p138

³³ *ibid*, p150

³⁴ *ibid*, p170

³⁵ Willam Orr, pre-hanging declaration, 2.45pm, 14 October 1796

³⁶ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p 16

³⁷ *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, p39 (1906)

³⁸ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p 17

³⁹ *A vindication of the Roman Catholic Clergy of the town of Wexford during the late unhappy rebellion*, pub 1799

⁴⁰ When Catholics and Protestants fought on opposite side

⁴¹ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p13

⁴² Col. Hugh Pearse in 'Memoir of the life and service of Viscount Lake' (1744 - 1808) p95 quoted in *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p12

⁴³ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p 18

⁴⁴ APRN, 11 May 1998

⁴⁵ *The Wexford Rising in 1798*, *ibid*, p116

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p129

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p126

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p77

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 1955, p126

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 1955, p62

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 1955, p149

⁵² *Revolt in North*, *ibid*, p243

⁵³ *Ibid*, p243

⁵⁴ *A history of the Irish Working Class*, *ibid*, p72

⁵⁵ *Labour and Irish History*, *ibid*, Chap VII

Letters

The last issue of Red & Black Revolution included an article written by Donato Romito, a militant in the Italian FdCA for many years. One paragraph of this has proved controversial and below we print a reply to this paragraph and Donato's response to the points raised. The full article is on the web at http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/rbr/rbr3_italy.html or if you send us an SAE we'll send you a copy of it. The paragraph in question is reproduced below

There are tens of non-federated groups and circles. ... Among these groups we have to mention Cane Nero. 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!!

Dear Comrades,

I read the article about Italian anarchism in your last issue and after showing it to comrades involved in the 'Italian Solidarity Committee' in Munich, Germany, have been urged to write to you to comment on a few points in this article.

Under the heading "Non-Federated Groups" the author talks about a group called 'Canenero'. In reality no such group exists, 'Canenero' is a magazine that writes about insurrectionalism and is not affiliated to any particular group.

The author afterwards accuses this non-existent group of "military actions" which "are decided in secrecy". This is simply a lie, the comrades in Italy do not distinguish between 'military' and 'nonmilitary' actions, they see it as 'direct action' which can - of course - take different forms. As there is no established organisation most actions are decided more or less 'secretly', i.e. in very small groups, but there exist many opportunities where insurrectionalist anarchists meet (with the full knowledge of other Italian anarchists) and your author would have been

more than welcome to participate.

Insurrectionalistic anarchists in Italy do not form a sort of clandestine movement as the article implies, instead this is exactly what the Italian state and the police want to make everybody believe, so they can get on with their repression and their imprisonments.

The insurrectionalistic comrades in Italy need our solidarity, because tomorrow it could be others who are criminalised and eventually it could be us.

More information about the recent repression against Italian anarchists can be obtained from the "Italian Solidarity Committee" in Munich at the following address:

Solikommittee Italien c/o Infoladen
Munchen
Breisachnerstr. 12
81667 Munchen Germany

All the best.

Martin Kubler (for the Italian Solidarity Committee, Munich)

23rd October 1997

Reply of Donato Romito (FdCA)

Yes, what's very important is solidarity - solidarity with comrades who are victims of state repression. (See judge Marini's stunt, one comrade's suicide in prison and another two in jail in Turin, one comrade in Milan sentenced to 5 years and 270 millions of Italian liras on the base of a not focusing video....) But solidarity does not imply agreement or support for insurrectionalistic positions.

Direct action is made by the organised masses, and not by individuals considering themselves as anarchist vanguards and splinters of the working-class at the same time. Anarchism was born inside the real movement of the masses and its revolutionary aims live inside the class-struggles and are not separate from them.

So it does not matter whether "Canenero" is a magazine or a group, it does matter if different forms of direct action are "decided more or less secretly" "by very small groups" of insurrectionist anarchists. Our view is that of Cafiero, who wrote in 1882

"...it's better one step with all comrades along the real road of life, than to stay alone walking hundreds of yards...in abstract."

Libertarian Regards, Donato Romito

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<http://www.pandora.it/fdca>



The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939

The 'Friends of Durruti' appear in just about every book on the Spanish Civil War, especially in relation to the 1937 May Days in Barcelona. They get mentioned but we are told very little about their politics or activities. Some organisations, like the Workers Solidarity Movement, see their political stance as important to the tradition of revolutionary anarchism. Other anarchists, most notably sections of the syndicalist movement, condemn them for 'flirting with Bolshevism/Leninism/Trotskyism' or for 'advocating an anarchist dictatorship'. So who were they, where did they come from, what did they say, and what did they do?

This book is probably the most detailed work about them in the English language. Unfortunately, it takes as its starting point that readers will be extremely knowledgeable about both anarchist ideas and the role of the anarchist movement in Spain. Without such knowledge the reader will find it impossible to understand what the author is writing about. Guillamón's book reads as if it is a specialised academic paper, or a chapter which has been extracted from a much bigger work about Spain.

To make matters worse, the author seems unable - despite a familiarity with the historical details - to understand the ideas of anarchism. He criticises the Friends on each occasion when they don't issue "instructions" or "seize power". His own bias is made clear when he proclaims "*anarchism's inadequacy as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat*" (p.93).

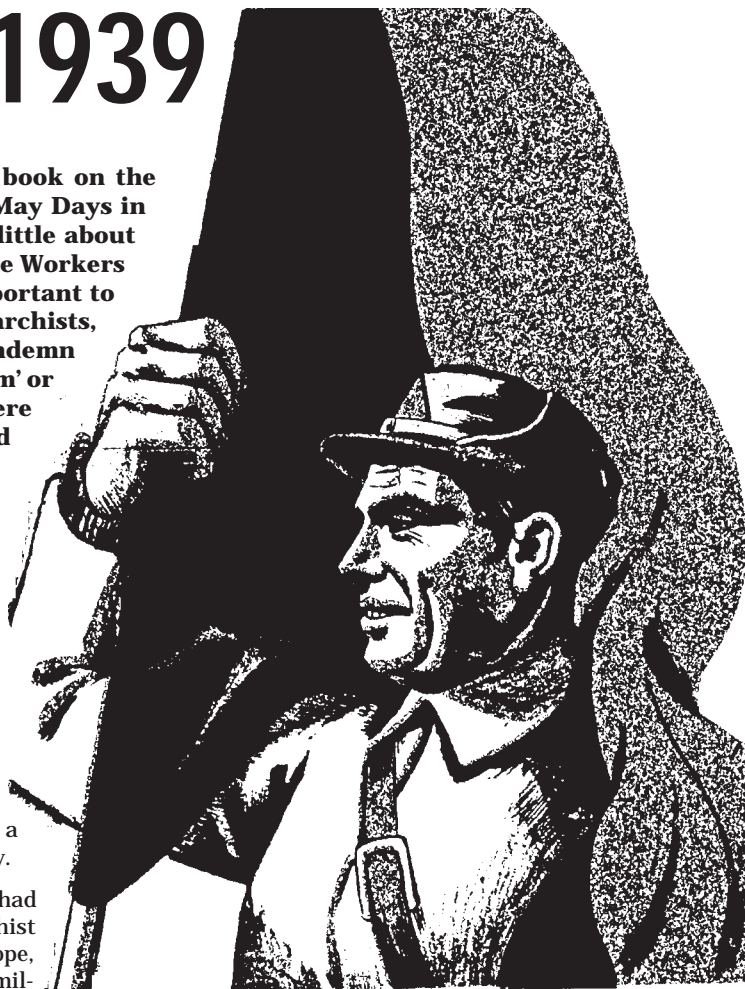
His own views appear to be of the Marxist 'council communism' type which enjoyed a brief popularity, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands, in the 1920s. Like all 'councilists' Guillamón sees unions as "*capitalist State machinery*" (page 83). Because

of this he sees the entry of CNT members into the government as inevitable. Therefore his biggest criticism of the Friends is that they did not split from the CNT, renounce anarchism and transform themselves into a revolutionary party.

Spain in the 1930s had the biggest anarchist movement in Europe, with almost two million people in its National Confederation of Workers (CNT), it truly was a mass organisation with very deep roots in the working class. The Communist Party, prior to 1936, was a small outfit, the anti-Stalinist POUM probably had no more than a few thousand members and the Trotskyists could be counted on the fingers of a couple of hands.

Because of this the syndicalist notion that the political battle of ideas was not of the utmost importance was widespread. While there were activists and tendencies with varying ideas and strategies within the movement, there was no large and clear-cut opposition when a section of the CNT 'leadership' proposed 'postponing' the revolution and collaborating with the government to win the war against Franco. The 'Friends of Durruti' group had no existence prior to the outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936.

On July 19th 1936 workers across most of Spain took to the streets when the military rose up against the centre left Popular Front government. Arms were seized and the military rising defeated in over half of the country. For many this was the chance to get rid of the capitalist system.



by Agustin Guillamón
Translation by Paul Sharkey
£7.95 (AK Press)

Workplaces were seized and put under the control of their workers. In rural areas tens of thousands of peasants collectivised their land. Trade union militias were formed to attack the military rebels. Power was shifted from the government and the rich to local delegate committees.

Although the government still existed it had no real power. The military, economic and political struggle was proceeding independently of the government, and, indeed, in spite of it. The councils and collectives which had emerged were the structures upon which the revolution could have been built and consolidated. They needed to be brought together on a regional and national level so that the power of the workers and peasants could have swept the government aside. This would have meant refusing to share power with the remnants of the ruling class, it would have been a big step in making the social revolution complete.



The CNT's leading committees refused to do this. After July 19th Prime Minister Companys of Catalonia called them to his office and told them that the CNT had the mass support, they controlled the region, and he would be their faithful servant if they took over. They refused. Instead the CNT joined the Catalan government, and later the national government in Madrid.

This collaboration was in direct opposition to all anarchism holds dear about ending the division of people into rulers and ruled. Their reasoning was that the Western democracies would not supply arms to beat Franco's rebels if there was a social revolution. (No arms ever came anyway!). They had decided that winning the war and making the revolution were two different things, and that winning the war came first. This meant collaborating with all the anti-Franco forces.

Over the next year the capitalist state, aided by Stalin's loyal servants in the Communist Party, set about rebuilding itself. All states demand a monopoly of armed force and October 10th 1936 saw a "militarisation" decree making provision for putting the workers' militias under government control.

Five days later Jaime Badius wrote in *Solidaridad Obrera*, a CNT daily paper, that the working class should push on and he warned against applying a brake to the revolution. He was a journalist with a record as a hard-line anarchist, which earned him several spells of imprisonment by the Popular Front governments during the 1936-38 period. Badius was later to become secretary of the Friends.

In November, the legendary anarchist militant Buenaventura Durruti told the magazine *Anti-Fascist Spain*,

"This decision by the government has had a deplorable effect. It is absolutely devoid of any sense of reality. There is an irreconcilable contrast between that mentality and that of the militias. We know that one of these attitudes has to vanish in the face of the other one".

On November 20th Durruti was killed on the Madrid front. Over 500,000 attended his funeral in Barcelona. In December the German volunteers in the Durruti Column's International Group expressed their opposition to militarisation and listed a number of items they wanted incorporated in any new military code: they wanted the delegate system retained along with egalitarian features; they wanted soldiers' councils to represent the army as a whole.

The beginning of 1937 saw the government issue an order that no pay and no equipment would be issued to non-militarised combat units. The anarchists and other revolutionaries were viewed by the government as a bigger threat than Franco's military rebels. The state authorities were even prepared to weaken the front if that was the cost of preserving capitalism.

March 5th, *Solidaridad Obrera* announced the formation of a new group: *"The Friends of Durruti" is not just another club. We aim to see the Spanish Revolution pervaded by the revolutionary acumen of our Durruti. The FoD remain faithful to the last words uttered by our comrade in the heart of Barcelona in denunciation of the work of the counter revolution. To enrol in our association it is vital that one belong to the CNT and show evidence of a record of struggle, a love of ideas and the revolution.*" Applications for membership could be made at the office of the CNT journalists union.

April 1st saw, *Ruta*, the paper of the Libertarian Youth in Catalonia, print an article by the Friends which says

"We point the finger at no one. We feel a burning love for our precepts and our organisations. But as militants of them, we have an indisputable right to speak out. There is still time for us to rescue the revolution and revitalise our precepts but we must press on with the revolution".

C.N.T.	F.A.I.
Agrupación "Los amigos de Durruti"	
¡TRABAJADORES..!	
Una Junta revolucionaria. - Fusilamiento de los culpables.	
Desarme de todos los Cuerpos armados.	
Socialización de la economía.	
Disolución de los Partidos políticos que hayan agredido a la clase trabajadora.	
No cedamos la caile. La revolución ante todo.	
Saludamos a nuestros Camaradas del P.O.U.M. que han confraternizado en la calle con nosotros.	
VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN SOCIAL... ¡ABAJO LA CONTRAREVOLUCIÓN!	

On May 2nd the Friends held a public meeting in the Goya Theatre in Barcelona at which they warned that an attack upon the workers was imminent. The following day the Stalinists seized the Telephone Exchange. This signalled the start of the May Events which saw the CNT, Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), Iberian Libertarian Youth Federation (FIJL) and the POUM fighting against the Stalinists, republicans and Catalan nationalists, and the official security forces.

The revolutionary forces soon controlled most of the city. The next day, just as the CNT-FAI Defence Committee had resolved

Want to find out more?

The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism in Action by Eddie Conlon. Why the war started, the workers' response, was a revolution possible, the anarchist contribution in industry and on the land, their role in organising the anti-fascist militias, the Stalinist sabotage of the revolution, why Franco won. £1.50

Lessons of the Spanish Revolution by Vernon Richards. Investigates the defeat of the Spanish Revolution and looks critically at the CNT "leadership". £5.00

Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution by Jose Peirats. The first 100 pages are a brief survey of the working class movement from the founding of the Spanish section of the first International in 1969, and the struggles that were a prelude to the events of 1936-39. The rest of the book is taken up with a comprehensive, critical history of the Spanish Civil War and the role played by the anarchists. £6.00

Durruti: The People Armed by Abel Paz. Biography of the legendary Buenaventura Durruti. A rich and passionate documentary of a man and his time. £8.95

Spain: Revolution and Counter-Revolution Reprints of articles from the British paper *Spain and the World* which appeared from 1936 - 1939. First hand accounts of the constructive aspects of the revolution: the collectives in industry, agriculture and public services; reports from the front. £5.00

The Maydays in Barcelona 1937 by Emma Goldman, Jose Peirats, Burnett Bolloten and Agustin Souchy. Barcelona members of the CNT and Marxists of the POUM party responded to provocations of the state police - backed by Catalan republicans and the Communist Party - by seizing control of the city. £2.50

Towards A Fresh Revolution by the Friends of Durruti. Why workers' power and liberty were not won in Spain in 1936/37. This was written by a group of anarchist militants after the May Days of 1937, an excellent assessment of the mistakes that should not be made again. £0.80

A Chronology of the Friends of Durruti by Paul Sharkey. A short history of the 'Friends', goes well with the above pamphlet. £0.50

Please add about 20% to cover postage & packing, and send your order to WSM Books, P.O. Box 1528, Dublin 8.



to make a final assault on the government building, the police HQ and the Hotel Colon, there came the radio appeals by CNT leaders Garcia Oliver and Marano Vazquez for a ceasefire. The state forces availed of this chance to renew their attacks. The conflict ignited again.

The FoD proclaimed

"we anarchists have arrived at the limit of our concessions... not another step backwards. It is the hour of action. Save the revolution. If we continue to give up our position there is no doubt that in a short time we shall be overwhelmed. It is for this fundamental reason that it is necessary to develop a new orientation for our movement".

"To beat Franco we need to crush the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist and Socialist allies. The capitalist state must be destroyed totally and there must be installed workers' power depending on rank & file committees. A-political anarchism has failed."

They called for the formation of a *revolutionary Junta*, the disarming of the police, socialisation of the economy, and the dissolution of parties which had turned against the working class. In effect they called for working class power.

The confusion caused by CNT ministers appealing for the barricades to be taken down demoralised the fighters. CNT and POUM militia columns preparing to march on Barcelona were turned back after pleas from their leaders, but thousands of pro-government troops did arrive. The workers were defeated and the repression that followed was severe.

The regional committee of the CNT issued a statement denouncing the Friends as *"agents provocateurs"* and saying they were expelled from the CNT. The Friends replied that only the local unions had that power, and, interestingly, not a single CNT union was prepared to expel a single member for being in the FoD. But the struggle had been lost, their offices were taken over by the police. The revolution was finished and it was only a matter of time before Franco's forces won the war.

It sounds disturbing to hear anarchists talking about the need for a *"junta"*. To most of us in the English speaking world it conjures up an image of Generals in dark glasses running a dictatorship. However, in Spanish, it means no more than a committee or council. CNT unions each had a junta, as did the Mexican Liberal Party (an anarchist organisation - which shows that labels can be deceptive!).

In their pamphlet 'Towards A Fresh Revolution' the Friends spelled out what they meant

"The body will be organised as follows: members of the revolutionary Junta will be elected by democratic vote in the union organisations. Account is to be taken of the number of comrades away at the front. These comrades must have a right to representation. Posts are to come up regularly for re-election so as to prevent anyone growing attached to them. And the trade union assemblies will exercise control over the junta's activities".

The task of this junta was to be that of a National Defence Council: to oversee the war, control public order, and deal with international relations. Alongside it the unions were to take control of the economy and the free locality was to be the basic decision-making level of territorial organisation.

Spanish Revolution on the Web
<http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spaindx.html>
 Includes new translations into English from the Friends of Durruti paper *El Amigo del Pueblo*



Also over 100 other documents and photographs

The Friends - despite the claims of their detractors - represented no break with anarchism. Their break was with the traditional a-politicism of the CNT. They knew that state power would not disappear just because that was the wish of the majority; it would have to be smashed and replaced with the power of workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils.

They saw the defects of syndicalism. Nothing and nobody can take away from the militancy of the CNT. As Eddie Conlon remarked in *Anarchism in Action*:

"The rank and file literally tore down capitalism and put workers' and peasants' collectives in its place. They fought heroically in the militias and the members of the CNT surpassed all others with their bravery."

The problem for the CNT was that after the workplaces and

lands had been seized the state should have died. It didn't. The CNT had great ideas about what the anarchist future would look like, it knew that the working class would have to make a revolution, but it could not make a connection between the existing revolutionary situation and the anarchist objective. The majority ended up behaving like a minority.

The Friends put it this way:

"We (CNT) did not have a concrete programme. We had no idea where we were going. We had lyricism aplenty but when all is said and done we did not know what to do with our masses of workers or how to give effect to the popular effusion." The anarchists should have "leapt into the drivers' seat in the country, delivering a severe coup de grace to all that is outmoded and archaic".

The CNT did not see things this way. Garcia Oliver, one of the CNT representatives in the government, said *"The CNT and FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, renouncing revolutionary totalitarianism which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by the anarchist... dictatorship"*. But nobody was suggesting an anarchist dictatorship or the CNT becoming a new government.

The question was whether or not new bodies would be created and co-ordinated through which the working class could assert their power. Syndicalism did not see this, because it holds that the unions are structures upon which the new society is to be built.

When the state did not simply pack its bags and vanish, they felt they had to participate in order to have some control. The Friends were an expression of opposition to this thinking. In their paper, the *Friend of the People*, and in numerous local publications of the CNT, the Libertarian Youth - and, indeed, the UGT and POUM you found the same sentiments.

However this was only given a clear expression when it was too late. The Friends did not have enough time to win over the majority to their position. What they have left in their wake are the lessons they had drawn from their experiences in a living revolution. By understanding what went

wrong in the past we can prepare ourselves for the future. The lessons they left us were a re-affirmation of the need for political anarchism, for anarchist political organisations which can become a *"leadership of ideas"* (and certainly not a leadership of personalities or would-be dictators like the Russian Bolsheviks). The state and political power does not *"die"* or *"wither away"*; it has to be smashed.



The Platform

Anarchists are constantly thinking about how society is and how it could be. We strive towards the ideal of a free and democratic society. We know that, in order to get there, it will be necessary to tear down the present authoritarian system of government. Our struggle for freedom throws up many areas of controversy and debate. One of these has always been, and always will be, how do we get to a revolution? How do we organise for change? An important contribution to this debate was the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, a document which was written in 1926 by a group of exiled Russian and Ukrainian anarchists, and which still has much to offer to today's debates around the question of organisation.

The authors had participated in the Russian revolution and saw all their work, their hopes and dreams fail as an authoritarian Bolshevik state triumphed and destroyed real workers' power. They wrote the pamphlet in order to examine why the anarchist movement had failed to build on the success of the factory committees, where workers organising in their own workforces began to build a society based on both freedom and equality. In the first paragraph they state

"It is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, and in spite of the facing up to the social revolution, and finally the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for anarchist 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."

This is strong stuff, a wake up call for the anarchist movement. It is a call that we still need to hear. Despite the virtual collapse of almost all other left wing tendencies, anarchism is still not in a position



of strength. Even though the Trotskyist organisations have either evaporated into thin air, shrunk drastically in size or moved to social democracy, it is a sad fact, that were there a revolution tomorrow, they **still** would be in a better position to have their arguments heard and listened to than we would. This fact alone should give us pause for thought. We cannot be complacent, and rely on the hope that the obvious

strength and rightness of our ideas will shine through and win the day. The world we live in is the product of struggles between competing ideas of how society should be organized. If the anarchist voice is weak and quiet, it won't be heard, and other arguments, other perspectives will win the day.

It is not my intention to go through *The Platform* with a fine-tooth comb. It was never intended to provide all the answers, in the introduction they make this clear

We have no doubts that there are gaps in the present platform. It has gaps, as do all new, practical steps of any importance. It is possible that certain important positions have been missed, or that others are inadequately treated, or that still others are too detailed or repetitive.

It was hoped, however, that it would form the beginning of a debate about how anarchists could escape from the doldrums they were in.

Instead I will look at some of the document's underlying principles, in particular the problems which they identify in anarchist organisations, which they describe as follows.

*In all countries, the anarchist movement is advocated by several local organisations advocating **contradictory theories and practices, leaving no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing** hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them. (my emphasis).*

Their solution is the creation of certain type of anarchist organisation. Firstly the members of these organisations are in theoretical agreement with each other. Secondly they agree that if a certain type of work is prioritised, all should take part. Even today within the anarchist movement these are contentious ideas so it is worth exploring them in a little more detail.

The *Platform's* basic assumption is that there is a link between coherency and efficiency. Those who oppose the *Platform* argue that this link does not exist. To them efficiency has nothing to do with how coherent an organisation is, rather it is a function of size. This position argues that

The Platform: What's in it?

The introduction is brief, it describes the poor state of the anarchist movement and explains why they felt it necessary to formulate a new approach to organisation. The authors then describe the following two sections as the "*minimum to which it is necessary and urgent to rally all the militants of the anarchist movement*". These are the basic issues on which they believe it is important to have agreement, in order to have an organisation which can co-operate and work together in practice.

General Section

This section outlines what they saw as the basic anarchist beliefs. They look at what is meant by class struggle, what is meant by anarchism and libertarian communism. They explain why they oppose the state and centralised authority. The role of the masses and of anarchists in the social struggle and social revolution is also explained. They criticise the Bolshevik strategy of obtaining control of the state. Finally they look at the relationship between anarchism and the trade unions.

The Constructive Section

This outlines how a future anarchist society would be organised, they look at how the factories would operate and how food would be produced. They warn that the revolution will have to be defended, and talk a little about how this might be done.

The Organisational Section

This is the shortest and most contentious section of *The Platform*. Here the authors sketch their idea of how an anarchist organisation should be structured. They call this the General Union of Anarchists.

By this they seem to mean one umbrella organisation, which is made up of different groups and individuals. Here we would disagree with them. We don't believe there will ever be one organisation which encompasses everything, neither do we see it as necessary. Instead we envisage the existence of a number of organisations, each internally unified, each co-operating with each other where possible. This is what we call the Anarchist movement, it is a much more amorphous and fluid entity than a General Union of Anarchists.

However, what we do agree on are the fundamental principles by which any anarchist organisation should operate.

**ORGANISATIONAL
PLATFORM OF
THE LIBERTARIAN
COMMUNISTS**



the Platform, in its search for theoretical agreement, excludes those not in absolute agreement, and thus will always be smaller than a looser organisation. As size is of more importance than theory, practically these organisations will not be as effective.

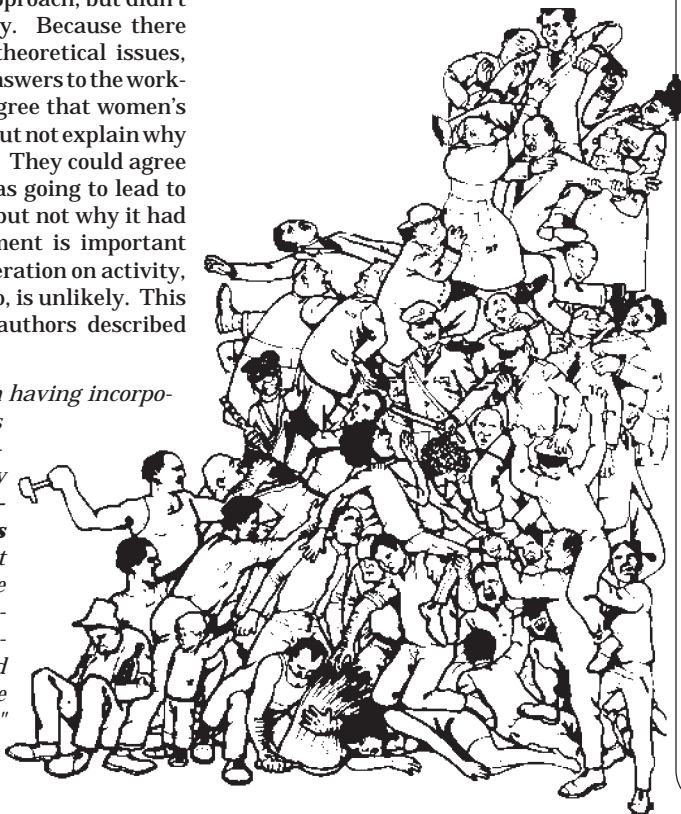
This debate takes us to the centre of one of the most important debates within anarchism. How does a revolutionary change of society occur? What can anarchists do to assist in the process of bringing such change about?

Capitalism is an organized economic system. Its authority is promoted by many voices, including the parliamentary political parties, the media and education system (to name but a few). A successful revolution depends on the rejection of those voices by the majority of people in society. Not only do we have to reject capitalism, but we also need to have a vision of an alternative society. What is needed is an understanding both that capitalism should be defeated and that it can be replaced. For an anarchist revolution there has to be the recognition that we alone have the power and the ability to create that new world.

The role of an anarchist organisation is to spread these ideas. Not only do we need to highlight the negative and injurious aspects of capitalism (which is obvious to many anyway), we also need to develop explanations of how the system operates. This is what is meant by theory, simply it is the answer to the question 'why are things as they are?'. And we need to do one more thing, we need to be able to put our theory into practice, our understanding of how things work will inform how we struggle.

Returning to the Platform, the key problem with anarchist organisations as they existed is that they were not only incapable of developing such an approach, but didn't even see it as necessary. Because there was no agreement on theoretical issues, they could not provide answers to the working class. They could agree that women's oppression was wrong, but not explain why women were oppressed. They could agree that World War One was going to lead to death and destruction, but not why it had occurred. Such agreement is important because without it cooperation on activity, agreement on what to do, is unlikely. This is how the *Platform's* authors described such an organisation

*"Such an organisation having incorporated heterogeneous theoretical and practical elements, would only be a **mechanical assembly of individuals** each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement, an assembly which would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality" (my emphasis).*



By a 'mechanical assembly of individuals' they mean a group of individuals meeting together, yet not united in mind or in action. This undermines the entire meaning of organisation, which is to maximise the strength of the individuals through co-operation with others. Where there is no agreement, there can be little co-operation. This absence of co-operation only becomes obvious when the group is forced to take a position on a particular issue, a particular event in the wider world.

At this point, two things happen. Either, the individuals within the group act on their own particular interpretation of events in isolation, which raises the question, what is the point of being in such an organisation? Alternatively the group can decide to ignore the event, thus preventing disagreement.

This has a number of unfortunate side effects for anarchist politics. Most seriously, it means that the anarchist interpretation of events still will not be heard. For no matter how large the organisation, if all within it are speaking with different voices, the resulting confusion will result in an unclear and weak anarchist message. Such an organisation can produce a weekly paper, but each issue will argue a different point of view, as the authors producing it change. Our ideas will not be convincing, because we ourselves are not convinced by them. The second side effect is that our ideas will not develop and grow in depth and complexity because they will never be challenged by those within our own organisation. It is only by attempting to reach agreement, by exchanging competing conceptions of society, that we will be forced to consider all alternatives. Unchallenged our ideas will stagnate.

Without agreement on what should be done, the anarchist organisation remains no more

- **Theoretical Unity**, that there is a commitment to come to agreement on theory. By theory they don't mean abstract musings on the meaning of life. By theory they mean the knowledge we have about how the world operates. Theory answers the question 'why?', for example 'why is there poverty?' 'why haven't Labour Parties provided a fairer society?' and so on and so on. By theoretical unity they mean that members of the organisation must agree on a certain number of basics. There isn't much an organisation can do if half their members believe in class struggle and the other half in making polite appeals to politicians, or one in which some people believe union struggles are important and others think they are a waste of time. Of course, not everybody is going to agree with everybody else on every single point. If there was total agreement there would be no debate, and our politics would grow stale and sterile. Accepting this however, there is a common recognition that it is important to reach as much agreement as possible, and to translate this agreement into action, to work together, which brings us to ...

- **Tactical Unity**, that the members of the organisation agree to struggle together as an organisation, rather than struggle as individuals in opposition to each other. So for example in Ireland, the WSM identified the anti-water charges campaign (see *R&BR 3* for more details) as an issue of great importance. Once it was prioritised, all of our members committed themselves to work for the campaign, where possible. The tactics and potential of the campaign were discussed at length at our meetings. It became the major focus of our activity.

- **Collective Responsibility**, by this they mean that each member will support the decisions made by the collective, and each member will be part of the collective decision making process. Without this, any decisions made will be paper decisions only. Through this the strength of all the individuals that make up the group is magnified and collectively applied. The Platform doesn't go into detail about how collective responsibility works in practice. There are issues it leaves untouched such as the question of people who oppose the majority view. We would argue that obviously people who oppose the view of the majority have a right to express their own views, however in doing so they must make clear that they don't represent the view of the organisation. If a group of people within the organisation oppose the majority decision they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole. Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthens both the individual and the group to which she or he belongs.

- **Federalism**, which they define as "the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards common objectives".

than a collection of individuals. The members of that organisation don't see themselves as having any collective identity. Too often the lifetimes of such groups are the lifetimes of those most active individuals. There is no sense of building a body of work that will stretch into the future. Considering that in these times the revolution is a long term prospect, such short term planning is a tragic waste of energy and effort.

Often the experience of anarchists is that they are energetic and committed activists, but fail to publicize the link between the work they do and the ideas they believe in. One example of this is the successful anti-Poll Tax Campaign in England, Scotland and Wales. Although many anarchists were extremely involved in the struggle against this unjust tax, when victory finally came, anarchists didn't come out of it, as might be expected, in a strength-

ened position. We need to ask ourselves why this is so.

It would seem to be because anarchists concentrated their efforts making arguments against the tax, and sidelined arguments in favour of anarchism. Furthermore, though many worked as individuals they couldn't give any sense that they were part of any bigger movement. They were seen as good heads, and that was all. In contrast, despite the WSM's extremely small size when a similar campaign - the Anti-Water Charges Campaign - ended, we had heightened the profile of anarchism in Ireland. We emphasised that our opposition to an unjust tax was linked to our opposition to an unjust society and our belief that a better society is possible.

Returning to the question of efficiency and size, organisations in the 'Platform' tradi-

tion agree that size is important and they all seek to grow so that they are in a position of importance in society. However, they emphasise that all the positive attributes of belonging to a larger organisation, the increased work that can be undertaken, the increased human potential that can be drawn on, are undermined if such an organisation is directionless. The key point is that it is not a case of choosing between size or coherency, rather we should aim for both.

The importance of the Platform is that it clearly highlights the serious problems caused by the disorganised nature of loosely based anarchist organisations. It exposes a problem, it highlights how fatal this flaw in anarchism can be, it emphasises the urgency with which we must deal with it and compels us to come up with some answers.



Alternative
Libertaire



Platformist groups today

Anarchist organisations that have been influenced by the Platform are well aware that it is no Bible full of absolute truths. There is no grouping anywhere that would be so stupid to treat it as one. Anarchists have no need of such things. It is just one of the signposts pointing us in what we believe is the direction of making anarchism the most realistic and desirable alternative to both the present set-up and the authoritarian alternatives served up by most of the left.

Its ideas have been developed and modified in the light of experience over the years. Two other relatively well known documents are *Towards A Fresh Revolution* by the Friends of Durruti (which arose from the experience of the Spanish revolution) and the *Manifesto of Libertarian Communism* by Georges Fontenis (which arose from French experiences in the post-World War II years). The WSM stands in this tradition because it is the best one we have found, but it is a continually developing, modifying and growing one. We have no tablets carved in stone, and we don't want or need any.

Organisations which are influenced, to varying degrees, by this tradition can be

found in countries where anarchism has sunk deep roots, like France (Libertarian Alternative), Switzerland (Libertarian Socialist Organisation) and Italy (Federation of Anarchist Communists); and also in countries where anarchism is a fairly new force, like the Lebanon (Al Badil al Taharouri) and South Africa (Workers Solidarity Federation). In the last year new translations of the Platform have appeared in Polish and Turkish.

In the English speaking world, however, many anarchists are either unaware of what is in the Platform, or are hostile to it. Why? The authors drew a distinction between real federalism, the free agreement to work together in a spirit of free debate

for agreed goals; and what they describe as "the right, above all, to manifest one's 'ego', without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation". As they point out, there is no point making decisions if members will not carry them out.

However, when they went on to talk about a General Union of Anarchists they found themselves under attack from prominent anarchists such as Voline, Fabbri, Malatesta and Camilo Berneri who accused them of trying to "Bolshevise anarchism". I believe that this criticism was wrong. On one hand Voline and his fellow thinkers were opposed because they saw no problem with organisations which were a pick 'n' mix of anarcho-syndicalism, anarchist-communism and individualism with all the incoherence and ineffectiveness that implies. On the other hand many anarchists saw the proposed General Union of Anarchists as some sort of monopoly





organisation that would incorporate all anarchists. It is a fault of the authors that they did not say explicitly that the General Union would, as all anarchists should, work with others when it is in the interests of the class struggle.

Neither did they spell out that all the decisions, the policies and the direction of the organisation would be taken by the members after full and free debate. It should not have had to be spelled out when addressing other anarchists but seemingly it did, and the 'Platform' was misunderstood by many as a result of this omission. Further signs of authoritarianism were seen in the proposal for an executive committee. Maybe if they had called it a working collective or something similar the same threat would not have been seen.

The tasks of this executive committee were listed as

"the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted, the theoretical and organisational orientation of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and general tactical line of the Union, the monitoring of the general state of the movement, the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the union, and with other organisations. The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the executive committee are fixed by the congress of the Union".

The last sentence of the document talks about the aim of the Union to become the

"organised vanguard of the emancipating process". It appears that what is being talked about is winning the best militants, the most class conscious and revolutionary workers to the Union. But it is not clearly spelled out. A doubt could exist. Did they mean a more Leninist type of vanguard? When read as part of the entire pamphlet I don't think so, but even if this is not the case it still does not invalidate the rest of the work. It would be very stupid to throw away the whole document because of one less than clear sentence.

Two arguments get used again and again against the Platform. Firstly we are told that it is Arshinov's 'Platform' as if the other four authors were just dupes, but then it would be far less credible to throw the same accusation at Nestor Makhno. It is done because in 1934 Arshinov returned to Russia, where three years later he was murdered in Stalin's purges. What Arshinov did eight years after helping to write the 'Platform' surely does no more to invalidate what was written in 1926 any more than Kropotkin's support for Allied imperialism in the First World War invalidated all his previous anarchist writings.

The other reason is the experience in Britain where the Anarchist Workers Association in the 1970s and the Anarchist Workers Group of the early 1990s both claimed the 'Platform' as an inspiration. Both groups - after very promising starts - declined, degenerated, died and then saw their remnants disappear into the Leninist milieu. This has been held up as some sort of proof that the basic ideas of the Platform inevi-

tably lead to an abandonment of anarchism.

Of course, even the briefest look at the movement beyond the shores of Britain shows that this is clearly not the case at all. But what did go wrong with both the AWA and the AWG? After all, mistakes that are not understood can easily be repeated.

One factor shared by both organisations was that they were formed by people who were already anarchists and who saw the need for an alternative to the loose organisation and lack of theoretical clarity so prevalent in British anarchism. Or to put it simply: they saw a movement with great ideas but a very poor ability to promote them. They started off by concentrating too much on what was wrong with the movement; they lost sight of all that is sensible and inspiring, and increasingly only saw the problems.

In so far as there was regular internal education and discussion it tended to be about strategies and tactics. New members were recruited on the basis of activity in strikes and campaigns, and often had little understanding of basic anarchist ideas. These people had, however, come from a background where anarchists were presented as a group of clowns without two ideas to rub together or as dropouts, incapable of dealing with modern society and wishing for a return to living on the land. There were no formal educationals on the anarchist tradition but a fair few slugging off other anarchists.

At the last conference of the AWG one observer was shocked to discover that someone who had been in that organisation for over a year knew, by his own admission, virtually nothing about the biggest ever practical anarchist experiment - the Spanish revolution. Not surprisingly many of these new members came to believe that the AWG must be a radical departure from anarchism for it seemed radically different from what they had been told anarchism was. This, in turn, strengthened a feeling that there was little to learn from the anarchist tradition.

The result of this was that, as the anarchists got demoralised and drifted away, the remaining members felt they had to move 'beyond anarchism'. In both cases the surviving rumps ended up moving into authoritarian politics. We cannot be surprised when organisations where the majority of members have little understanding of anarchist ideas cease to be anarchist organisations. To expect anything else would be crazy.

The ideas of the Platform can aid anarchists to organise more effectively, but this is meaningless if we have not first ensured that those in the anarchist organisations have a good grasp of anarchist ideas, are confident enough to disagree and debate, and are united by the common cause of making anarchism a reality.

Hobson's choice...

The 'Good Friday Agreement' & the Left

Until the Real IRA blasted the heart out of Omagh and its people, the Northern "peace process" appeared to be close to achieving the impossible. Loyalists and Republicans alike signing up to the "Good Friday Agreement", its acceptance by large majorities on both sides of the border, Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley sitting down in the same room as part of the new Assembly - it seemed as if what had appeared for decades to be impossible had been overtaken by the realpolitik of the pragmatic. All sides in the "conflict" - we were led to believe - were looking to a new beginning. Countless column inches in the popular press had been written eulogising the "statesmanship" of David Trimble and Seamus Mallon, the "peacemaking skills" of Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern and the "pragmatism" of Gerry Adams and David Ervine.

At the time of writing it remains to be seen what the ramifications of the massive carnage wreaked on the people of Omagh by the Real IRA will be. What is already clear, however, is that the working-class people of the 6-Counties are once again the people who suffer. Following on from the sectarian murders of the 3 Quinn brothers in Ballymoney during the Drumcree stand-off, another working class community was on the morning of August 16th counting their dead and injured. Jumping on the bandwagon of populism, right wing politicians and commentators such as Shane Ross (Senator and "Sunday Independent" columnist) and Michael McDowell (former Progressive Democrats TD) were screaming for the introduction of internment and even hinting that the extra-judicial murder of those associated with the Real IRA and the 32-County Sovereignty Committee should be considered.

While the reactions of the mainstream media commentators and political parties North and South and on both sides of the Irish Sea and in the United States to the "Good Friday" Agreement have been well commented on, this article is a look at the reactions to this deal from left wing parties and organisations in Ireland.

Desire for peace

In the May 22nd referendum on the deal the Workers Solidarity Movement called for an abstention, stating that "Neither a 'yes' vote nor a 'no' vote will advance the cause of workers unity and socialism". We noted in a statement issued before the referendum that the great desire for peace was being

"...used to pressurise us into choosing between two completely flawed alternatives. The agreement, which was drawn up in secret by our so-called 'representatives', does not challenge the sectarian divisions which have bedevilled this country."

Indeed our statement went on to note that the structures proposed in the agreement actually institutionalise sectarian divisions. Politicians elected to the proposed Assembly must declare themselves either

'unionist' or 'nationalist'.

"Those who refuse," we noted, "will not have their votes counted in measuring the cross community support necessary for passing legislation.....As the agreement was drawn up in the interests of the ruling class, the concept of working class interests is not even considered.....The division between rulers and ruled, between bosses and workers, between rich and poor remains. The biggest change will be a few nationalist faces sitting down with bigots like Trimble and Taylor, to make laws which preserve the dominance of the rich over the poor."

In relation to the aspect of the referendum which proposed changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Southern Constitution, the statement pointed out that these amendments

"mean nothing to us.....Articles 2 & 3 have never made one whit of difference to the real lives of anyone on this island."

While rejecting the agreement as having nothing to offer the working class North or South, we went on, however, to point out that

"Those urging rejection of the agreement have no alternative to offer, just more of the same conflict that has ruined tens of thousands of working class lives. The republican forces of the 32 County Sovereignty Committee, RSF [Republican Sinn Fein] and IRSP [Irish Republican Socialist Party - the political wing of the Irish National Liberation Army] have nothing but increased communalism and sectarian tension to offer. The loyalist opponents - whose rallies are attended by vocal supporters of the Loyalist Volunteer Force death squads - want a return to a time when Catholics lived on their knees and in fear."

The WSM statement further criticised the undemocratic nature of the referendum itself. The manner in which the deal was put to the people was such that it was not possible to support or oppose the many individual components of the agreement, allowing only one vote for or against the entire complex package.

Failed armed struggle

Having called for an abstention in the vote on the deal, our statement went on to urge the continuation of the IRA and loyalist ceasefires, stating that there must be no going back to the failed armed struggle "which gave us nothing except repression, suffering and increased sectarian hatred." We then outlined the task facing anarchists, socialists and trade unionists in the coming period:-

"When working class people begin to ask what kind of country they want to live in, and what kind of country they want their children to grow up in, the politics of anti-imperialism will start making





sense to people who up to now have been trapped in green and orange communalism.

Our struggle is for liberty, we are for the removal of the British troops from Ireland - and the destruction of the sectarian Orange state in the North and the Green conservative state in the South.

We remain committed to a united Irish Workers Republic, run by working class people in their own interests, and democratically controlled through a federated system of workers and community councils. Nobody has the right to wage war on our behalf, working people themselves must discuss the future they want and fight together for that future. Our struggle is for liberty, and no minority can impose liberty on the majority. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself."

Nothing to offer

Our analysis that the agreement had nothing to offer working class people was shared by the majority of socialists and anarchists in both Ireland and Britain - although all other organisations ended up by coming down on either the 'yes' or 'no' sides. Perhaps one of the most realistic assessments of the realities of the deal was offered by the British-based *Solidarity Federation* in the Summer 1998 edition of "Direct Action" when they stated

"Just maybe the peace agreement will take the gun out of Northern Irish politics, or at least limit its impact. A sectarian political scene without guns will be preferable to one with guns. Per-

haps this is the best we can hope for from this agreement."

This was an assessment shared in large part by Sol. Fed.'s sister organisation in Ireland *Organise!-IWA*. In an interview with a spokesperson for *Organise!* in the same edition of "Direct Action", it was stated that some members of the organisation had supported the WSM position of abstention on the referendum. "Other members of *Organise!*" it was stated, "like many working class people, voted 'yes' to the 'Agreement', not because they in any way support sectarianism, or want anything to do with choosing the form of government which oppresses us, but because of a simple desire to see the guns removed from the sectarian politics in the north.

Sectarian politicians agreeing a format in which to argue is better than the prospect of continued or worsening sectarian violence being counted in the lives, maiming and imprisonment of working class people..... Social issues, the position of workers and the unemployed at the bottom of society etc., will not and cannot be tackled through this agreement - but surely at least a vast reduction in sectarian violence must be welcomed. Beyond this, we may also see the development of an atmosphere in which anti-sectarian working class politics may be given room to develop."

'Normalisation'

It was this hope that the agreement might lead to some 'normalisation' of the political scene which also appeared to be the primary factor behind the *Socialist Party's* call for a 'yes' vote in the referendum. In an article in the May 1998 edition of the SP's newspaper "Voice", Joe Higgins the party's TD (Teachta Dala - member of the Irish Parliament) wrote

"Tragically, but inevitably, the terms drawn up are a reflection of the stunted politics that have dominated Northern Ireland for generations, the work of politicians and political parties, most of which are hopelessly sectarian-based or right wing or both.....It appears inconceivable to those who have framed this agreement, that the ordinary people of Northern Ireland might want to elect individuals or parties which are not sectarian based but which represent working class people equally from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, and who would have a vision utterly different to the narrow sectarian politics that have dominated Northern Ireland for decades with disastrous consequences."

According to Higgins' article, the choice was a stark one. Rejection of the deal would be seen as a victory by the most

reactionary elements -

"Bitter sectarian polarisation in the communities would be the background to paramilitary outrages and open warfare on issues such as parades." If the deal was accepted "This may at least see the main political parties carry on their strategies within the framework agreed even though they will stumble from one political crisis to the next. It would allow the continuation of the peace process and could provide a space for working class politics to emerge which could challenge the grip of the sectarian based parties."

In the same edition of "Voice", Peter Hadden, Secretary of the SP in the North wrote

"A yes vote is likely in the referendum, more because of the lack of an alternative rather than any conviction that the Agreement will work."

"On offer," he wrote, "is a choice of two roads towards sectarian conflict. The immediate and direct route is via the No camp. A Yes victory would mean a slightly longer road. There might be a limited breathing space which would give more time to the working class to challenge the sectarians. We believe the best option is to vote Yes, not in support of the Agreement, but for a continuation of the peace process and to allow more time for class politics to develop.

Challenge

Hadden went on to offer what he saw as the challenge for socialists in the post-referendum scenario:-

"The real issue is not just to vote in the referendum but to use this time to build a socialist alternative and campaign for a socialist solution.....One advantage of the Assembly would be that the anti working class policies of the major parties on issues such as Health, Education and Economic development would be exposed to view - but this will only happen if a socialist opposition is built. This is now the key task."

This was a theme to which the SP returned in an editorial in the June 1998 issue of "Voice":-

"If the situation holds together over the summer", they wrote, "then there is a possibility that the agreement can hold, at least for a period. This can open up a space for working class and socialist politics.

Local politicians will lose the luxury of blaming London and the Northern Ireland Office for cuts in services, hospital closures and other unpopular decisions.

Their real nature will be exposed as they take the decisions in these areas in the Assembly. The Assembly would provide a focal point in the North for workers' struggles and community campaigns."

Window of opportunity

The Socialist Party decided to contest the elections to the Assembly on the basis that

"It is likely that small parties will make a breakthrough by winning seats in the Assembly. All of this can open up an opportunity for building a socialist alternative to the sectarian based parties.....If a window of opportunity opens up for class based politics, we are determined to go through it."

In a lengthy article entitled "Will the Agreement bring peace?" in the May 1998 issue of "Socialism 2000", the political journal of the Socialist Party, Peter Hadden expanded on how this 'window of opportunity' might be represented:-

"There is only one way out for the working class. It is not to imitate the leaders of the trade unions and sit back and applaud the Agreement and the politicians who produced it. Rather it is to begin to build an alternative to sectarian politics, to unite working people, Catholic and Protestant, around common class interests and in opposition to all who attempt to maintain sectarian division..... From a working class point of view the best scenario is that the Agreement would hold, that a new local administration would form and that as many as possible of the existing parties accept the ministerial reins they are offered. On the one hand this would allow the working class movement the precious ingredient of time to begin to put an alternative to these parties in place. On the other hand the fact of these parties holding responsibility for local services and for the low pay, contracting out and privatisation which goes with them, would be a positive assistance to the development of a class opposition..... United class movements directed against local politicians would open the way for political conclusions to be drawn, for socialist ideas to begin to take on flesh..... Forces and obstacles which today appear unshakeable, the various sectarian forces included, can be melted down in the furnace of struggle. The building of a socialist organisation which can influence and effect events can be a crucial factor in determining whether the coming political and social upheaval leads towards a 'carnival of reaction' or towards united class action to bring about socialist change."

"The way to solve the national question," according to Hadden's analysis, "is to build unity between the working class in common struggle against the present rotten system and for...a socialist society..... We stand for the unity of the working class to achieve a socialist Ireland as part of a democratic and voluntary socialist federation of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland."

Hopes & realities

The *Socialist Workers Party*, on the other hand, called for a 'no' vote on May 22nd. The May 1st - 14th 1998 edition of their paper "Socialist Worker" stated that many hoped that the deal "...brings peace to the working class areas that have suffered most during the conflict." Pointing out however that the Agreement "...does nothing to dismantle the sectarian structures of the North.....institutionalises sectarian division.....doesn't even begin to tackle the poverty that affects both Catholic and Protestant workers" and that "Having Gerry Adams in a cabinet with David Trimble will only mean that both preside over student fees, cutbacks and poverty" the SWP called for a 'No' vote in the referendum.

"The alternative," the SWP stated, "is not civil war or armed conflict.....The pressure for a settlement came from both the elite at the top and workers at the bottom of society. Tens of thousands of workers turned up to peace rallies to demand an end to the armed campaign. In the unlikely event of the settlement being rejected that same pressure for peace would continue and socialists would give it every support. The real solution to sectarianism lies in common class struggle..... It is time to break from all the sectarian agendas and put class politics to the fore. Voting No to this deal will mark a start."

What's the alternative?

All in all then it can safely be said that the Good Friday Agreement excited little positive support on the left. It must be stated however that those who adopted a position which might best be described as 'critical support' were much more honest than those who opposed the deal without actually putting forward any credible alternative. The SWP view that a 'No' vote would have resulted in the coming to the fore of class politics ignores completely the fact that the deal's rejection would have been hailed

by the most reactionary elements on both sides of the sectarian divide - from Paisley and the LVF through to the 32 County Sovereignty Committee and RSF - as their victory. A more likely scenario than the coming to the fore of working class politics would have been a demoralisation of such tiny progressive forces as currently exist and the filling of the subsequent political vacuum by the forces of sectarian hatred. We would quite possibly have been facing into a Lebanon/Balkan type situation with each community retreating into 'its own' area and the possibilities of cross class unity would at the very least have been dealt a severe blow.

As Andrew Flood wrote in *Workers Solidarity* 54(Summer 1998) "For anarchists looking at the future the old saying 'if I was going there I wouldn't start from here' rings particularly true." The challenge facing all of us is to attempt to break down the sectarian barriers and to build unity between Catholic and Protestant workers. The question is not whether this is desirable - All sections of the left are agreed that it is. How to do it is however the problem that remains. What is achievable in the short to medium term? And - provided that the guns remain silent - does the new situation make this task any easier?

The WSM has always drawn a distinction between the ceasefires and the "peace process". In a statement issued on September 7th 1994, following the first IRA ceasefire we welcomed the decision to end the 'armed struggle' but pointed out that

"The 'peace process' as it is called, will not deliver a united socialist Ireland, or significant improvements apart from those associated with 'demilitarisation'. In addition it represents a hardening of traditional nationalism, and the goal of getting an alliance of all the nationalists, Fianna Fail, SDLP, Sinn Fein and the Catholic Church.

Its appeal to Protestant workers is no

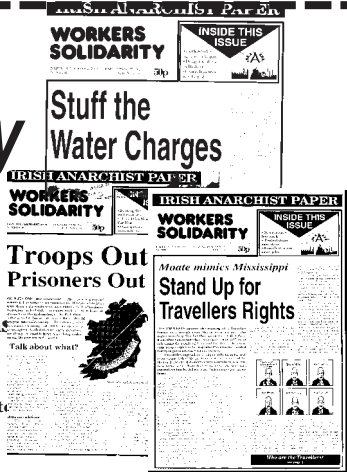
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Red & Black Revolution

The 'Good Friday agreement' & the Irish Left

greater than the military campaign (i.e. none) and to date republican statements have focused on the need for a De Klerk type figure to lead the Protestants to compromise..... This approach should come as no surprise to us, it is the underlying bedrock of nationalism. It is the reason we are anti-imperialists rather than socialist republicans..... The ending of the armed struggle cannot simply become part of history. The issue of partition cannot be quietly dropped in the interests of winning over Protestant workers. In the short term it would be possible to build workers unity on day to day economic issues without mentioning partition but it would be building on sand. In the past we have seen how instances, some involving very large numbers, of working class unity have been swept away on a tide of bigotry. What is needed is a revolutionary movement, with consistent anti-imperialist policies that is composed from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds."

Although 4 years have passed since the issuing of this statement, these sentiments still stand as an accurate assessment of the challenge facing revolutionaries today. The "Good Friday Agreement" is a consequence of the failure of republicanism and the left to win over any section of northern Protestant workers to an anti-partitionist, anti-imperialist stance. Right now, this failure is complete and it may even seem utopian to put forward such a project as the principal challenge facing us. But historically, most notably at the time of the Republican Congress of 1934, sections of the Protestant working class have proved open to such a strategy and the idea of uniting "Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter" became more than a catchphrase.

A step too far

At the Bodenstown Wolfe Tone commemoration of 1934, some 500 Belfast Protestant workers marched to Tone's graveside behind banners proclaiming "Wolfe Tone

Commemoration 1934, Shankill Road Belfast Branch. Break The Connection With Capitalism" and "James Connolly Club, Belfast. United Irishmen of 1934". Unfortunately the Belfast comrades found themselves confronted by, and ultimately attacked by, a body of IRA men with orders to prevent them marching unless they agreed to take down their banners. The strategy of "breaking the connection with capitalism" was one step too far for the

Republican leadership whose political project looked no further than the extension of the Southern clerical state north of the border. Making the links with Protestant workers would have involved breaking the links with the Catholic Church and with the southern ruling class. The Republican leadership then were unwilling to do so and, following in their footsteps - despite the occasional left-wing rhetoric - the republican leadership of today see their allies in the likes of Bertie Ahern, Bill Clinton and John Hume.

Republicanism will be forced to drop completely the remaining elements of its socialist rhetoric in the coming years. Certainly an opportunity has opened up for the development of class politics but this will not be built successfully by ignoring partition. The challenge is to build a movement of working class people involving people from all religious backgrounds - a movement which will be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. Northern workers have united across the sectarian divide in the past to fight on economic issues, this will happen again in the future. We must build an anarchist movement on this island which will be big enough to be in a position to turn future battles into the fight for an anarchist Ireland.



Inside: 1798, Victor Serge, Racism & more