

Red & Black *Revolution*

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A magazine of libertarian communism

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J18 - N30 - S26 - A20 Capitalism under siege?



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**Peadar O'Donnell and
the Spanish Revolution**

**Biotechnology, confusion,
fear and protest**

A Comment A

After a long absence we are back. It is nearly two years since the last edition of RBR, and although the delay has been longer than anticipated, the fact is that a number of important changes have taken place within the WSM. Firstly, our newspaper *Workers Solidarity* is now a free news-sheet and appears 6 times a year. With a print-run of 6,000, this means a huge increase in the number of people here in Ireland receiving information about anarchism and struggle for change. Just as important, has been the increase in the numbers of people who take bundles of each issue to distribute at work, in their neighbourhood or to their friends. A second change is that we have simplified the process for joining the WSM. Although the basics still hold – you have to agree with the WSM's democratically decided policies and you have to agree to work for these – joining is a lot more straight forward. If you want details on this just write or email us. Thirdly, we have increased and improved our presence on the Internet. This move

has been prompted by the enormous success to date of our web site and resources. In March of this year alone a quarter of a million pages were downloaded from the (*struggle*) site which includes our pages. This means a vast number of people are now looking at and reading about our anarchist ideas. Furthermore, we have made our papers, magazines, posters and some pamphlets available on PDF format – allowing for material to be downloaded in pre-set format, to be sold or distributed free right across the world.

Over the last period there has been considerable change on the world stage of struggle, but in another way little has changed – this is reflected in the content of the current edition. The rise of a new anti-capitalist or anti-globalisation movement is discussed in the article *Revolutionary Anarchism and the Anti-Globalization Movement* and in two linked reviews. In terms of what is still the same: both in the North of Ireland and in the South,

parliamentary elections are forthcoming. This is the subject of *Anarchism and Elections* - looking at the real reasons why anarchists won't be participating. Turning to other pressing issues, *Biotechnology - Confusion, Fear and Protest* looks at the crucial business of gene modification and how it fits in with the anarchist view of technology. Finally as part of our ongoing commitment to building up more information on libertarian aspects of Irish history we have an article about *Salud*, a little known account of a brush with the Spanish Revolution by one of Ireland leading leftists in the 1930s, Peadar O'Donnell.

While long in the making, we hope you find this issue enjoyable, provocative and, of course, useful. But don't forget, if you feel you have an article or book review that could be included in the next issue – get in touch.

Editorial group

Back Issues

All the previous issues of **Red & Black Revolution** are available on our web site as PDF files which you can download and print out.

www.struggle.ws/wsm

R&BR1 featured articles on the collapse of the left, Russia 1917-21, Marx & the state, the EZLN & more.

R&BR2 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

R&BR4 included Anarchism in the Czech Republic, Environmental Survival, Racism, Victor Serge, The 1798 Rebellion

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- Tell us you are re-printing and send us a copy of the publication it appears in.
- If you are also translating an article, please email us a copy of the translation so we can add it to our web pages.

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.

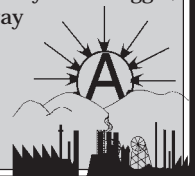
Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. 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 ongoing 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 built up the circulation of our paper, *Workers Solidarity*, from 500 to 6,000 per issue. We have also organised speaking tours of Ireland by an anarchist veteran of the Spanish Civil War, Marco Nadal; a former Black Panther, Lorenzo Kam'boa Ervin; and a Czech anarchist militant, Vadim Barak.

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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Summer 2001

Red & Black Revolution is published by the Workers Solidarity Movement. The deadline for the next issue is August 2001. 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.**

<http://www.struggle.ws/wsm.html>

Biotechnology, confusion, fear and protest

On the 26th of June 2000 researchers announced that they had finally created a rough map of the human genome – almost 3 billion DNA letters. In December 2000 British MPs voted to allow scientists to collect cells from human embryos and to substitute a nuclei from an adult cell into embryo cells for research purposes. These sorts of developments leave many people confused and frightened.



The BSE, and Foot and Mouth, crises have left people wondering are scientists and governments to be trusted in these areas. There has been a consumer revolt against Genetically Altered foods and activists have rushed to pull up genetically altered crops. So what's all this about? Is it any use to anyone or just another example of big science and big business going mad at our expense?

What is Genetic Engineering?

Genetic Engineering (GE) refers to a set of technologies that make it possible to transfer genes between organisms. Genes are chemical sequences found in the nucleus of every living cell, which work as plans or blueprints to manufacture proteins. Thus genes working in conjunction with environment and upbringing are crucial in determining the makeup of any living entity. For example I could have inherited a gene which makes me big and fat but clearly if I can't get food or don't eat then I will remain skinny. My genes give me a certain potentiality but the influences around me decide to what extent the potential comes through.

GE, by enabling genes to be transferred and then switched on in totally new organisms, makes possible traits, which could never have arisen through conventional breeding. Previously a breeder who wanted a purple variety of cow would have to find a purple cow or a purple animal close to a cow and set-up a programme to breed this trait into conventional cows. A genetic engineer simply extracts a gene, which codes for a protein that creates a purple pigment from any organism and transfers it into an unfertilised egg. When the egg is fertilised and the new

cow grows up, and if the scientist has found a way to make sure the gene is switched on in the cow's coat - she will be purple.¹ So far almost all success in this area has been with plants rather than animals where it is easy to generate a new plant from a single cell.

GE has existed more or less since the 1970s but it is only in the last 10-15 years that it has become a potential money-maker especially in the area of crop plants.

The American biotechnology giant Monsanto has over the course of the last 15 years, modified several popular crop plants to make them resistant to it's herbicide Roundup. This has obviously meant a huge increase in markets and sales. Other crops which have been modified include tomatoes where the ripening process is lengthened so that they can be transported longer distances. In Ireland Guinness have spent years (seemingly unknown to environmental activists, many of whom have been known to consume large quantities!) transferring genes into different strains of yeast to improve their brewing process.

However, since the introduction into the European market of foodstuffs derived from genetically engineered plants (Note: they've been selling in the US market for several years already!), massive consumer concern has emerged. So-called GM (Genetically Modified) food has become a big issue. That said, it is worth noting that GM food is only one of a number of food technologies that come under the under the general heading of

Glossary

In order to make this article easier to understand we have included a short glossary of technical words, which are explained here in a bit more detail

DNA: The chemical substance DioxyriboNucleicAcid that makes up genes. DNA is made up of 4 different chemical bases or letters.

Chromosomes: Chromosomes are tightly wound strands of DNA bundled together in an area in the centre of every cell known as the nucleus. Chromosomes contain all the genes for an animal or plant and a lot of extra DNA whose function is still unsure (bacteria and other simple organisms don't have their DNA coiled into chromosomes but they do have genes)

Genes: Genes are sections of DNA that act as blueprints or plans for the creation of proteins. Proteins decide how the body is made up and develops. Human hair is made up of protein, as is haemoglobin on your blood and your fingernails. Other proteins control chemical reactions in the body. Proteins play a crucial role in making us what we are and so genes which act as blueprints for proteins have a major part to play in our make up.

Genome: The Genome is basically all the DNA on all the Chromosomes in a cell, including all the genes.

Clone: A clone is an exact genetic replica of an individual with exactly the same genes as the original – anyone who has ever succeeded in rooting a cutting from a plant has, in fact, created a clone.

biotechnology. One is the identification and possible treatment of so-called simple Genetic Disorders where a problem can be traced to one or two defective genes – Cystic Fibrosis being just one such where progress has been made.

Cloning is another. The cloning of Dolly the sheep caused massive media interest. More recently the same team of scientists have cloned a monkey – several countries including Japan and Britain now have legal bans on human cloning, which is probably already scientifically quite feasible.

The Good

Before looking at GE in the context of the economics of capitalism I will try to look at the technology *per se*. An important question needs to be asked: is GE in itself safe and potentially of benefit? In answering this it needs to be borne in mind that those who advocate GE claim a wide number of benefits on its behalf. Though some of these claims are wild and off the mark, there are undoubtedly some real benefits to be achieved through this new technology.

One in particular is the area of inheritable disease. Already some progress has been made identifying diseases that are caused by deficiencies in our human genes, in particular deficiencies present in new-born babies. Although pharmaceutical companies (concerned primarily with making profits) finance much of this research, it is obvious that there is real value to it. However charitable foundations, which don't have a direct profit motive, finance some research in this area; the benefits of research from these bodies could be made much more widely available.

Another area with obvious potential benefits is that of reproductive technology. Many childless couples have benefited from various techniques, for example increasing the production of eggs in a woman and then harvesting them and combining sperm and eggs artificially. Although this research has often been controversial in nature (for example see the recent debates here and in England on the use of stored, frozen embryos), anarchists have been at the forefront in defending this type of research against attack from the pro-life movement and other moralists of the Right.

Obviously there are sensitive issues in this area but we would argue that on balance this sort of research could lead to real and tangible benefits. In fact, if any questions are to be raised

about this technology surely the question of access to health improvements has to be top of the list. It remains true that, while huge improvements have been the order of the day in the medical establishment over the last few decades, the problem remains that only the really wealthy can access these services on any ongoing basis – precisely because such services are so expensive!

Feed the world?

One of most prominent excuses put forward by many of the multinational food corporation to justify the introduction of GE foods 'is to solve the problem of world food shortage!' As Monsanto put it "As a life sciences company Monsanto is committed to finding solutions to the growing global needs for food and health". Although this sounds nice, it is nonsense!

Firstly there is more than enough food to feed the world several times over already. There are huge food mountains and these could easily provide the 4.3 pounds (in weight) of food that the average person needs to live and prosper on per day. This would include two and a half pounds of grain, beans and nuts, about half a pound of meat, milk and eggs, and another of fruit and vegetables! ³

The problem, in other words, is not food but the distribution of what is already being produced. Hunger and poverty are a man-made problem – more specifically a problem caused and maintained by the manner in which the world economy is organised:

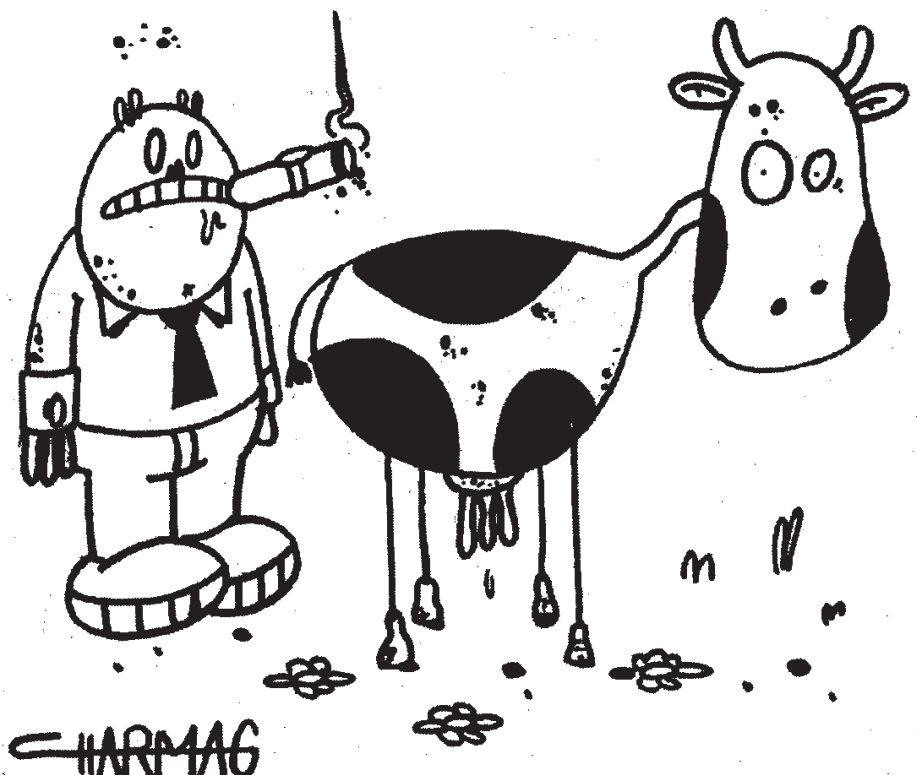
to produce profits first and to meet needs second – capitalism. It is also worth bearing in mind that to date no GE food research has been devoted to increasing yield *per se*. Rather current GE food research supports and promotes *intensive agriculture* methods, which may eventually cut into both the quality and even the quantity of food we eat.

The Bad

When it comes to examining the bad side of biotechnology industry, it is once again difficult to separate out this feature from the reality that food production today is organised primarily to meet the profit needs of giant corporations.

It is accepted by many scientists that humans or animals who consume GM food will be exposed to "remote but real risks"⁴ For example, if a new protein is introduced from a non-food organism into a food it may cause allergic reactions. Only very careful long-term monitoring of a large group of consumers could determine whether there were such problems. Similarly for long-term gastrointestinal problems or cancers. At present only single genes with well understood effects are being transferred. But the next generation of GM foods may involve several genes- how will these interact? The truth is no one knows!

And a further complication lies with a seemingly minor aspect in the current technology - this is the common use of antibiotic resistance genes that



are attached to the transferred genes to monitor their progress. This resistance may be transferred to bacteria in the body and later to infecting bacteria. Resistance to major antibiotics is a growing problem in hospitals. Finally there maybe other subtle effects, for example genes may insert randomly into DNA switching other genes on and off with potentially bad effects. Although millions worldwide do consume genetically altered food daily, for example yeast and soya, we still cannot be sure of the potential long term effects and very little study has been done.

...And the downright Ugly

So much for the technology itself - in so far as it can be judged. However, in a capitalist world no technology is implemented for the benefit of the many. The use of biotechnology has been a perfect example of how retaining market share and instant profits have predominated over all other considerations.

For example, farmers who buy seeds from chemical giant Monsanto cannot save seeds. Monsanto have taken hundreds of seed piracy cases (see De Paor, *ibid.*). Besides sending Pinkerton detectives into the farmers' fields the company sponsors a free line so their neighbours can blow the whistle and they place ads on the radio naming and shaming those who have "stolen the company's genes". Such lengths may no longer be necessary, as Monsanto has now patented a terminator gene that ensures that the plants cannot produce new seed. This has no useful property other than forcing farmers to buy patented Monsanto seed every year!

GE is being used to grab a few specific traits - transfer them and patent the resulting organisms. GE has been intimately tied in with intensive agriculture, with massive inputs of chemical weed killers and fertilisers. The 27 corporations who have herbicide-resistant plant programmes include the 8 largest pesticide companies in the world namely; Bayer, Ciba Geigy, ICI, Rhone-Poulenc, Dow/Elanco, Monsanto, Hoescht and Du Pont as well as almost all the seed companies most of which have been bought by the chemical companies⁵

GM plants, as presently being developed, pose several environmental risks including:

1. A loss of genetic diversity. Between 1845 and 1847 almost 1 million people were wiped out by famine and disease and another 1 million emigrated. There were economic and political



reasons for this but the direct cause of the famine was a dependence on one variety of one plant; the potato. The potato remains a staple in the Irish diet only because researchers were able to go to the Andes and Mexico and find new strains resistant to blight. These were then crossed with the original potato to introduce the new trait. The lesson is that a loss of genetic variety is disastrous.

The worldwide trend with intensive agriculture is to concentrate on a small number of varieties. The GM industry is at the heart of this process. The corporations are gene thieves, extracting individual genes from particular plants. They depend on a rich variety from which to "mine" the genes. But they then patent the altered plant and encourage mass monoculturing, where a huge number of farmers grow them and abandon the old varieties. Ultimately this narrows the gene pool, as other varieties of the crop are no longer grown or even wiped out as weeds.

The evidence is there. Both conventional breeding and GE are leading to mass erosion of genetic variation. In the last 80 years 97% of vegetable varieties in the USA have become extinct. In India there were 30,000 varieties of rice 50 years ago now 75% of the total crop is accounted for by just 10 varieties. This loss is permanent. Genetic engineering can only shuffle existing variety, it cannot really create anything new.

2. Further ecological problems are emerging. One is the transference of herbicide resistance into weeds. Cereal crops often grow side by side with weedy grasses very similar to themselves. It is quite easy for a resistant gene to be transferred in the pollen of an engineered species. Even if this doesn't happen - increasing use of herbicides on the fields of resistant crops will increase selection pressure on the weeds. This will make the emergence of "super weeds" a possibility. Gene flow has been demonstrated between maize and its weedy plant relative teosinte. (Altieri, *ibid.*)

The same applies to plants engineered to produce their own insecticides. Several commercial crop plants have been engineered with a naturally occurring ant-insecticide produced by bacteria known as *Bacillus Thuringiensis*. Insects are now being exposed to massive doses of this toxin concentrated in engineered plants. The end result can only be that resistance will develop quite fast among survivors. Furthermore it now appears that BT also kills natural pollinators of some plants in the pollen of the engineered plants.

Massive increase in the use of herbicides like Monsanto's *Roundup* means that beneficial animals like spiders and worms are also wiped out - the herbicides are concentrated in the food chain raising the question of human safety when massive doses are involved.

Privatisation

Put simply, the application of Biotechnology and GE to maintain profits and market positions raises real ecological problems and may carry risks for human health. One final effect, which is often passed over, is the privatisation of science itself. Science relies for progress on the free exchange of new ideas and experimental information through journals like Science and Nature. Increasingly, research is being kept secret and the results patented by business. Just as the engineers steal the accumulated knowledge and breeding of the last few centuries, they are also privatising scientific knowledge. 46% of biotechnology firms support research at universities in the USA and 33 out of 50 states have university-industry centres for "biotechnology transfer." To quote Altieri, the challenge for universities and state funded research will be:

"to carefully monitor and control the provision of applied non-proprietary knowledge to the private sector so as to protect that such knowledge will continue in the public domain for the benefit of all society."

In summary, taking biotechnology and GE in isolation there may be some benefits e.g. in the treatment of hereditary diseases and fertility treatment.⁶

As GE has been applied through capitalism it has proved disastrous. The environment, and possibly human health, has been sacrificed for profit and monopoly. We should oppose current trials in Ireland. When activists attacked a Monsanto sugar beet trial in Shanagary Cork they were accused of being luddites. However it is clear that the trials are rubbish. If they are carefully regulated to prevent the accidental release of pollen then they are bogus trials. But if they are carefully regulated then they don't reflect the real dangers. As they are being conducted by the companies themselves they are not subject to neutral scientific evaluation. Anyhow there isn't much money in pointing out the dangers. As Butler and Reichhadrtd put it (Nature, *ibid.*)

"such research is unattractive to researchers as it tends to yield negative results that are difficult to publish and account for to funding agencies."

Anarchists are not anti-technology. On the contrary we advocate the optimum use of science and technology for the benefit of common good. For

example if it were possible to build robots to sweep streets, such an invention would certainly be welcome in an anarchist society. Isn't it in all our interests to reduce the time spent on boring and repetitive tasks?

Up to a point capitalism accelerates the introduction of new technology and the development of new technologies (a real benefit, it should be said, to the capitalist form of economic organisation), but capitalism often places the brakes on new technology too. Capitalists will only invest in technology that can cut costs, especially labour costs, and thereby improve their competitive position. For years the large oil companies have bought out patents for alternative energy sources and buried them. Anyone who uses a computer has probably had ample time to regret the dominance of two companies; Intel and Microsoft which have slowed rather than improved the rate of evolution of computer technology in order to preserve their monopolies.

Capitalists only invest in technology when it suits them. In this context GE as it stands, is simply theft. Theft of the property of the many (breeders and farmers) for the profit of a few. The question of whether it could be of any benefit is a moot one until the many have power over the decisions of

what they produce and consume.

Footnotes

¹ This is not nearly as far fetched as it sounds. The first issue of the British magazine New Scientist (Jan 6th 2001) carried an interview with a Chicago artist Eduardo Kac. He paid a French laboratory to create a Genetically Modified Rabbit that glows green in blue light. Kac claims that he wishes to use the rabbit to open the process of genetic modification to a more public discourse!

² quoted in "Weird Science" Ainé De Paor, Magill Magazine, July 1999)

³ "Why genetically altered food won't conquer hunger" Peter Rosset, New York Times, September 1st 1999)

⁴ "Long-term effects of GM food serves up food for thought," Declan Butler and Tony Reichhardt, Nature 398:651, April 22 1999.)

⁵ "The Environmental Risks of Transgenic Crops: An agro-ecological Assessment" Miguel Altieri, Department of Environmental Science - University of California)

⁶ There are also some theoretical ideas for engineering plants that could fix their own Nitrogen from the soil or have high tolerance to salty conditions. These things might be of REAL benefit to poor countries. Needless to say barely a penny has gone into this research.



anarchist news on the internet

It's not surprising that the national media - owned by the state or by the super rich - refuses to advertise anarchist news or activity. But now you can bypass the censors if you have access to the internet.

In your web browser go to <http://www.struggle.ws/wsm>

This page, designed to be friendly for new internet users shows you key sites on the internet linked with Irish anarchism, international and Irish radical news and a huge variety of anarchist history and theory.

To get regular news and announcements from the WSM by email send a message to lists@tao.ca with the text **subscribe ainriail**.

This free service is a low volume list with an average of only 4 posts/week

Peadar O'Donnell and the Spanish Revolution

Peadar O'Donnell (1893-1986), the novelist and political activist, is a major figure in the history of the Irish left. Born in Donegal, he left teaching (and a prominent role in the Donegal branch of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation) to become a full-time organiser with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1918.

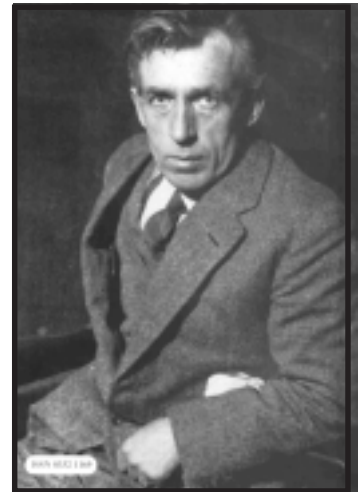
His mother, a fervent Larkinite, and her brother Peter, a member of the Wobblies (the Industrial Workers of the World) in Butte, Montana, had instilled a strong syndicalist sensibility in the young Peadar and its fruits emerged in an active burst of union organising, which included the successful strike at Monaghan asylum in January 1919 when he led the workers in a week long successful occupation of the institution. With the outbreak of the war of independence O'Donnell joined the IRA. He opposed the Treaty and was among the IRA executive when the Four Courts were shelled in 1922.

Imprisonment and hunger strikes followed before he escaped from the Curragh in 1924. For the next ten years he served on the Army Council and Executive of the IRA, arguing that class politics should be the dynamic of republican politics and the IRA should adopt the role of a Connollyite citizen army. As editor of *An Phoblacht* from

1926 to 1929 he pursued his left republican agenda, focussing particularly on the land annuities campaign, which he himself initiated as a grassroots popular campaign. The revolutionary left was monopolised by the 'orthodox' communists at this time and O'Donnell was aligned to many of the Comintern groupings that emerged in the late twenties and early thirties, particularly the Irish Working Farmers' Committee movement, a branch of Krestintern, the communist Peasant International.

A leading figure in the failed 1931 Saor Eire experiment, when the IRA rhetorically embraced a socialist programme, he eventually split from the IRA with the formation of the doomed Republican Congress in 1934. He went to Spain on a writing holiday in 1936 and was accidentally caught up in the revolution and civil war. His experiences formed the basis of his book *Salud! An Irishman in Spain*. Although no longer a member of any

Peadar O'Donnell at the European Peasants' Congress in Berlin, in 1930.



political organisation, O'Donnell remained an important figure in Irish political and cultural life.

He helped found the liberal *Bell* magazine in 1940 and edited it from 1946 to 1954. He was associated with most of the progressive campaigns in post-war Ireland and was a seminal figure in groups like the Anti-Apartheid Movement and CND. He was prominent in the Save the West campaign of the 1960s, and in the National Land League which agitated for the break up of large estates. He also continued his lifelong support of Irish emigrants abroad, particularly in Britain. He published the last of his 7 novels in 1975, and died aged 93 in 1986.

Salud! An Irishman in Spain

***Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (Methuen, London, 1937), Peadar O'Donnell's book detailing his experiences in Spain in the early months of the revolution and civil war in 1936, is a little-known account of these events by one of Ireland's best known and respected radical figures. It is particularly interesting for Irish anarchists, given its sympathetic treatment of the anarcho-syndicalist contribution by a long-time 'fellow traveller' of the orthodox Irish communist movement, which has always set out to denigrate that contribution.**

Not suprisingly, O'Donnell's account and impressions of anarchism in action in Spain in the summer and autumn of 1936 are never referred to by mainstream and Stalinist writers. They are notably ignored by the Communist Party of Ireland's Michael O'Riordan, who fought with the international brigades, in his book *The Connolly Column* and in the numerous talks he gives on the topic. For the likes of O'Riordan, Peadar O'Donnell had impeccable credentials, so to accommodate his portrayal of and

sympathy with revolutionary Spain would be to undermine the official Stalinist line. Far easier to focus on and dismiss George Orwell, with whose account and impressions in *Homage to Catalonia* O'Donnell's tally, because of his direct involvement with the supposedly 'counter-revolutionary' POUM and his subsequent anti-Communist work for British Intelligence, fuelled by his hatred of Stalinism.

The tone of O'Donnell's book differs from that of Orwell's, being the account

of an engaged (and accidental) observer rather than that of an active participant. It is uneven and obviously rushed, written with the immediate purpose of countering the anti-(Spanish) republican propaganda that was dominating public discourse in Ireland. It is regrettable that he did not subsequently write a more reflective piece with the benefit of hindsight, but this is typical of an activist who declared his pen to be merely a weapon to be used for immediate political purposes, and who always moved quickly on to a new cause.

Unlike Captain Jack White, O'Donnell did not 'convert' to anarchism in Spain. He was frequently critical of anarchist anti-clericalism, utopianism and 'pet theories', yet displayed a self-proclaimed 'enthusiasm' for the anarchists, which was at odds with the attitude of his republican socialist circle, which tended to take the Moscow line. This sympathy and enthusiasm was noted by contemporaries and

Below and right: Stills from a CNT newsreel of anarchist agricultural collectives



comrades, including Frank Ryan, who led the Connolly Column to Spain; in a letter to the CPI's Sean Murray in September 1937 Ryan makes reference to "Peadar's friends (the Anarchists)". While it is evident in *Salud!*, his positive view of the revolution does not feature in his journalistic accounts and comments on his return to Ireland. Instead, he fell in with the CPI line - that bourgeois democracy rather than socialist revolution offered the bulwark against fascism - which dominated the pro-republican/anti-fascist campaign in Ireland.

O'Donnell went with his wife Lile and some friends to Spain in July 1936 and intended remaining there for a year or two to do some writing, including a booklet on the changed agrarian situation under the new Republican government. His plans were radically altered, however, by the fascist uprising a little over a fortnight later and he found himself swept up in the turmoil of those early months of revolutionary fervour and civil war.

He arrived in Barcelona with a letter of introduction from a contact in the French Communist Party, assuming that this would give him an entry into the centre of radical politics in the city. He soon discovered the actual situation. He went in search of the Communist Party, but having tried taxi after taxi, café after café, could find nobody who knew the whereabouts, nor even the existence of the Catalan Communist Party. Eventually he met a Kerryman who brought him to the CP offices, hidden away in a drab back street. He realised that it was the anarchists who were the overwhelmingly dominant force among the working class. The anarchist influence was everywhere and in discussions with members of the English speaking colony he was left in no doubt as to their time honoured role as 'bogey men': "To the foreign colonists the Anarchists were not dreamers seeking . . . to bring government to a standstill so that it might collapse and permit life in the

villages to organize itself without interference and allow villages to interweave their social plans to ensure regional welfare, and work out, through autonomous areas, to a federated Spain. The Anarchist was just a man with a gun, or maybe a razor, with a weakness for killing at night time." (The failure of the bourgeois press to identify the strong anarchist influence in Spain was remarked upon by Irish journalist Mairin Mitchell in an article in the liberal journal *Ireland To-Day* in September 1936. She pointed out that CNT-FAI formed "the most important working class organisation in Spain . . . I have not seen this important fact stated in any of the English papers." She correctly predicted that the anarchists, "with their adherence to the fundamental meaning of anarchism", had little hope of finding a compromise with the "dictatorial Communists".)

O'Donnell met with FAI representatives, one of whom brought along a press clipping relating to the famous attack on him the previous April by a right-wing Catholic mob, when he tried to address a public meeting from a lamp post in Dublin and was lucky to escape with his life. They discussed plans for overcoming illiteracy and the respective educational theories of Padraig Pearse and Francisco Ferrer. O'Donnell made the fascinating suggestion, in the light of subsequent developments in distance learning, that as soon as the technology permitted the anarchists should pioneer the use of television to bring "the lecture room within sight and sound of the youth of the whole nation. What a fight will be made on that one day!". The end result of the discussions was an invitation to Peadar to attend the FAI-CNT regional conferences being organized to plan the land collectivisation campaign and to put his views in a memorandum that would be discussed.

He was back in his base in Sitges, a fishing village about 30 miles from Barcelona, when the fascist rising occurred. He and Lile immediately returned to Barcelona and immersed themselves in a city in the grip of a glorious revolutionary energy. Echoing Orwell, O'Donnell describes the atmosphere of the streets, saluting "that cityful of people, who preserved such uncanny order even in their first flush of victory". On a visit to the newly formed press bureau at anarchist headquarters, he was brought on board to edit the English language version of their international news bulletin and was given a press

pass endorsed by the FAI-CNT and the new Anti-Fascist Militia Committee.

The O'Donnells set off for the Aragon Front with the first column from Barcelona, carried along by the collective passion and energy: "Saragossa must be freed. All Spain must be freed. The whole world must be freed. 'SALUD'. I'm sure I roared it too. I have not the slightest recollection what I did." They returned again to Barcelona - "where workers were in the first flush of their overlordship of industries" - and he describes the various groups insisting on marching under their own flags - the Communists, POUM, Socialist trade unions, "but above all came FAI-CNT, the real power in Barcelona".

Encouraged by their friends, Peadar and Lile decided to return to Ireland to try and give an account of what was actually happening in an atmosphere of catholic church fuelled anti-Red hysteria. The burning of churches was a particular focus of pro-Franco propaganda and he prepared to defend himself on this front; he recalls joking to a priest in Ireland that the Spanish government had given him a free holiday in Spain on condition that he burned a few churches: "There was a chance that he might have written to the papers in Ireland by this time to give me away." He remained in Ireland in August, writing letters to the press and addressing public meetings on Spain before returning there in September.

O'Donnell's descriptions of life in rural Catalonia on his return reflect something of the changed mood since the heady days of July, and he detects a certain stagnation in the collectivised villages, with the rural population immobilised and the militias over-inclined "to poke their noses into every grumble that arose". Back in Barcelona he found the Catalan government publicity department "very poor", staffed mainly by foreign exiles from fascist countries "without the local sense of atmosphere which is the very lifeblood of publicity". The anarchists alone ran a readable paper, telling stories of "real happenings" and



International section of the Durruti column

reflecting *"the workaday life in reports from the syndicates"*. He re-established his anarchist contacts and was invited to address the large agricultural conference that was being held in the city. *"I was sorely tempted"*, he writes, *"to send telegrams to a few outstanding reactionary farmers in Ireland to tell them that I would have much pleasure in conveying their greetings to the Anarchist Farmers' Congress"*.

He devotes a whole chapter of *Salud!* to this congress, indicating, like his later reproduction of the decrees issued by the industrial syndicates in the Catalan town of Badalona, his concern to document the revolution as best he could as it was happening. His account of the speeches and contributions to the conference, centring on the pace of collectivisation, reflect his own views arising from his Irish experience. He instinctively sided with those whose ideas *"went deep into the soil, into history"*, who argued for partial, staged collectivisation.

Compromise was reached to allow those with small farms to continue to work them, derelict farms and those of the enemy were to be collectivised, and no rents were to be paid to landlords. The acknowledgement of the universal peasant *"passion for a piece of land"* was, for O'Donnell, a victory for common sense and highlights his pragmatic approach to the land question in areas of high small farmer proprietorship like Ireland and Catalonia: strive for the collective ideal while allowing room for individualisation. The small farmer, he wrote in 1930, is *"wedged into his holding . . . guaranteed tenure of the working farmer must continue, for it is that ease and rest of mind that will enable his thoughts to ripen for collective effort"*.

The talk in the cafes of Barcelona, where he spent much time, was of the shortage of arms, and he joined in the criticism of the government for failing to arm the people and permitting the war *"to assume the character of a clash of armies only"*. He was approached by the militia with a view to securing

arms and he wrote them a message to be sent to two people who had experience in gun running in the Irish struggle and agreed to make the necessary introductions if these people were willing to help. He set off for Madrid and immediately noted the Communist influence there in contrast to Barcelona where the anarchists were the driving force. He believed this to be an instinctive reaction to the fascist attacks on Communism: *"If Communism was the enemy-in-chief in the eyes of the Fascists then it clearly was a fighting formation to which anti-Fascists should rally. There was also a groping hope of help from the Soviet Union . . ."* He found that Madrid did not give *"that impression of a people set free which Barcelona did"* and that it was making a poorer fist of publicity than the Catalan capital *"where the Anarchists at least brought glimpses of life into their writing."* He saw in the Spanish capital a distortion of the situation:

"Fascists thundered their condemnation of Communism and the ordinary man in the street felt the impulse to give back 'Viva Communismo'. It was easier to see the main line of struggle in the villages, stretching out towards the front [where] the agrarian revolution was put through in a hurry". In discussions with foreigners and Spaniards in Madrid he heard again *"this distant-minded judgement of the Anarchists. There was some surprise at my enthusiasm for them, for it was taken for granted that every foreigner coming to Madrid at this stage was a Communist."*

After a brief excursion to London to arrange the publication of his account of his experiences in Spain and a few days on the French border observing the smuggling of arms to Republicans, he returned to Barcelona through the villages of Catalonia which he now found *"fair and peaceful"*. Barcelona *"was almost as it had been when I had first come into it in July; although anybody could tell now where the Communist offices were to be found."*

His final impressions are of increasing Communist influence, with the *"outlines of Government"* coming into view, a push towards Republican 'unity' and the need to defend Madrid. With the International Brigades arriving and the defence of Madrid beginning, O'Donnell returned to Ireland and the book concludes with his description of the propaganda war in Ireland between the powerful supporters of Franco and the marginalised anti-fascists, with whom he vainly struggled against the tide.

A common lament on the left in Ireland concerns the historical appeal of nationalism/republicanism and its impact on the fortunes of the left. Connolly's 1916 gesture symbolised the problem, and Peadar O'Donnell's immersion in the republican movement is similarly pointed to. What is less often remarked upon is the detrimental impact of the virtual monopolisation of socialist politics by the Stalinists from the 1920s to the 1960s, so that a 'gut socialist' like O'Donnell, with a syndicalist background and a natural sympathy for the anarchist project once he had experienced it at first hand, re-immersed his socialism in the stagnant communist pool on his return to Ireland - primarily, it could be argued, because it was the only 'socialist' pool in town. He never joined the party, preferring to maintain his independence, but remained a fellow traveller until his death. An editorial in the Donegal Democrat following his death in 1986 was headed 'Death of a Quasi-Anarchist'. The latter term was used as a synonym for trouble-maker, but the writer might have inadvertently captured an element of O'Donnell missed by many others, an element that never developed due partly to the domination of Irish radical politics for most of the twentieth century by the elitist and authoritarian republican and communist traditions.

Donal Ó Drisceoil's biography of Peadar O'Donnell is published by Cork University Press in May 2001 as part of a new series entitled *'Radical Irish Lives'*.

Anarchism and Elections

We are all used to the scenario. You don't see your local political 'representatives' for years and suddenly when an election is called they're all swarming all over your neighbourhood like flies around cowshit - the politicians and the wannabe politicians. It's a scene which is going to be enacted all over Ireland - both North and South - shortly as general elections loom on both sides of the border. Yet again we'll have the great choice between Tweedledum and Tweedledumber as to who we want to sit in Leinster House or Stormont for the next four or five years - even though we know that it's not really going to make any difference.

We will of course also have the candidates who tell us they're different - the ones who claim to be 'honest', 'anti-corruption', even 'anti-capitalist'. The only guarantee there can be about this election - as with previous ones - is that you won't come across any anarchists on your doorstep asking you to trust in them. Anarchists have always opposed participation in the sham of parliamentary elections and this time around it will be no different.

Democracy??!!

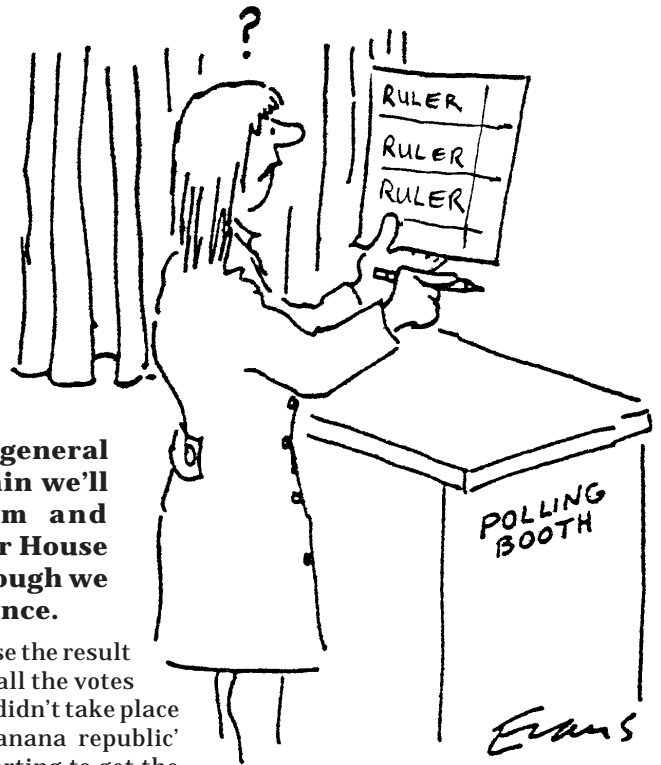
The main reason why anarchists are so opposed to parliamentary elections is because we are fervent believers in democracy - in real democracy. What passes for democracy in terms of how parliament operates is in fact the complete opposite. You only have to look at the recent USA Presidential election for proof of that - the person who got the most votes didn't win the election, tens of thousands of people intimidated out of voting because of the colour of their skin, ballot papers laid out so confusingly that some people didn't know who they were



voting for - and of course the result being declared before all the votes are counted. Now this didn't take place in some backward 'banana republic' where they're only starting to get the hang of this democracy thing. This was in the supposed 'greatest democracy in the Western World'. Oh and of course almost half of the people didn't bother to vote at all. In fact George W. Bush was elected president with the votes of less than a quarter of those entitled to vote.

OK you might say, but things don't operate like that in Ireland. We have a very fair electoral process after all. We even use Proportional Representation to ensure that the make up of the parliament reflects closely the voting intentions of the voters. Does it though? At the last general election, every single political party claimed to be opposed to Ireland entering the NATO-led so-called Partnership for Peace (PFP). We're now members of PFP. I don't remember any politician promising at the last election that they would ensure that the gap between rich and poor would be widened, that funds would be diverted from much-needed spending on hospitals and education in order to give tax breaks to the corporate sector. Yet this is exactly what has happened.

Why is it that no matter what parties are elected to government, nothing really changes? When 'New Labour' replaced the Tories in Britain, did they set about repealing Thatcher's anti-union legislation? Did they implement a new fiscal policy which would reverse



some of the worst effects of Thatcherism on the working class? Not bloody likely. In fact, if we hadn't been told we could easily have presumed that Blair was actually leading a Tory government.

Likewise in Ireland (i.e. the South) over the past decade there have been 5 different parties in government (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour, Democratic Left, Progressive Democrats). Yet the change from one government to the next has been unnoticeable - policies, economic or social, haven't changed. Now there are two more parties waiting in the wings to get a bit of the action (Sinn Féin and the Greens) but, of course, before they will be allowed to join the club they have to prove that they will be 'safe', that they won't try implementing any radical policies. Anyone who thinks that's an exaggeration has only to look at the example of how well the Green party in Germany adapted to the trappings of power.

Liars and Cheats?

Why is it that politicians ignore their mandate? Is it because they're all liars and cheats (yes I know a lot of them are!!) or is there another reason? Let's suspend reality for a moment and presume that in the upcoming general election in the 26-Counties a majority government is elected on a platform of

imposing a 75% tax on the profits of corporations, and re-investing this money in housing, education and health. Do you think they would be allowed?? How would business and the wealthy react??

We all know the answer to that particular question. Before the newly-elected Minister for Finance would have time to even try out his Ministerial Merc for size, the owners of business and capital would have pressed the necessary buttons on their computers and transferred all their wealth out of his nasty clutches, leading of course to immediate total economic collapse and mass unemployment. Or if the new Minister for Finance was smart enough to have pre-empted this and put in place exchange controls to prevent the transfer of funds abroad, we would instead see a total economic blockade and an international refusal to trade with the Irish economy, with similar catastrophic economic results.

This is exactly what happened in Britain in 1974 when a Labour government was elected on a much more limited platform of reform. Even the threat of these limited reforms led to international capital effectively 'ganging up' on the British economy, and forcing a backdown by the Labour government. For more on this see 'Anarchist FAQ' J.2.2, <http://www.anarchistfaq.org>

The basic fact of the matter is that parliament is not allowed to be democratic - capital will not invest in a country or an economy which does not meet its approval. 'Democratically elected' governments can therefore be very easily controlled. Even the threat of a withdrawal of capital or a boycott of investment in the Irish currency

would be quite enough to whip any government which was thinking along radical lines back into step. And, of course, as the globalisation of capital marches ever onward, and as communication technology develops and improves, this threat becomes more and more real. Not alone is the Irish economy, for example, (on both sides of the border) more dependent than ever on international investment but the task of removing that investment is becoming easier all the time.

Concessions

That's one reason, therefore to oppose parliamentary elections - parliament is not democratic, no matter what political party is elected to government their room for manoeuvre is extremely limited. Indeed it could well be argued that the only times in which parliaments/governments have conceded anything in terms of social or economic rights have been when they have been left with no other option. The introduction of the Welfare State by the 1945-51 British Labour government is a good example of this. The Welfare State was not conceded by the State at this time because of some paternalistic 'nice guy' feelings. It was conceded only because the State had no other option. In short *"..the dangers of not giving in outweigh[ed] the problems associated with the reforms."* 'Anarchist FAQ' J.2.2 paragraph 21

Those reforms that have occurred, those concessions that have been given by parliament have come about as a result of popular protest movements demanding change, not as a result of any particular politicians being elected. The problem is that when history is being taught, it is usually taught from the 'one great man' perspective. Lincoln freed the slaves because he was a nice guy! The welfare state was introduced because it was the right thing to do! Apartheid was abolished because De Klerk realised that black people were okay! The 'great man' theory teaches us that a particular politician/leader was good so he did a certain

thing but then the 'bad man' took over and did something else instead. This leads people to believe that if they want change they should find a 'great man' and manoeuvre him into a position of power, and leave it to him to sort things out!!

The reality is of course different. As I've said above, the welfare state was only introduced because, even during a World War, there was a huge number of strikes and a great deal of social unrest in Britain. The ruling class were shit scared that if they didn't concede something, the working class would set about taking over completely. As it was put by the Tory MP Quintin Hogg (again quoted in 'Anarchist FAQ') *"If you don't give the people social reforms they are going to give you social revolution"*.

The point being made here is that while politicians and governments do eventually announce the policy, what that policy is has less to do with the people elected and more to do with the political and social situation in the country.

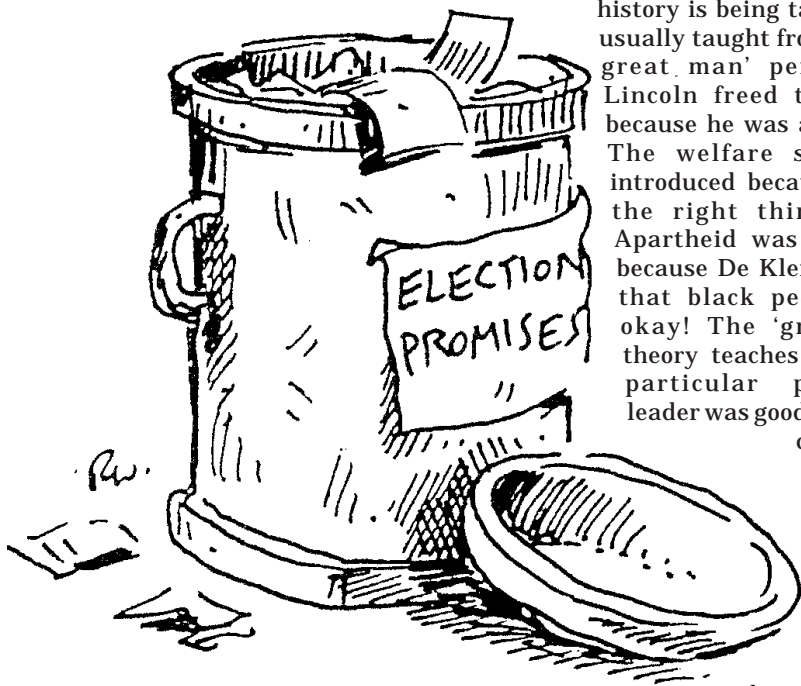
Put them under pressure!

Anarchists therefore prefer to spend our time helping to create the conditions outside of parliament that will force politicians and governments to make concessions to the working class rather than wasting our time running around trying to get politicians elected.

A good example of this - and one in which the Workers Solidarity Movement was centrally involved - was the campaign against water charges in Dublin and the subsequent election of Joe Higgins as Socialist Party TD for Dublin West. For a detailed report on this campaign see 'Red & Black Revolution 3' - on the web at http://struggle.ws/rbr/rbr3_water.html

When a by-election was called in the Dublin West constituency in 1996 following the death of Brian Lenihan TD (member of parliament), the campaign against double tax water charges was in full flow. The campaign which had been built up over the previous two years was the strongest campaign of political resistance to any government measure for over two decades. It was a campaign which had great popular support and involvement.

Over 10,000 households were paid up members of the campaign, Council attempts to disconnect water supply from non-payers had been thwarted by community protest, their attempts to take people to court for non-payment



had served only to provide a focus for popular protest. In short a campaign had been built which had rendered the charge uncollectable and unenforceable, 2 years into the campaign over 50% of households were refusing to pay the unjust charge and the campaign was very much on winning ground.

It was in this context that the Dublin West by-election was called, and that the Socialist Party (Militant Labour as they were called at the time) saw the electoral road beckoning. When a conference of the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charge Campaigns was called in January 1996, a proposal was put forward by Militant Labour that the campaign should endorse Joe Higgins (chair of the Federation) as a by-election candidate.

Anarchists present at the meeting argued strongly against this proposal. We made the point that our opposition was not based on a distrust of Joe or a belief that he would 'sell-out'. Rather our principal argument was that we would much prefer to see the charges defeated by the working class organising on the streets to show their opposition. We argued that people had to seize back control over their own lives and that this was not done by electing some official to fight our corner. Empowerment would come from defeating the combined forces of the state, the government and the local authorities, by organising together and fighting the imposition of the charge.

As I have already said, a campaign had already been built which had rendered the charge uncollectable - a campaign which did not rely on any great leaders but which relied instead on the resistance of ordinary working class people. Our argument was that diverting the campaign into voting for Joe Higgins - or anyone else - as TD was in fact an act of disempowerment. The message the campaign should have been giving people was - YOU have defeated the water charges. By standing side by side with your neighbours and resisting Council attempts to intimidate us WE together have forced the government and the politicians to back down.

Unfortunately, the anarchist voice was very much in the minority at that conference and while our arguments were well received, the decision of the meeting was to endorse Joe's candidacy. And while he was not elected in the by-election (he took a seat in the next year's general election), his vote certainly was high enough to send shock waves through the political establishment. But the

thing that was really terrifying from the government's perspective was the sight of ordinary working class people refusing to bow down, standing shoulder to shoulder and delivering clear and tangible evidence that Solidarity is indeed Strength.

Who makes the decisions??

This is one of the key messages of anarchism, and one of the key reasons why we oppose the electoral strategy. The very act of going into a polling booth and putting a number or an X on



Socialist party TD, Joe Higgins

a piece of paper is in itself an act of disempowerment, it is an acceptance that someone else has the right to make decisions on our behalf.

In every situation in which decisions have to be made, there are basically two options - either the decision is made by the people effected by it or it is made by someone else. Capitalist society being what it is, usually our decisions are made for us by someone else. Being an anarchist however means refusing the right of rulers to rule (and no matter how nice or benign they might be they would still be rulers). The argument is simple - rather than choose who should make decisions for us why don't we use our energies to attempt to build a new society in which we can make those decisions for ourselves? Instead elections are based on the idea of getting someone else to act on our behalves? *"far from empowering people and giving them a sense of confidence and ability, electioneering disempowers them by creating a 'leader' figure from which changes are expected to flow."* 'Anarchist FAQ' J.2.2. paragraph 27

True democracy of course would be a different thing. As I wrote earlier in the article, we only tend to see our

politicians when elections are called. Then they turn up on our doorsteps and listen to our 'problems' with such apparent concern that you would nearly believe that they care. But that's all part of the game as we know - what they really want to know is 'will you vote for me?'. If they can get a 'yes' to that question all their apparent concern will have been worthwhile. The more senior politicians - Blair, Ahern etc. - have this worked out to a fine art. They portray the 'man of the people' image, shaking hands, slapping backs, even bringing the US president into the local for a pint. But the one thing these guys do to perfection is avoid having an actual conversation with a real person.

Mandate - what mandate??

Because at the end of the day elected 'representatives' are not actually representatives at all. Representation implies a mandate, a mandate implies being bound to keep your promises and being recallable if you don't. So while, people might vote for a particular political party/candidate on the basis of the policies in the manifesto, there is absolutely no mechanism by which the voter can ensure that these policies are carried out.

Take the following example. In the Irish (26-County) general election campaign in 1982, all political parties said they were opposed to the imposition of local service charges. Following the election, a Fine Gael-Labour government was formed and within months passed a law empowering county managers to impose a charge for services. While this engendered much anger among working class communities throughout the State, there was no mechanism by which those TDs who had broken their mandate could be disciplined or recalled by the voters. They simply had to wait for the next election. By the local elections in 1985, service charges were a big issue. Fianna Fáil fought the election on an anti-service charge ticket and won significant votes because of this. Immediately after the elections however their councillors around the country did a complete U-Turn and voted for charges. Yet again there was no electoral remedy.

By the time of the 1987 general election, Fianna Fáil had given a written commitment to the National Association of Tenants Organisations that if returned to government they would scrap local charges. You would have thought that this pledge would be taken with a pinch of salt but yet again people voted for Fianna Fáil on

this basis. They returned to government, and service charges remained. In fact charges remained for the next decade until the massive campaign of people power referred to earlier in this article led to their abolition.

As an example of the problems associated with both a lack of a system of recallability and a dependence on electing the 'great man (or woman)' to sort out the problem, the service charges issue demonstrated quite clearly the shortcomings of parliamentary democracy. In fact over that ten-year period at least 3 TDs - Eamonn Gilmore and Kathleen Lynch (Democratic Left now merged with the Labour Party) and Emmett Stagg (Labour) - were elected to Dail Eireann on the basis of their opposition to service charges and ended up in a government which was taking people to court for refusing to pay them.

Direct Democracy

This demonstrates quite clearly what might be referred to as the democratic deficit - the fact that parliamentary

democracy does not come anywhere close to real or direct democracy.

Direct democracy is advocated by anarchists as the alternative to parliamentary democracy. Direct democracy is based on delegation rather than representation with delegates being elected only to implement specific decisions. Delegates would not have the right to go against the mandate of those who elected them. Delegates would enjoy no special rights or privileges and, unlike TDs or MPs, would be subject to instant recall and dismissal if they disobey their mandate. Perhaps even more importantly, direct democracy involves both local and workplace assemblies at which all those effected by a decision would be given the opportunity to contribute to the making of that decision. From local level, the assemblies would federate upwards through the delegates but at all times the power would be built from the bottom up rather than from the top down. For more on direct democracy see WSM pamphlet 'Parliament or Democracy?' by Kevin Doyle, pages 39-46

Direct democracy is the political system with which anarchists aim to replace parliamentary democracy, the system by which capitalism will be crushed and replaced with a new free and equal society. And the tactic by which this will be brought about is the use of direct action. Direct action simply means that instead of looking to someone else - politician, boss, bishop or

anyone else - to act for you or to make decisions for you, you act for yourself. Direct action in the current circumstances means protest organised and controlled by ordinary working class people aimed at bringing about change.

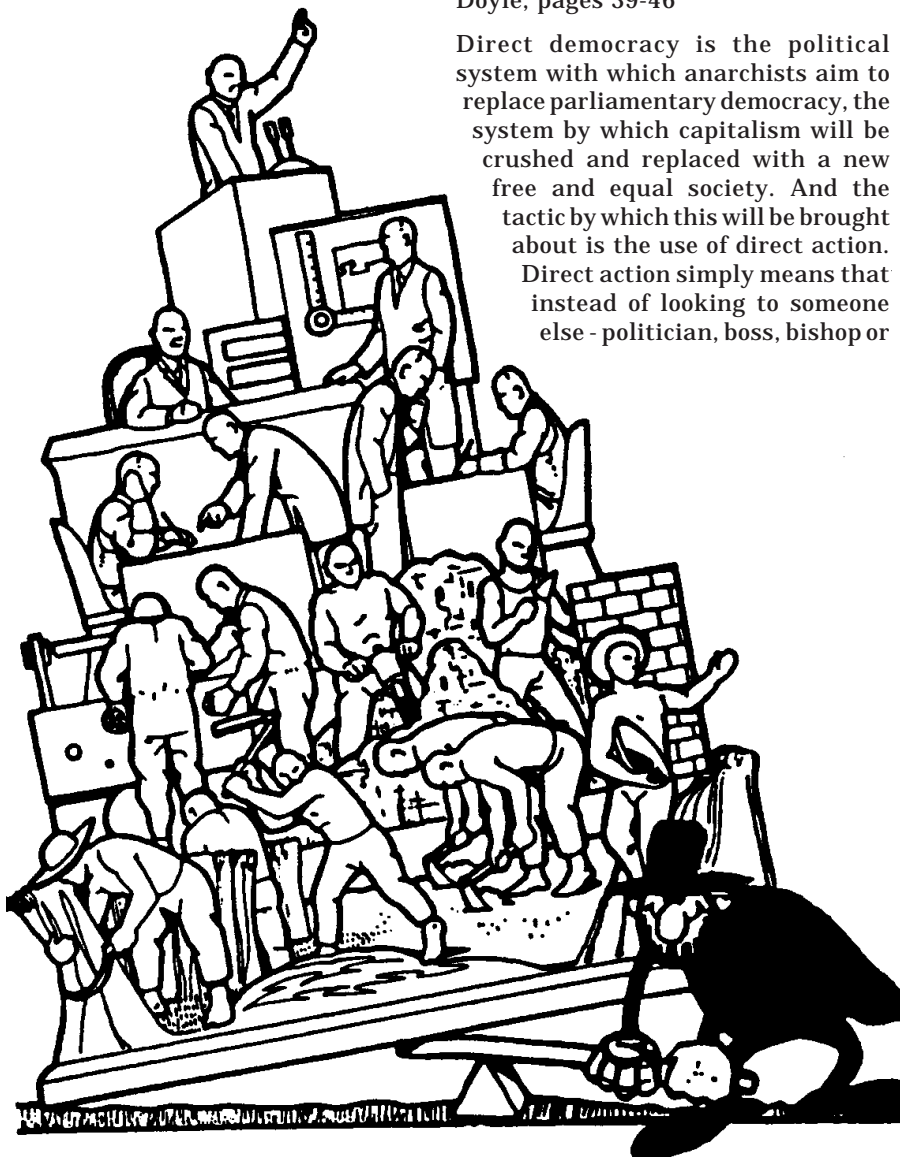
This can involve putting pressure on politicians to bring about a change in policy, for example the way in which the non-payment campaign described above forced the abolition of water charges. It can involve bringing pressure to bear on companies as when groups of workers take strike action for improved pay or conditions. Its central ingredient is that it is *"..any form of activity which people themselves decide upon and organise themselves which is based on their own collective strength and does not involve getting intermediaries to act for them."* 'Anarchist FAQ' J.2 paragraph 9

Direct action is, on the one hand, a means of fighting back, of workers asserting their freedom. It is also the most effective way of fighting back. When there are no big leaders, there is nobody to buy off. Working class history is littered with examples of movements which have challenged the status quo, which have brought thousands and tens of thousands of people on to the streets demanding their rights, but which have been defeated because all that was necessary to defeat them was either the imprisonment or the buying off of the leaders. With direct democracy and direct action, this is not possible. If ownership of the particular strike or campaign remains in the hands of everybody, it isn't possible for the establishment to 'buy off' everyone without making some concessions.

Illusions

There are many on the left who would agree with the anarchist analysis of elections and parliament. Indeed they would also agree with our analysis of direct action as the way to bring about real and meaningful change. They argue however that it is possible to combine both, that the limits of electioneering can be overcome if it is combined with direct action protests. 'Vote for us but have no illusions in the system' might be the slogan they start off with. And that's the important phrase - 'start off with' because ultimately this position must inevitably lead to compromise.

History is littered with examples of parties which started off from this position but which became part of the system. From Marxian Social



Democracy at the turn of the 19th/20th century right through to the current German Green Party, we have seen example after example of radical parties starting off from the position of declaring the need for direct action and extra-parliamentary action. Indeed they often refer to their electoral involvement as the least important part of their strategy. In every single example, however, the parties involved have ended up considering the gathering of votes as more important than the message. The revolutionary slogans and policies eventually get watered down in order not to offend potential voters, the elected 'representative' loses touch with 'the real world.'

Pierre Joseph Proudhon, an anarchist who made a brief foray into parliamentary politics in 1848, described his experience thus: "As soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of the current of events .. one must have lived in that isolator which is called the National Assembly to realise how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it?.. fear of the people is the sickness of all those who belong to authority; the people, for those in power, are the enemy." Quoted in 'Demanding the Impossible' by Peter Marshall, Page 244

Very soon, the party becomes dependent on both the media exposure and the funding which comes with parliamentary representation. Almost without noticing the more radical parts of the message are quietly ditched, and by the time the party arrives at a position of power not alone does it no longer advocate direct action but in fact such activities are denounced. See 'Anarchist FAQ' J.2.6 for more on this

Another argument often put forward in favour of voting for a particular candidate/party is the 'single issue' argument - supporting that candidate/party because of their opposition to the death penalty, support for abortion etc. The argument is put forward that if the candidate, on election, implements this one policy it will be a major advance. But again it's impossible to insist on the mandate being carried out. And what about all the other issues that this 'single issue' candidate will be making decisions on if elected. In Ireland in the past

candidates elected on 'single issues' such as keeping a local hospital open have ended up supporting the government on a whole host of economic issues. One of the independents propping up the current government - Tom Gildea - was elected on the 'single issue' of television deflectors in Donegal.



New ideas

Ultimately anarchists support abstention from the electoral process because, in the words of Emma Goldman, "participation in elections means the transfer of one's will and decisions to another, which is contrary to the fundamental principles of anarchism." "Anarchists and Elections", Vanguard III, June-July 1936, quoted in 'Anarchist FAQ' J.2.5, paragraph 1 Rather than sowing illusions in the current system, we seek to win working class people to a whole new set of ideas, to a belief in

our own abilities and strength, to the prospect of building a new society based on real grassroots democracy. This we do through involvement in the day-to-day struggles of our class, at community and workplace level.

For the Workers Solidarity Movement this currently means in practice involvement in our own trade unions at shopfloor level, in rank-and-file trade union campaigns against so-called 'social partnership' and for trade union democracy. It means involvement in the campaign against double taxation service charges (Yes, the victory referred to earlier in the article was short-lived - now they're called refuse charges), building and developing the fight against racism and helping to build the growing anti-capitalist movement.

In all of these campaigns, in all of our political activity, it means arguing for direct democracy, arguing for and implementing direct action tactics. Because the means leads to the end, if our goal is a free and democratic society, our tactics and our methods of organisation must at all times be open and democratic.

This is our driving force and it is this desire for a free and democratic society that leads us to reject participation in the parliamentary sham.



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Review: No Logo

The publication of *No Logo* was perfectly, if unintentionally, timed. Just as the N30 demonstrations in Seattle made headlines around the world, *No Logo* arrived to explain some of the reasons for that movement. So although Naomi Klein has made it clear that she is not an 'official' spokesperson for the movement - that this movement has no official spokespeople - at a time when observers (and even some participants) wondered what was going on, *No Logo* provided some answers.

Klein starts by discussing how advertising and general business practices have changed in the last twenty years. Essentially, companies decided that they were no longer in the business of selling products, because products are messy, they can be copied, or even improved on. But if you are selling an idea, an experience, a set of associations, it's much harder for another company to compete with you. Sportswear is a good example of a market where price, and even quality, isn't that important - people choose between Nike and Adidas because of their ad campaigns, not their shoes.

At the same time as companies started this emphasis on brands rather than products, they started moving out of manufacturing. Owning a factory was thought to tie a company down, because then you have the constant expense of wages, as well as the money tied up in buildings and equipment. Manufacturing still has to take place of course, if not by you then by your suppliers, but then dealing with workers can be someone else's problem, and you can concentrate on building your brand.

Now a lot of the actual manufacturing of clothes, computer parts, and other industries has moved to the developing world. Unlike the west, where workers expect a decent wage, and are organised enough to demand it, in the free trade zones in China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Mexico, and many more countries, factories can be run with little outside interference. The description of these free trade zones, where workers sometimes work up to 100 hours a week, in appalling conditions, is the most interesting and useful part of the book. Workers there are barely paid enough to live on, and often work compulsory (and sometimes unpaid) overtime. Most of the workers in these factories are young women, migrants from other provinces, because they are thought to be easier to dominate, and less capable of organising themselves. Even when workers start to unionise, they can be

summarily fired, and large-scale agitation faces the constant threat that the factory will be simply packed up and moved to another zone. Solidarity with these workers, and outrage at the conditions they live in, was one of the driving forces of the Seattle and Prague protests.

Where *No Logo* fails is in its attempt to tie these different themes together. Klein tries to argue that companies have to spend more money on 'branding', and this is why production is moving to sweatshops. Companies can't afford to have factories and a brand, so they ditched the factories. But it's not just the big brands that are made in sweatshops. Nike runners may be made in Indonesia, but so are the own-brand runners in your supermarket. Gap shirts are made in sweatshops, but so are the shirts in the department store. The sweatshops aren't a result of branding, they're a product of the desire of companies to cut costs. Some companies will then keep their prices low, while others will spend a lot on advertising, but hope to make even more by charging higher prices.

The sweatshops are, after all, nothing new. They existed in the west, alongside hellish factories, and unsafe mines about a century ago^[1], and it wasn't because the Victorians had just discovered advertising. Bosses always try to keep their costs down, because decent pay and safe working conditions just eat into their profits. Conditions didn't improve because the rich had a change of heart - every pay rise, every reduction in the working week, every safety standard had to be fought for. The same struggle is going on around the world today, and it's a fight against capitalism, not logos.

This is why *No Logo* is ultimately disappointing. When it tries to be constructive, and suggest actions we can take, too much time is spent talking about 'subverting' advertisements, or painting over billboards. Ads may be annoying, and this kind of thing can be fun, but it



No Logo by Naomi Klein (Flamingo Press, IR£11.13/stg£8.99)

doesn't really accomplish anything. Consumer boycotts are explored, even while their weaknesses are admitted.^[2] So there's less room to explore ways that we in the west can help sweatshop workers get organised, and how we can help their struggles, which should be the objectives of any campaign. *No Logo* is still an interesting book, and possibly a good introduction for those who don't know much about the issues involved. But as a political analysis, or a guide to action, it's severely limited by Klein's unwillingness to admit that the problem is not advertising, but capitalism.

Footnotes

¹ There are some direct parallels - in China, textile workers are frequently locked into their factories so the women will have no choice but to work, and 'outside agitators' can't get in. Because textiles are highly flammable, there have been several fires at these factories, and in some cases the factory has burned down with the workers still trapped inside. Exactly the same thing - doors locked in a textile factory, for the same reasons, with the same tragic results - happened in New York in the early 20th century, most notably the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire.

² Boycotts may be effective when they have a single clear target, like Shell's actions in Nigeria, but they may just prompt a whitewash campaign, and a series of apologies from the companies concerned, until they think the spotlight has moved on to someone else. Since Nike has been a focus of the anti-sweatshop campaign, Reebok can pose as the ethical alternative, even though their work practices are exactly the same.

Review: Globalise This!

The Battle Against The WTO and Corporate Rule

Globalise This! - The Battle Against The WTO and Corporate Rule by Kevin Danaher and Roger Burback (Common Courage Press US\$16.00/stg£10.22)

Globalise This! is one of the more important and informative books to come out of the Battle of Seattle. Published by Common Courage Press ("Our Goal is to turn pens into swords") the thrust of the book from the very beginning is towards the activist and 'the citizen' interested in doing something about what is wrong on this planet. As the blurb says "The WTO, World Bank and IMF must - and can - be stopped. This book tells us how."

In terms of style and structure the book is well set out. There are four sections: the first on *What Happened At Seattle*, the second on *Dealing With Diversity*, the third on *The Case Against the WTO*, and the fourth, *Ways To Restructure The World Economy*. Overall this format gives something to everyone - eyewitness accounts, background and facts, arguments to be put to the unconvinced. Moreover the style, while somewhat uneven due to the number of contributions, is engaging and personal.

The politics of course are the main thing, so what about these? It should be borne in mind that this book is something of a celebration, and in this sense it probably does shy away from being too self-critical. Nonetheless, some issues are tackled. For example, in *Where Was The Colour in Seattle?* (by Elizabeth Martinez), the issue is raised about why the overwhelming majority of the participants at the protest were, as the author puts it, "Anglo".

Similarly in terms of the acknowledging the 'anti-authoritarian' practices and organisational methods of protesters at Seattle, the book is good and informative. Clearly this 'anti-authoritarianism' has given the authorities a lot of problems; but the point also needs to be brought out that this structure principally suits the participants - allowing for great momentum of action in what is a diverse movement of groups, organisations and individuals.



It's when the book gets on to its proposals for the future (Part 4 - *Ways To Restructure The World Economy*) that it is at its weakest. Take for example the article *It's Time To Gone On The Offensive ? Here's How*. Here Willian Grieder advances the idea of putting manners on the 'multinational corporations'; this will be done through the enactment of legislation in the US Congress.

Of course this is a lovely idea, but what planet is the author living on? Grieder cites the precedent of 1977 legislation in the States - the Foreign Currupt Practices Act - that made it a domestic crime for US multinational to bribe officials in their international operations. Indeed, interesting! But FCPA is a far cry from an action that would really effect multinational operations and right to 'profit'.



Standard political analysis (and a reading of recent history) would suggest that if an attempt was made at even a principled level to wrest power and the right to profit from capitalists (via an act of Congress), their reaction would be far different and more extreme; it is reasonable to suggest that such measures would not even be "allowed" get to Congress's door!

Unfortunately there are plenty more naïve prescriptions of this nature lying about in this section. The view seems to be that we can 'humanise' capitalism. If only it was so!

But another aspect to the contributions in this section that is worrying (and grating!) is that many of the actions/solutions proposed are predicated around 'reforms' in the US Congress and so on. Some of the contributors obviously feel that the USA is the place where it is all happening - that the solutions, as much as the desire for real change, begin and end there! There is so much wrong with this sort of outlook (that posits change at the USA Congressional level as a real and tangible strategy for the new movement) that one wouldn't know where to begin.

This isn't the place to go into what anarchists propose instead, but isn't there a real need in this sort of book for an article(s) that hits at some home truths about the system we are trying to overthrow? Let's face a few basics:

- (a) change must begin and come from below;
- (b) the type of change we need must tackle authoritarianism in society and root it out;
- (c) last but not least, the emancipation of people must be in the hands of the people themselves! The Congress (and especially the US Congress) is far removed from these simple but important rules of engagement!

There is much to commend in this book, but not so much in the solutions it offers. But perhaps having these 'solutions' set out here in the manner they have been, is useful for the debate that they can (and undoubtedly will) provoke. Common Courage have done us a very good service in that respect.

Kevin Doyle

More articles on globalisation
<http://struggle.ws/wsm/global.html>

Revolutionary Anarchism & the Anti-Globalization Movement



Riot police battling youth. Armed forces locking down a major American city. Tens of thousands under anti-capitalist banners. Western youth and workers physically battling the WTO and imperialism. These potent images of the 'battle of Seattle', November 30, 1999, were seared into the minds of militants the world over, inspiring millions upon millions fighting against the class war from above that some call 'globalization'. Followed by further mass protests in Washington and Davos, and two massive international coordinated actions on May 1, 2000 and September 26, 2000, Seattle marked, by any measure, an important turning point for the global working class and peasantry.

"The Idea That Refuses To Die"

And anarchists were in the thick of these protests and solidarity actions, whether in Rio, Johannesburg, Prague, Istanbul, New York or Dublin, demonstrating an impressive organizational ability, growing credibility, and rising popular appeal.

In the bourgeois media, anarchists have assumed a prominence unknown since the 1960s, amazingly receiving even more credit than was our due for our role in the new 'anti-globalization' movement. Anarchism was, the *New York Times* exclaimed, "*the idea that refuses to die.*" The authoritarian left, shocked at being so outflanked and outmaneuvered by the anarchists, suddenly found it necessary to write vicious, and often grossly dishonest, polemics against anarchism.

It is ironic, then, that the anarchist movement remains wracked with disagreement about how it should orientate itself towards the 'anti-globalization' movement.

Orientating To The Movement

While the Platformist tradition of anarchism, and many anarcho-syndicalists have strongly identified with the new movement, many other

comrades seem reluctant to become more involved in the new movement. Some are rightly concerned about the presence of reformist and middle-class elements such as NGOs in the movement; others point to the unexpected support of far right groups such as fascists and Islamic fundamentalists for 'anti-globalization'; for others, there are suspicions about the role of right-wing trade union leaders in the movement.

These concerns are valid. But they should not be used as reasons not to be involved in the 'anti-globalization' movement. The new movement represents an important development for the international working class and a massive opportunity for the anarchist movement at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Seizing the moment, being involved, shaping the movement - this is the best opportunity available today to implanting anarchism within the working class and clawing our way back to our rightful place as a movement of millions, a movement that can help dig capitalism's grave.

Anti-Capitalist, Not Just 'Anti-Globalization'

When we enter the 'anti-globalization'

movement, though, we must enter as conscious anti-capitalists. 'Anti-globalization' is a vague term that opens the resistance to capitalism to all sorts of pitfalls.

Many aspects of globalization - if by this we mean the creation of an increasingly integrated world economic, political and social system - should be welcomed by anarchists. The breaking down of closed national cultures, greater international contact, a consciousness of being "*citizens of the world*", concern for developments halfway around the world - all are positive developments.

We should not line up with those who, under the banner of 'sovereignty' and 'nationality' call for the enforcement of national culture, national foods, closing of the borders to 'foreign' influences and so forth. This outlook - even if dressed up in 'anti-imperialist' clothing - is xenophobic and directly implies support for local nation-states.

We must support the possibilities for the development of a cosmopolitan international culture, the globalization of labour and the labour movement that are emerging with globalization. We must totally oppose the religious fundamentalists, nationalists and fascists whose problem with globalization is that it opens people to new ideas that challenge backward prejudices and cultural practices. Culture is not static. It is changed and reshaped through struggle, and we anarchists should only defend those elements of national cultures that are progressive and pro-working class.

What anarchists oppose are the neo-liberal, capitalist, aspects of globalization. We oppose attacks on wages, working conditions and welfare, because these hurt the working class and because they are in the interests of capitalists.

These capitalist aspects of globalization are an international class war rooted in capitalism, and its current crisis of profitability. Notwithstanding the hype about the "*new economy*" and the "*new prosperity*", capitalism has been in crisis since around 1973. Average growth rates in the West in the 1950s

were around 5% per year; by the 1970s, they fell to 2%; by the 1980s, the figure was closer to 1%. And so, big business has been trying to restructure itself for survival and renewed profit through the implementation of neo-liberalism: casualization, privatization, subcontracting, welfare cutbacks, regressive tax reform, and the deregulation of trade and money movements. All of these policies are in the interest of the dominant sections of the capitalist class - the giant transnational corporations.

Outside And Against The State

The capitalist nation state is not the victim of capitalist globalization, as some suggest - usually from a nationalist, state-capitalist, or reformist perspective - when they argue that the development of large companies and large multi-lateral institutions like the IMF and WTO leads to a loss of 'sovereignty' by a supposedly innocent nation state, which is then 'forced' to adapt to the 'new reality' of 'globalization'.

These sorts of argument have some serious political implications. They divert attention away from the role of the nation state in driving neo-liberal restructuring. They also tend to suggest that the nation state - 'our' nation state - is an innocent victim that 'we' must ally with and defend against a 'foreign' globalization. On the contrary, anarchists recognise that the nation state is one of the main authors of globalization, and, in particular, the capitalist aspects of globalization.

The IMF, World Bank, and WTO are organizations made up of member nation states, as is the United Nations. It is the nation state that has implemented neo-liberal attacks on the working class the world over. It is the nation state that has allowed giant corporations to operate globally, by dismantling the closed national economies of the 1945-1973 period, which were characterised by the thinking that "*what's good for Ford is good for America.*"

It is neo-liberal restructuring, implemented and enforced by the nation state, which has made it possible for international labor markets, international capital movements, and international production chains to emerge on the scale that has taken place (I include many Third World nation states here, including 'my' own, South Africa: witness the fact that the South African capitalist class government is reducing tariffs faster than the WTO requires.

When the WTO asked South Africa to open up its textile industry over 12 years, our rulers volunteered to do the job in just eight! So capitalist globalization is not something simply imposed on 'us' by the global system, imperialism, etc., although these play a role).

The nation state is part of the problem. One is as bad as another in this respect.

Therefore anarchists do not agree with people like Ralph Nader who argued, roughly, 'Vote me, so I can save our democracy from the big companies', because anarchists know that the role of the State is to serve those companies: this is what the State does! This is where we part ways with those who think the state is an ally of labour and the poor in the fight against capitalist globalization.

As such, anarchists cannot agree with idea of a right/left anti-globalization coalition, or the liberal myth that we have now moved 'beyond left and right.' (Witness the Seattle protests: the liberals gave semi-fascist Pat Buchanan a platform, but whined

protectionism and trade bans.

Anarchists want self-managed, class-confrontational struggle, rather than 'engaging' the system. Anarchists want to build self-managed forms of struggle and action, rather than placing our faith in technocracy, elections, or 'our' governments. In this picture, the use of violence is a tactical question, not a principle: lock down or burn down are choices to be made according to the situation. This is precisely what the liberals and pacifists refuse to see.

Into The Anti-Globalization Movement

We must enter the new anti-globalization movement. True, it is full of reformists and middle class elements. But this is precisely why we must be involved! To stand back is to surrender the new movement, with its immense revolutionary potential, to the reformists and middle class. It is to abdicate our revolutionary duty to merge revolutionary anarchism with the struggles of the working class, to prevent the revolt of the slaves being used to hoist another elite into power.

It is not a question of whether we should be involved. It is an issue of how.

The aims of anarchist involvement are surely:

1) To promote the self-management of struggle: at every point, anarchists must fight for organisational forms, protest forms, and decision-making forms that rest upon the active involvement of the working class and provide an opportunity for the class to self-manage the struggle, win confidence, and fight from below.

This means:

- Occupations, rather than elite sabotage.
- Marches and protests and riots, rather than policy advocacy.
- Action committees operating through mandates and accountability through assemblies and summits, rather than the delegation of all responsibility to a small coterie of leaders.
- Decentralised coalitions which allow the maximum initiative from below.
- Building the capacity of organisations through promoting horizontal linkages between groups, and by ensuring the widest dissemination of information to the 'base' members of the structures
- Fights and demands that promote class polarization and expose the class basis of neo-liberalism.

JUST SAY NO TO THE WTO



CARNIVAL AGAINST CAPITAL! SEATTLE, NOV.29-DEC.3, 1999

when the anarchists attacked Niketown).

Against National Protectionism

We fight outside and against the State, trying to organize internationally. True, cheap imported goods do threaten jobs 'at home'. But the solution is not to call on the state to ban these goods: it is to organize workers in all the sweatshops around the world. We fight for international labour unity, an international minimum wage, international labor standards, and never national

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Cntd. from inside page:

We can raise 'reformist' demands with a class war bite. (For example, take a company in a financial crisis. The bosses will say let's save money by outsourcing workers and slashing jobs. Anarchist militants can instead raise the apparently 'reformist' demand that the company can be saved by slashing management salaries by 80%. This will expose the unfair nature of the system, the class wage gap, and the refusal of bosses to really consider alternatives - because they sure won't consider this one - all of which will deepen class polarisation!)

2) Fighting the government: anarchists must be there arguing against national protectionism, against arguments to 'engage' the local state, against calls for the state to 'stand up' to capital, against multi-class coalitions and calls for nationalisation. Instead, our focus must be on promoting the self-emancipation of the working class through its own struggles, organizations, and efforts, on the need to mobilize outside and against the state, and on class struggle anti-capitalism).

This means:

- Fighting for practical international solidarity with workers in sweatshops and in subcontracting companies through campaigns, actions etc., informed by the overall perspective of winning international labor standards (a global minimum wage, global basic conditions of employment, etc.) and global trade unionism of the base. This is the real working class basis for

opposing cheap imports: better wages for all, rather than a race to the bottom where we see who can earn the least, or chauvinist protectionism.

- Labour-based regulation of working conditions, through practical solidarity action, rather than appeals to the WTO, etc. to enforce labour standards through a social clause in free trade agreements etc.

- Exposure of the class basis of neo-liberalism as an attempt to drive down wages and working conditions, and open up the economy for privatisation and speculation, and hence, of the need for a class response that has no illusions in the capitalist state

- Opposing privatisation because it harms the working class through job loss and worsening social services, and not because we think nationalisation is some sort of step towards socialism and workers' control. Instead of calling for more nationalisation as an alternative to privatisation - which won't happen and in any event won't empower the working class - anarchists should raise demands for worker and community self-management of social services and infrastructure, and stress the right of the working class to a decent life.

Aims And Objectives

The aim of these tactics and demands is simple. These points are put forward as means to develop a powerful, democratic, and internationalist working class coalition centred on unions, but also involving communities, tenants, students, etc. Further, these points are also meant to help develop a libertarian and anti-



capitalist consciousness of the international nature of the class struggle, the opposition between the working class, on the one hand, and the state and capital on the other, and a generalised confidence and belief in the desirability, necessity and possibility of self-managed stateless socialism (i.e. anarchy).

Many in the 'anti-globalization' movement will not accept these aims. But this is precisely why our intervention in the anti-globalization movement as militants with clear ideas and tactics is so vital.

And this is also why we need anarchist political organizations with theoretical and tactical unity and collective responsibility, groups of the type advocated by Nestor Makhno and Peter Arshinov in the Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists in 1926. Unity, clarity, dedication are our indispensable revolutionary weapons against an enormously powerful and confident capitalist enemy. We can win.

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Inside: Elections, Peader O'Donnell, Biotechnology