Red & Black Revolution

From Bakunin to the Black Bloc
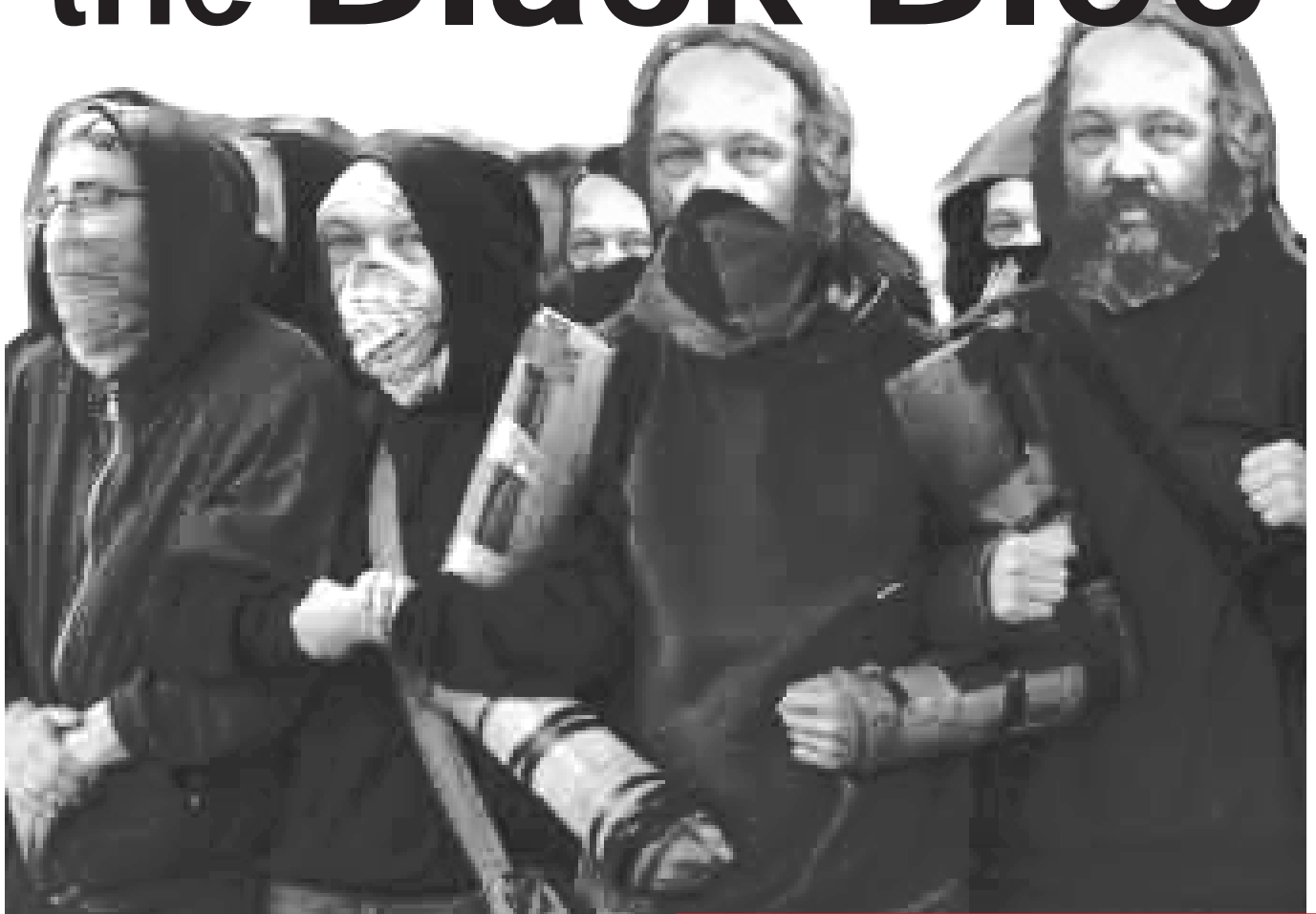
Community policing, anarchism and crime

The Afghan war and the media

A—Comment—A

Welcome to the sixth issue of Red and Black Revolution, the second to be produced since we switched to this shorter and more frequent format. Although the gaps between each issue are still substantial, we hope that one of the effects of more regular publication will be to encourage our readers to use this magazine as a forum for debate. Most of the articles will, of course, reflect the positions of the Workers Solidarity Movement, since we produce the magazine, but we continue to print articles from outside the organization, and would like to see other anarchists responding to some of the arguments made in these pages.

In this issue we look at two of the earliest anarchists, two men who represent very different traditions within the movement. Bakunin is perhaps the most famous of anarchists, a man who travelled Europe preaching revolution, clashed with Marx, and whose politics ranged from early Slav nationalism to anarchism. While Bakunin was a man of action, Stirner was an intellectual and an academic, known mainly for 'The Ego and its Own', reviewed here. Both have been controversial, and though often enough there are misquotations and deliberate misunderstandings at the roots of some of those controversies, the differences between the two men, and between the visions of anarchism they represent, are real enough.

Though Bakunin may have had the better arguments, Marx was always the more respectable revolutionary, and often since the 19th century it has seemed that anarchism was the poor relation of authoritarian socialism. In recent years anarchism has been making a comeback, partly because of the final collapse of the soviet union and the last vestiges of 'actually existing socialism', and partly because of the role non-hierarchical, directly democratic and essentially anarchist ideas have played in the anti-capitalist/anti-globalisation movement. Within that movement, the Black Bloc has been seen as the personification of anarchism, but what future does it have? The Black Bloc, the summit protests, and many of the modern protest movements have often emphasized the role of the media, their part in creating images and in blocking or transmitting information. It's crucially important, then, to understand the make-up of the media, and to know how we can expect them to deal with political issues. This is all the more necessary in a time of war, when information is so important, and access to that information so controlled.

Our first article in this issue is also about conflict, and control. The question of community policing raises pressing human rights problems especially in Northern Ireland, a situation where poverty and sectarianism combine in a cycle of crime and punishment. When our ideas are tested, in our own communities, what solutions can anarchists propose?

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. You can also read each individual article on the web. The WSM bookservice may have also have some back issues, write to WSM Books, PO Box 1528 for a catalogue

http://struggle.ws/rbr.html

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About the WSM

The Workers Solidarity Movement was founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1984 following discussions by a number of local anarchist groups on the need for a national anarchist organisation. At that time, with unemployment and inequality on the rise, there seemed every reason to argue for anarchism and for a revolutionary change in Irish society. This has not changed.
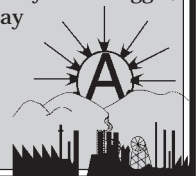
Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. But, just as importantly, we see this struggle against capitalism as also being a struggle for freedom. We believe that socialism and freedom must go together, that we cannot have one without the other. As Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian anarchist said, *"Socialism without freedom is tyranny and brutality"*.

Anarchism has always stood for individual freedom. But it also stands for democracy. We believe in democratising the workplace and in workers taking control of all industry. We believe that this is the only real alternative to capitalism with its 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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Spring 2002

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

Crime, punishment & community policing

The issue of crime and anti-social behaviour and society's responses to it is possibly one of the most pressing issues facing many people - especially those in working class communities. While it is true to say that the mainstream media and some politicians often - for reasons of sensationalism and for their own political ends - over-hype the "crime problem", it is also a fact that in many of the poorer and more deprived housing estates in urban areas North and South many people do live in something near a state of siege[2]. Housebreaking, vandalism, joyriding, alcohol and drug abuse and even physical attacks (including muggings, rape and stabbings) are far too often a regular feature of life in many areas.

In this context, the implementation of the 'Good Friday Agreement' in the 6-Counties has seen the issue of policing become one of the most contentious areas of disagreement between the political parties. Long hours of negotiation have taken place in an attempt to establish a police force which will be 'acceptable to both communities'. While there is no doubt whatsoever that the RUC is a totally discredited (something which will hardly be changed by changing its name!) and sectarian police force and while the issues of the continued use of plastic bullets and the failure to face up to past human rights abuses are important, surely the debate about its replacement should have involved more than what symbols would be worn on the caps of the new police force and what flags would fly over their barracks.

The real issues have, in effect, been ignored by the mainstream players - by the politicians and commentators who have been setting the agenda. Interestingly, some of those on the fringes of the debate have actually put forward a somewhat deeper analysis. Speaking in a personal capacity at the 'Voice of the Lark' discussion forum in Conway Mill, Belfast on April 3rd 2001, Billy Mitchell of the Progressive Unionist Party (political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force) stated:

"A new and effective policing service will only be achieved through a new and effective philosophy on policing...that rejects the traditional model of 'justice' that is rooted and grounded in retribution... An effective philosophy on policing must include an effective philosophy on justice...So long as justice is regarded as 'just desserts' rather than 'just relationships' no amount of tinkering with the police service will serve the interests of justice..."[3]

Punishment beatings

Unfortunately, considered opinions such as these are few and far between in the context of the Northern debate on policing. And what has been happening on the ground in working class

> *"....the man who is called 'criminal' is simply unfortunate;...the remedy is not to flog him, to chain him up, or to kill him on the scaffold or in prison, but to help him by the most brotherly care, by treatment based on equality......"[1]*

communities is not alone worrying but frightening. In the name of 'community policing' - and under the cover of there not being a police force 'acceptable to both communities' - the number of punishment beatings and shootings has continued to increase. Figures quoted by the "*Irish Times*" earlier this year claimed a 40% increase in punishment shootings and a 30% increase in beatings in the North over the first five months of the year.[4]

What this means in reality is that from January 1st to May 20th 2001, 144 people - an average of approximately one person per day - were either beaten or shot for 'anti-social behaviour'. Even more frighteningly, more recent figures show that a growing number of those so targetted - by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries - are teenagers. A report prepared by Professor Liam Kennedy of Queen's University Belfast and published in August 2001[5] claims that between 1990 and 2000, 372 teenagers were beaten and 207 shot by paramilitaries in so-called punishment attacks. The youngest victim of a

punishment shooting was 13 years old while three other children under 14 were assaulted.

So while Billy Mitchell's comments on policing as quoted above are welcome, it is unfortunate that those to whom he is close politically don't appear to be listening. Instead of developing an 'effective philosophy on justice', his political comrades are setting themselves up as judge, jury and executioner and doling out their own brand of 'justice' to members of their communities who they deem to be guilty of anti-social behaviour.

Likewise we have to listen to the pathetic justifications of politicians such as Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. While both of them have in recent months said that punishment attacks 'don't work' and are 'counter productive', Adams has been quoted as describing them as

"the community responding in exasperation to the fact that there are elements who disregard any
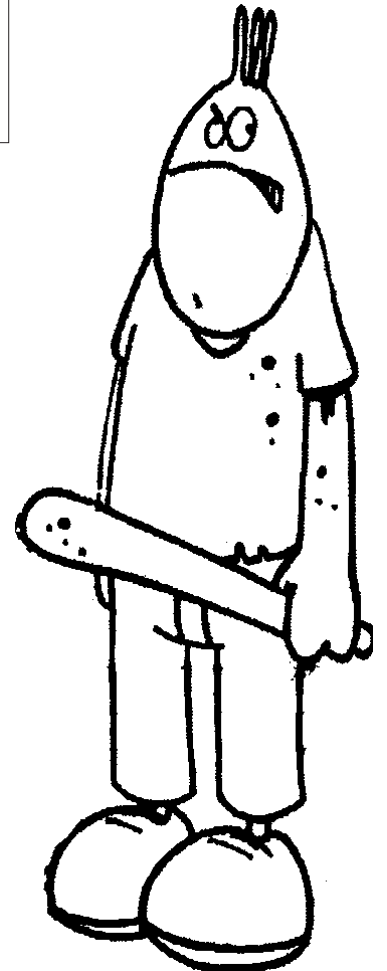
sort of acceptable norm and who simply prey upon other members of the community"[6]

Furthermore Adams has expressed his worry that his party would lose votes if they weren't seen to be doing enough to combat anti-social behaviour. Yet we don't see or hear from him or his colleagues any considered analysis of the causes or reasons for anti-social behaviour, but instead see a tacit - and indeed direct - acceptance of the authoritarian behaviour of the paramilitaries.

A deafening silence

The silence of the Irish left in general on this issue is deafening. If the RUC or the Gardai were systematically beating up working class kids, there would be an outcry from the left and from liberal and civil rights' groups. If the government - either North or South - were to introduce legislation allowing for kneecapping or the breaking of elbows as the sanction for stealing a car, they would rightly be condemned and opposed every step of the way. Why then do so many stand by and refuse to condemn loudly and vociferously people who call themselves socialists and yet have effectively introduced such laws in what they see as 'their' communities? And let there be no doubt about it, part of the agenda at play here - maybe even the greater part - is the marking out of territory as belonging to either the orange or green bullyboys.

To call such behaviour 'community policing' is a complete misnomer. 'Community policing' implies - in fact demands - that there be fair, open and democratic procedures which would involve the community putting in place a system of fair public trials where evidence would be given and the defendant/accused person would be given the chance to defend him/herself. A most important element of this would be that suspects would be tried by properly elected representatives of the community - not by self-appointed 'representatives'. A system of 'community policing' would also surely involve the putting in place of procedures which would aim more at ensuring that someone guilty of anti-social behaviour would make reparations of some sort to the community or to the victim of his/her crime. Surely punishment is less important than rehabilitation and compensation?

Obviously a system of community policing would involve something a little more developed than this, but the above paragraph gives an outline which shows just how far we currently are from such an ideal . The question which then arises is whether or not it is possible to put in place a proper fair and democratic system of community policing without fundamentally altering the class nature of society. Indeed, before this question can even be properly answered, it leads

us to ask what is crime and what are the true causes of crime?

Social deprivation

The Governor of Mountjoy Prison in Dublin, John Lonergan, has pointed out on more than one occasion that the people sentenced to his prison come overwhelmingly from a few areas of social deprivation. Most recently, speaking at the Patrick McGill Summer School in Co. Donegal on the theme of Drugs and Alcohol in Irish society, Mr. Lonergan quoted the results of research carried out in Mountjoy which found that 75 percent of Dublin prisoners came from six clearly identifiable areas, or - as he described them - "*pockets of disadvantage…infested with heroin*". The percentage of prisoners who had a heroin addiction history, he pointed out, had grown from 31 percent in 1986 to 67 percent in 1996. He went on in the same speech to point out that heroin addiction is a "*social class addiction*" and that as a society we continue to develop communities where only "*certain classes of people are housed*" and where the message given to these people by the broader society is that they are "*inferior*".

To people who look at political issues on a class basis, what Lonergan is saying is not radical or new. What is quite extraordinary in terms of Irish society is that it is the governor of a prison - and not the trade union movement or even the social democrats or the liberals - who is making this analysis. It is yet another legacy of the so-called 'social partnership' between the trade union movement, government, employers and most of the 'voluntary sector' - the usual expected 'voices of dissent' have been silenced, bought off by the pretence of 'partnership'.

It is a reflection of the Irish 'Celtic Tiger' and the supposed economic good times that the number of women in prison in the 26-County State rose to its highest in recent decades in April 2001. Again the only voice to be heard questioning what was happening was that of John Lonergan:

> "*At a time when people would be talking about a whole lot of advantages and improvements in society, this is an indication of something - that in 2001 we have a phenomenally high number of women in prison…*[the increase in numbers is]*…connected into feelings of isolation and loneliness and being totally disconnected to mainstream society…*"[7]

Again this might not be extremely new or radical thinking, but at least Lonergan's analysis attempts to look at the causes of crime rather than taking the simplistic attitude of beating up offenders. It says something that a prison governor can be described as more liberal than people who claim to be socialists! What he is doing is looking beyond the act of stealing a car or breaking into a

house and asking a simple question - why? This has got to be the starting point for anyone who wants to develop a realistic and humane response to crime and anti-social behaviour - Why do some people feel so disconnected from society that their response is to engage in behaviour which is damaging both to themselves and to their neighbours? Or to return to the question as posed earlier in the article - what are the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour?.

Definitions

The answer must be that the true cause of a lot of the crime in our current society is actually poverty. This of course leads also to the question of what is crime because it is interesting to note just what capitalist society defines as crime and - perhaps more importantly - just what is not defined as crime. For example, in August 2000, a march of 1,000 building workers took place in Dublin protesting about recent building site fatalities. Since the beginning of that year, 13 people had died in the 26-Counties as a result of construction industry accidents. But the deaths of building workers do not appear to be taken seriously and fines levied on building contractors for breaches of safety regulations amount to little more than pocket money. Addressing the protestors, Eric Fleming, SIPTU[8] branch secretary said that two-thirds of builders found guilty of serious breaches of the safety regulations "*walk away from court with fines of £500 and £1,000……If there were as many gardai being killed each year, or teachers or nurses, the Government would build a special prison*

for the killers."[9]

If someone pulls a knife on someone else in a drunken row it is (rightly) called murder. If someone kills someone else as a result of forcing them to work in unsafe conditions it isn't!

This is just one of the many contradictions thrown up in the way society defines crime. Over the past few years the Irish political system has seen a rash of 'tribunal-itis'. Investigations have been carried out into fraud and corruption in the planning and political process. Evidence has emerged of large scale fraud in the planning process, in political funding, in the awarding of radio licences. Huge amounts of tax evasion by the wealthy and big business (stealing from the rest of us!!) have been exposed. Yet no one has spent a day in jail as a result of these findings[10]. On the other hand Cork Corporation has jailed 6 members of the Householders Against Service Charges Campaign for campaigning against double tax bin charges.[11]

These are just two examples of the contradictions in definition of what constitutes criminal behaviour. In the 1890s, the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim wrote "*What confers a criminal character on an act is not the nature of the act but the definition given it by society. We do not reprove certain behaviour because it is criminal; it is criminal because we reprove it.*" In other words, what society deems a crime is a crime.

Anarchist analyses

Historically, many anarchists have put forward analyses of crime and punishment, and have looked to suggest remedies both for the current circumstances and for a future anarchist society.

> "*The constant refrain of the anarchist song is that the system of government and law in modern States is often the cause of, rather than the remedy for, disorder. Most laws in Western democracies protect private property and economic inequality rather than civil rights. An authoritarian society with a repressive morality encourages the psychological disorders which lead to rape, murder and assault. And punishment by its very nature tends to alienate and embitter rather than reform or deter.*"[12]

Over one hundred years ago, the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin suggested that crime can be divided into three categories :- property related crime, government related crime and crimes against the person. In putting forward this analysis he was arguing that if you remove property and government - in other words if you base society on freedom, socialism and democracy - you remove two of the biggest causes of crime. It

could also be argued that a large number of crimes against the person (people injured in muggings, for example) have their root in crimes against property.

This article does not intend to look in any more detail at the nature of criminality. There is much which could be written about the daylight robbery, for example, inherent in the very running of the system - the legal robbery which takes place when large amounts of wealth are diverted from much needed spending on health, education etc. to give tax breaks to big business, the fact that a workers' wages represent only a fraction of the value of his/her labour - with the remainder siphoned off by the boss. This area would demand an article in and of itself. Instead what I want to look at here is whether or not it is possible to have any real form of community policing under capitalism and what if any forms of policing would be needed in an anarchist society.

Is it possible?

Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) is an organisation which has done extensive work in the area of community response to anti-social behaviour, and has projects based in Belfast, Derry and Armagh. According to their website[13]

> "*The ultimate goal of restorative justice is not to punish people but to reduce the incidence of socially harmful activity, to promote victim-offender reconciliation and to help create safer communities.*"

The work and research done by CRJI is very interesting in the context of looking at the possibilities for alternative systems of community policing. In an article in the Summer 2001 issue of "Spark" (a magazine produced by Ogra Sinn Fein[14]), Paddy Molloy of CRJI outlined the method by which it operates

> "*We believe that when a crime is committed, there is a breach of a three cornered relationship, between the offender, the victim and the community. Our aim is not to punish people but to heal the breach and ensure that no further harm occurs.*"
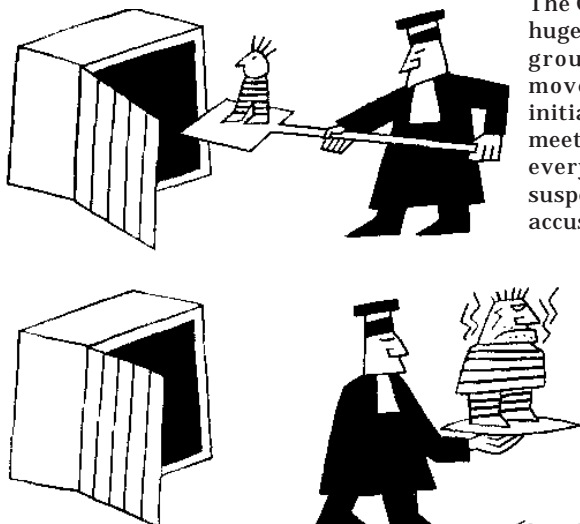
To achieve this outcome, CRJI has put in place a clearly defined process. When a case is referred to them (either by a victim or by someone else), full details are recorded by a caseworker. The case is then assigned to two workers who liaise with all concerned in an attempt to establish the facts, as far as possible. This part of the process helps to identify the needs of all involved and to come up with proposals as to the type of support that may be necessary, what type of mediation is possible etc. The process would then go on - depending on the circumstances of the individual case - to indirect mediation, formal mediation or victim-offender conferencing.

CRJI's mission statement "*Through a process of empowerment to build a restorative community that is tolerant, responsive and inclusive*" certainly does point to a possible way forward. The central question remains however as to how effective such a system can be while society continues to be organised in a hierarchical manner. To what extent does this remain a laudable objective, or does it have any real basis? Is the real local democracy that is necessary for such a system to operate properly possible under capitalism?

The answer has to be that it is not. It is only if it operates as a constituent part of the state's 'justice' system that it will be tolerated. The facts of the matter are that the state cannot and will not allow any parallel system of justice to operate, no state will tolerate its monopoly on power being challenged by its citizens.

State power

In the 1980s many working class Dublin communities were ravaged by the effects of heroin abuse and the consequent anti-social crime, with addicts needing hundreds of pounds a week to feed their habits and wreaking havoc on their neighbourhoods - the poorest and most deprived areas of the city. In response to what was a desperate situation, communities began to fight back through Concerned Parents Against Drugs (CPAD).

The CPAD movement initially met with huge success and very soon had active groups throughout the city. The movement that emerged was also initially open and democratic. Public meetings in the community - open to everyone - would be held at which suspected dealers were named. Those accused of dealing would be given the opportunity to defend themselves. If found guilty, dealers would be ordered to cease their activities or leave the area. Those who refused to comply were forcibly evicted through community marches on their homes.

CPAD however before long came under pressure from two sources. Firstly, the state (the cops) moved

in to dismantle what they saw as a threat to their power base. The sight of communities organising and bypassing the official structures frightened the life out of the powers that be, so they moved to crush the developing movement. Secondly, the temptation to allow the 'hard men' to sort out those who wouldn't co-operate became too great, and the movement tended to descend into vigilantism.

Ultimately, however, the principal reason why CPAD - and other similar anti-drug movements in the 1990s - failed was because of its political limitations. While focussing on driving anti-social elements out of the community, the bigger picture was missed - ie looking at the causes of drug abuse. While focussing on marches on the homes of small-time pushers living within the communities, the big drug barons were left untouched. Also the focus on forcing the state - health board and other agencies - to put facilities and treatment for addicts in place was missed. Ultimately the CPAD imploded - as a result of both its political limitations and the state's crackdown on it - and within a short period of time, drug abuse and anti-social behaviour was back to its previous levels.

This is not to say that the community activists who got involved and attempted to rescue their communities were wrong, but to say that in the absence of an overall political strategy which aims to change the authoritarian nature of society, such initiatives are inevitably doomed to failure. It is in fact difficult to envisage a situation in which any real degree of community policing could operate under capitalism. A system of community justice must - if it is to be successful - involve such a level of democracy and local organisation that - as already pointed out - the state will simply not allow it to happen.

The absence of just such a political strategy is patently obvious in the North, where - as stated earlier in the article - the very phrase 'community policing' is much abused. What is currently being witnessed on the ground in working class communities in the North is certainly not community policing. Nor could it even be said to be moving in that direction. The people involved in implementing what they describe as community justice are not in the least bit interested in looking at the causes of crime. Indeed their political allies are in many cases sitting in government, propping up a system which perpetuates economic inequality, thus ensuring that real community policing can never become a reality. As long as these people remain more interested in making friends in high places - be that with the Dublin, London or Washington establishments - than in challenging the

basis of capitalism, we cannot move any closer to a society in which the idea of communities being self-managed and self-policed could become a reality.

After the revolution

So what about after the revolution? Firstly, there is no doubt but that in a free, democratic society which meets everybody's basic needs the vast majority
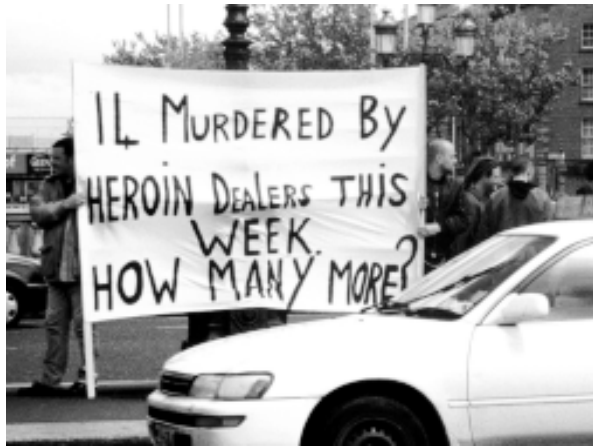
of crime against property will immediately be done away with. In a society in which everybody has his/her basic needs met - and where indeed there will be many shared luxuries - there will quite obviously be less occasion for crimes against property. But there will still be those who - for whatever reason - want to give society the two fingers. There will still be 'crimes of passion' and there will still be people with mental illness who will have to be removed from society for their own protection and that of others.

This in turn implies that there will have to be some form of community forum to deal with these problems. This will however have nothing in common with the current police force. Firstly, the 'laws' which are being implemented will be decided upon in a democratic manner. A free and democratic society will have very few 'laws' as such as these won't be necessary. The vast majority of people - given the opportunity to do so - are quite capable of living together in a peaceful and neighbourly way without having laws and rules to tell them what to do. People, for example, don't need police to tell them to drive on the correct side of the road or to stop at red traffic lights - common sense is enough.

Secondly, the community justice system (or whatever title will be put on it) will itself be under democratic control. It is of course impossible to state precisely what will happen, because the system will be created by the people living in that society, not according to blueprints that we draw up in advance, and may in any case vary from time to time and from place to place. Suffice to say that - as with all other aspects of decision making - maximum democracy will be the hallmark of the anarchist society

and thus no individual or group will be given the power to make decisions relating to 'law enforcement' by themselves.

Perhaps, for example, people will be elected as investigators when specific anti-social behaviour needs to be investigated. In some cases it will be necessary to have people with particular expertise such as in forensics. But these people will be given no particular positions of power as a result of this expertise - their function will remain purely administrative.

The idea of 'prosecuting' an offender will be done away with. Instead - where necessary - evidence will be presented before a democratically elected community forum, weighed up in an open manner with the 'accused' given every opportunity to question it (either personally or through a representative of his/her own choosing - there won't be any fancy lawyers or judges in silly wigs).

In addition, the idea of revenge or punishment will have no place in the justice system but it will be more about restitution and compensation for the victim. The aim will be to ensure that the perpetrator of the 'crime' makes some form of recompense to the victim, and that the behaviour is not repeated.

As has been said, we do not have a crystal ball and therefore cannot predict with any certainty exactly what will happen in an anarchist society. We do not claim to have all the answers but hope that this article and others will lead to a discussion among anarchists about how a future society should deal with anti-social elements.

It is a complex area and the only thing which can be said with certainty is that the only solution can be through freedom and democracy.

[1] Peter Kropotkin, 'Law and Authority', Quoted in 'Demanding The Impossible - A History of Anarchism' by Peter Marshall, Page 31

[2] Ireland is of course by no means unique in this context

[3] Text available on the web at http://lark.phoblacht.net/bmitchell.html

[4] 'Irish Times', Friday 25th May 2001

[5] See 'Irish Times', Thursday August 23rd 2001

[6] 'Irish Times' Thursday August 23rd 2001

[7] 'Irish Times' Friday April 20th 2001

[8] Services Industrial Professional Technical Union - Ireland's largest trade union

[9] quoted in 'Irish Times' Thursday August 30th 2001

[10] One Fianna Fail TD, Liam Lawlor did serve a week of a 3-month sentence for failing to supply the Tribunal with full details of his financial affairs.

[11] The excuse of the Litter Act has been used. At the time of writing 6 activists have had to serve sentences of three days. More information at www.struggle.ws/wsm/bins.html

[12] Peter Marshall: 'Demanding The Impossible - A History of Anarchism' Page 648

[13] http://www.restorativejusticeireland.org

[14] The youth wing of Sinn Fein

Bakunin's idea of revolution & revolutionary organisation

The Russian revolutionary liberal Alexander Herzen, who was a close friend of Micheal Bakunin, told a story of how when Bakunin was travelling from Paris to Prague he came across a revolt of German peasants *"making an uproar around the castle, not knowing what to do. Bakunin got out of his conveyance, and, without wasting any time to find out what the dispute was about, formed the peasants into ranks and instructed them so skilfully that by the time he resumed his seat to continue his journey, the castle was burning on all four sides".[1]*

Bakunin was the giant of the revolutionary movement in Europe from 1848 to his death in 1876. At 6'4" and 240lbs he was a literal giant as well as the demon that stalked the bourgeois imagination. Yet although he is often cited as the father of the anarchist movement, today his ideas of revolutionary organisation are poorly understood by anarchists and Marxists. Instead he is most remembered for his role in countering the authoritarian aspects of Marxism in the 1st International.

There are several good reasons why Bakunin is not remembered for his positive ideas. The years Marx spent in the British Library perfecting Das Kapital were spent by Bakunin in a series of prisons, chained to walls, and losing his teeth through scurvy. Not the best environment for research or writing! And in any case as he admitted in 1870 *"I am neither a scientist, nor a philosopher nor even a professional writer. I have written very little in my life time, and have only ever done so in self-defence".[2]* In fact he wrote thousands of letters but relatively few articles or pamphlets. Many of those available today are drafts of unpublished works.

Also he never claimed any consistency to his life's writings or activity. Even in 1871, when he and Marx were fighting over the future of the First International, he could write *"As far as learning was concerned, Marx was* [in 1844]*, and still is, incomparably more advanced than I. I knew nothing at that time of political economy, I had not yet rid myself of my metaphysical observations ... He called me a sentimental idealist and he was right;...".[3]*

Many Marxists came to see Marx as a sort of prophet whose writings comprise a perfect materialist 'revelation' that can be used to answer all of today's questions. This may be a foolish approach but it's true to say that Marx's life's writings are more consistent than Bakunin's are. The writings of the young Bakunin have quite different politics to his writings at the end of his life.

Bakunin's early life

Bakunin followed a similar path of development to many of the other revolutionaries from a bourgeois background of that generation. Like Marx and Engels this included involvement with the left Hegalians. In 1844 he was a member of Marx's Democratic Federation in Paris where he also met and was influenced by Proudhon. When the 1848 revolutions (which centred on the demand for bourgeois parliaments and home rule) erupted, he served in the Workers' National Guard in Paris. When that rising was defeated he headed to Germany in March as the revolutions there started, hoping to encourage a Polish revolt.

Bakunin's political ideology at the time was fairly unformed but is usually described as 'Pan Slavist'. Many commentators since have had problems putting this in any sensible context. Anarchists have tended to see it as irrelevant, while Marxists have generally concentrated on attacking Bakunin for the anti-German (Prussian) aspect to it.

His writings and activity in this period bear more then a passing resemblance to what has been called left republicanism in Ireland. The idea that the 'national struggle' can be an impetus towards the abolition of class rule even as it achieves national independence is also found in many Marxist writings, including those of Connolly and Trotsky. His anti-German rants are echoed much later in the anti – US diatribes of Marxist South American revolutionaries who, sometimes identified the enemy as the 'blue eyed blondes of the north'.

1848 also saw Bakunin participate in the Slav congress in Prague and publish 'An appeal to the Slavs'. This appeal had many things in common with later left republican statements, for instance the call for revolutionary Slavic unity against the German, Turkish and Magyars occupations *"while we stretched our fraternal hands out to the German people, to democratic Germany"*. He sought to make socialism an inevitable part of the national liberation struggle writing; *"Everybody has come to the realisation that liberty was merely a lie where the great majority of the population is reduced to a miserable existence, where, deprived of education, of liberty and of bread, it is fated to serve as an underprop for the powerful and the rich."* The appeal ends with *"The social question thus appears to be first and foremost the question of the complete overturn of society."[4]*
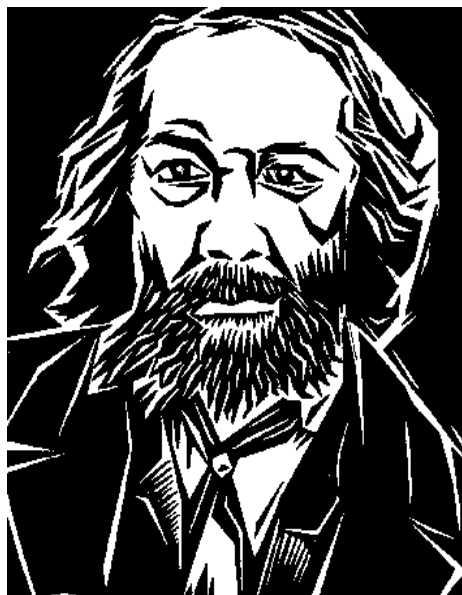
Years in jail

Bakunin moved to Dresden where he met and befriended the composer Richard Wagner. There, in May 1849, a constitutional crisis led to another rising. With Wagner he joined the insurrection and became a revolutionary officer. Marx gives a summary of events in a letter to the New York Daily Tribune (October 2, 1852) on 'Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany' *"In Dresden, the battle in the streets went on for four days. The shopkeepers of Dresden, organised into 'community guards' not only refused to fight, but many of them supported the troops against the insurrectionists. Almost all of the rebels were workers from the surrounding factories. In the Russian refugee Michael Bakunin they found a capable and cool headed leader".*

Bakunin was arrested after the rebellion was put down. His luck had run out. He was already wanted by the Russians, the Czar having confiscated all his property and removed all his rights in 1844. He spent 13 months in jail in Dresden under sentence of death. One

night he was led out, he presumed to be executed, but instead he was handed over to the Austrians. They jailed him in Prague for nine months before moving him to the Olmutz fortress where he was chained to the wall for two months. They condemned him to hang for high treason. Instead he was handed to the Russians where he was jailed in the Peter-Paul Fortress. Here he lost his teeth from scurvy and came close to losing his mind.

He spent nearly ten years in the various prisons until he was exiled to Siberia in 1857. There, once he had recovered his health, he fled via Japan to the US and then to London at the end of 1861. His incredible escape from Siberia (Japan had only just opened up to the west in 1853) only added to the mystification that surrounded Bakunin.

In prison he had remained a pan Slavist and was clearly not yet an anarchist. The Czar, like later generations of Russian rulers, had a fondness for extracting confessions from his victims. Bakunin used his as a chance to outline his program which included the idea that what Russia needed was *"a strong dictatorial power"* to raise the standard of living and education. While some have correctly pointed out that what is said in such a confession should be taken with a pinch of salt, even as late as 1862 Bakunin *"thought the Tsar was capable of really working with the people, and the people capable of imposing its will on the Tsar through a National Assembly".*[5]

However alongside and contrary to this he was clearly developing his thoughts in a libertarian direction. In 1862 Herzan's journal 'The Bell' published his open letter with the title *"To my Russian, Polish and other Slav friends"*. The section addressed to university students reads *"Go to the people. This is your field, your life, your science. Learn from the people how best to serve their cause! Remember, friends, that educated youth must be neither the teacher, the paternalistic benefactor, nor the dictatorial leader of the people, but only the midwife for the self-liberation, inspiring them to increase their power by acting together and co-ordinating their efforts".*[6] In that period the denial of education to the working class in most countries made it inevitable that the vast bulk of revolutionary writers would come from the bourgeois. Leaving that aside, Bakunin suggests a relationship between the 'revolutionary intellectual' and the people that anarchists would still hold with today.

He finally came to reject pan Slavism after the 1863 Polish insurrection when he saw that the Polish nationalists were more interested in Ukrainian land then the support of the Ukrainian Slavs and that they more afraid of peasant

insurrection than the Czar. He visited Marx in London on his return. Marx invited him to join the 1st International and wrote to Engels (Nov 4, 1864) saying *"On the whole he is one of the few people whom I find not to have retrogressed after 16 years, but to have developed further"*[7] .

Bakunin had not yet seen the value of the 1st International (which was then in an embryonic form as a combination of British trade unions and French followers of Proudhon or Blanqui). He went to Italy where he worked on an international project of revolutionary organisation. According to Daniel Guerin *"The few members of the brotherhood were … former disciples of the republican Giuseppe Mazzini, from whom they acquired their taste for and familiarity with secret societies".*[8] Brian Morris includes Polish and Russian exiles in this list.[9]

Bakunin comes in for a lot of criticism from modern day revolutionaries over his advocacy of secret societies in this

period. Such criticisms though are looking back from the comparative safety of 20th century western Europe or the US where mass unions are a fact and revolutionaries are comparatively free to hold meetings and publish papers. In Bakunin's time such activity was almost always illegal and liable to get the author sentenced to years in prison, if not death. Marx and Engels had published the 'Communist Manifesto' from one such secret society, the League of the Just, and had continued in another up to the founding to the International despite the fact they were in the relative safety of liberal England.

The group around Bakunin had worked in similar secret societies for years, there were no legal revolutionary organisations in Poland or Russia in this period. In Italy and France these societies, often based on the Freemasons, were also the norm. It is thus hardly surprising that they concluded that *"an association with a revolutionary purpose must necessarily take the form of a secret society"*[10]

They drew up sets of rules for such groupings, the first under the title Revolutionary Society/Brotherhood in 1865. Arthur Lehning, editor of the Archives Bakunin points out that such programs and statues mirror Bakunin's evolving thoughts, rather than *"the operation of an organisation".*[11] They were intended to be a blueprint of an 'ideal' organisation rather than a description of an already fully formed one.

The first of these documents, while clearly on the path to libertarian organisation, is firmly rooted in Bakunin's pre anarchist phase. It combines ideas of libertarian organisation with the contradictory aim of setting up a parliament; *"For the governance of common affairs, a government and provincial assembly or parliament will of necessity be formed"*[12]

It also reduces the question of revolution to an organisational one. The assumption is that everywhere the people are ready to rise and that all that is needed is for a relatively small number of revolutionaries to co-ordinate this rising. This an idea also common in 20th century Marxism either in the Trotskyist idea of the 'crisis of leadership' or the Gueverist revolutionary foci.

If this program cannot be considered any sort of final blueprint this does not mean that it is irrelevant. The kind of new society they advocated was a radical advance in the Europe of the 1860's and remains surprisingly relevant. The selection in the box (next page) gives the flavour of how they saw post-revolutionary society

Bakunin next attempted to introduce a revolutionary socialist program into the League of Peace and Freedom. This was founded at a conference in Geneva in August of 1867 attended by 6,000 people, *"all friends of free democracy"*. Bakunin is described rising to speak at the conference; *"the cry passed from mouth to mouth: 'Bakunin!' Garibaldi, who was in the chair, stood up, advanced a few steps and embraced him. This solemn meeting of two old and tried warriors of the revolution produced an astonishing impression … Everyone rose and there was a prolonged and enthusiastic clapping of hands"*[14] .

Some people date Bakunin's advocacy of anarchism from this point, not least

"the advent of liberty is incompatible with the existence of States.

…

..the free human society may arise at last, no longer organised … from the top down… but rather starting from the free individual and the free association and autonomous commune, from the bottom up

…

… women, different from man but not inferior to him, intelligent, hardworking and free as he is, should be declared his equal in all political and social rights …religious and civil marriage should be replaced by free marriage, and that the upkeep, education and training of all children should be a matter for everyone, a charge upon society … children belonging neither to society nor to their parents but rather to their future liberty

..

the revolution … can … be effected only by the people

…

the revolution … cannot succeed unless, sweeping, like a worldwide conflagration .. it encompasses the whole of Europe for a start and then the world

…

the social revolution .. will not … put up its sword before it has destroyed every state … across the whole civilised world"[13]

Basel congress of 1868

because as part of his speech he denounced nationalism - a break with his previous pan-Slavism. Others date it from the following congress of Berne in 1868. In any case it is from this period onward that Bakunin becomes centrally involved in the building of mass revolutionary organisations, including that of the 1st International.

It is from this point that he starts to advocate methods of organisation consistent with anarchism. His last major work, written in 1873, outlines the following program for the revolutionary youth in Russia.

"…they must go the people, because to-day – and this is true everywhere, but especially in Russia – outside of the people, outside of the multi-million-strong labouring masses, there is neither life, nor cause, nor future"[15].

"The chief defect which to this day paralyses and makes impossible a universal popular insurrection in Russia is the self-containment of the communes, the isolation and separateness of the local peasant worlds. At all costs we must shatter that isolation and introduce the vital current of revolutionary thought, will, and deed to those separate worlds. We must link together the best peasants
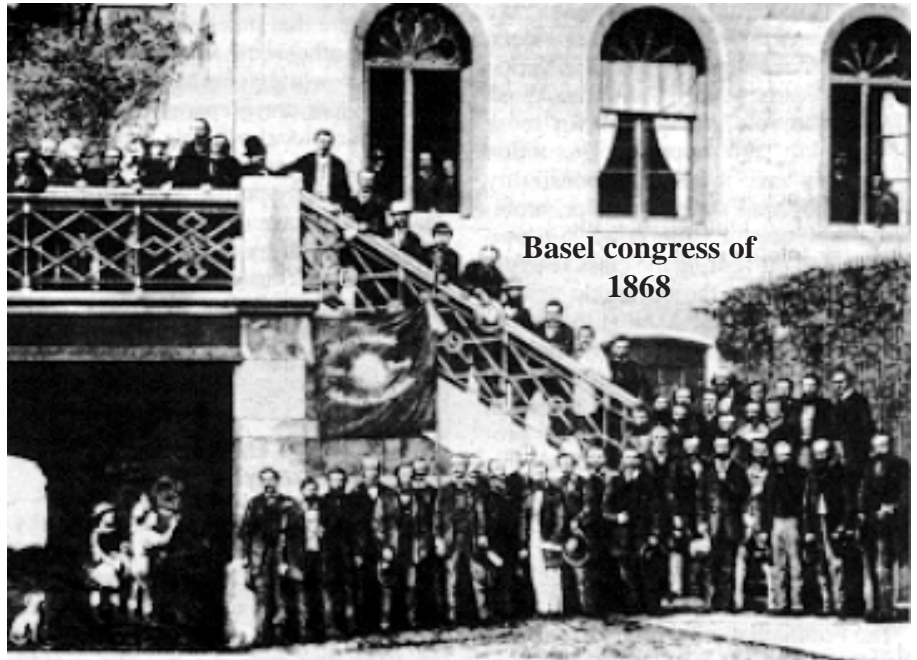
of all the villages, districts, and, if possible, regions, the progressive individuals, the natural revolutionaries of the Russian peasant world, and, where possible, creating the same vital link between the factory worker and the peasantry.

…We must convince these progressive individuals – and through them, if not all the people then at least a sizeable segment of them, the most energetic segment - that the people as a whole … share one common misfortune and therefore one common cause. We must convince them that an invincible force lives in the people, which nothing, and no one can withstand, and that if it has not yet liberated the people it is because it is powerful only when it is concentrated and acts simultaneously, everywhere, jointly in concert, and until now it has not done so. In order to concentrate that force, the villages, districts and regions must be linked and organised according to a common plan and with the single objective of universal liberation of the people. To create in our people a feeling and consciousness of real unity, some sort of popular newpaper must be established … which would immediately spread information to every corner of Russia, to every region, district and village, about any peasant or factory uprising that breaks out in one locality or another, and also about the significant revolutionary movements produced by the proletariat of western Europe.

.. the Russian people will acknowledge our educated youth as their own only when they encounter them in their own lives, in their own misfortunes, in their own cause, in their own desperate rebellion. The youth must be present from now on not as witnesses but as active participants, in the forefront of all popular disturbances and uprisings, great and small … Acting in accordance with a rigorously conceived and fixed plan,

and subjecting all their activity to the strictest discipline in order to create that unanimity without which there can be no victory.."[16]

This one quotation refutes the most common misrepresentations of Bakunin's model of organisation. It does confirm one common criticism of Bakunin, that he did not confine his revolutionary subject to the industrial working class, but looked as much, if not more so, to the artisans and the peasants. However while this criticism might make some sense in modern Europe or North America today, in the 1870's any revolution which only mobilised the urban workers would have been doomed to defeat. At that time urban workers were a tiny minority of society.

For instance in advocating a similar strategy for revolutionaries in Italy Bakunin estimates that *"…Italy has a huge proletariat… It consists of two or three million urban factory workers and small artisans, and some 20 million landless peasants."* [17] Bakunin, unlike Marx, saw that the peasants could be actively won over to the side of the revolution, and, because of the numbers involved there could be no libertarian revolution in that period without the peasants.

But Bakunin did not, as is often claimed, dismiss the industrial workers. In fact, in advance of Marx and in anticipation of the factory committee movement of the Russian revolution, he insisted that *"The co-operative associations already have proven that workers are quite capable of administering industrial enterprises, that it can be done by workers elected from their midst and who receive the same wage."*[18] He was however critical of a certain layer of the British, German and Swiss working class who he believed had become a labour aristocracy that could be hostile to the interests of

the proletariat as a whole.

Bakunin's view of how revolutionaries should organise is often criticised for appearing to advocate a secret dictatorship over the people. The documents on revolutionary organisation he produced in 1867 (above) and in 1868 do indeed contain an odd contradiction, captured by the quotation below.

"That association starts from the basis that revolutions are never made by individuals, nor even by secret societies. They are, so to speak, self-made, produced by the logic of things, by the trend of events and actions… All that a well organised society can do is, first, to play midwife to the revolution by spreading among the masses ideas appropriate to the masses' instincts, and to organise, not the Revolution's army – for the people at all times must be the army – but a sort of revolutionary general staff made up of committed, energetic and intelligent individuals who are above all else true friends of the people and not presumptions braggarts, with a capacity for acting as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the people's instinct

The numbers of such individuals, then, need not be huge. A hundred tightly and seriously allied revolutionaries will suffice for the whole of Europe. Two or three hundred revolutionaries will be enough to organise the largest of countries".[19]

This contradiction is emphasised in the last couple of lines where Bakunin seems to be suggesting that on the one hand two or three hundred revolutionaries are required in the larger countries but on the other only 100 (a smaller figure) are required for Europe (a larger area.).

This 'contradiction' appears again and again in Bakunin's writings, for instance in 1870 he was to write

"Thus the sole aim of a secret society must be, not the creation of an artificial power outside the people, but the rousing, uniting and organising of the spontaneous power of the people; therefore, the only possible, the only real revolutionary army is … the organisation should only be the staff of this army, an organiser of the people's power, not its own… A revolutionary idea is revolutionary, vital, real and true only because it expresses and only as far as it represents popular instincts which are the result of history. To strive to foist on the people your own thoughts-foreign to its instinct-implies a wish to make it subservient to a new state… The organisation must accept in all sincerity the idea that it is a servant and a helper, but never a commander of the people, never under any pretext its manager, not even under the pretext of the people's welfare.

The organisation is faced with an enormous task: not only to prepare the success of the people's revolution through propaganda and the unification of popular power; not only to destroy totally, by the power of this revolution, the whole existing economic, social and political order; but, in addition … to make impossible after the popular victory the establishment of any state power over the people-even the most revolutionary, even your power-because any power, whatever it called itself, would inevitably subject the people to old slavery in a new form…

We are bitter foes of all official power, even if it were ultra-revolutionary power. We are enemies of all publicly acknowledged dictatorship; we are social-revolutionary anarchists. But you will ask, if we are anarchists, by what right do we wish to and by what method can we influence the people? Rejecting any power, by what power or rather by what force shall we direct the people's revolution? An invisible force-recognised by no one, imposed by no one-through which the collective dictatorship of our organisation will be all the mightier, the more it remains invisible and unacknowledged, the more it remains without any official legality and significance.

Imagine… a secret organisation which has scattered its members in small groups over the whole territory of the Empire but is nevertheless firmly united: inspired by a common ideal… an organisation which acts everywhere according to a common plan. These small groups, unknown by anybody as such, have no officially recognised power but they are strong in their ideal, which expresses the very essence of the people's instincts, desires and demands…

This dictatorship is free from all self-interest, vanity and ambition for it is anonymous, invisible and does not give advantage or honour or official recognition of power to a member of the group or to the groups themselves. It does not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character…"[20]

On the one hand Bakunin recognised that _"The future social organisation should be carried out from the bottom up"_[21] On the other hand the possibility for the creation of this new society would not come about due to a spontaneous


revolution but would require an international organisation of revolutionaries which would be _"centralised by the idea and by the sameness of a program"_[22]

As we have seen Bakunin had some considerable experience of insurrection. He was also of course, like Marx, a disciple of Hegel and hence the dialectical method by which two apparently contradictory things would interact to create a new situation/idea that was an advance on both. At this stage in his writing Bakunin was advocating a way of overcoming the contradiction between the goal of a libertarian society and the organisational methods needed to overthrow an authoritarian one. Other and later revolutionaries faced with this contradiction have tended to either argue for a strongly centralised party that would aim for state power or to pretend that serious organisational methods were not necessary. Bakunin was attempting to go beyond these two opposing ideas to find a new solution that satisfied reality.

Bakunin's views on revolutionary organisation can be presented as a sort of wedding cake with separate but informally connected tiers of revolutionaries. At the top were the '100', the general staff whose role it would be to establish and maintain the informal links between countries. They would allow some judgement of when the time was ripe for revolutionary insurrection on the one hand and on the other a means of trying to co-ordinate this insurrection. This was to be a secret (because of the danger of arrest) and (after 1868) an informal set of contacts who would attempt to influence the course of events through the power of their ideas.

Beneath this was to be a second, much larger and more open organisation. This was the Alliance and its role was primarily to introduce revolutionary ideas into the mass organisations of the proletariat, in particular through the building of regional sections of the international.

After 1868 he would come to see the base of this 'cake' as the International. The base was to be the creation of organs of
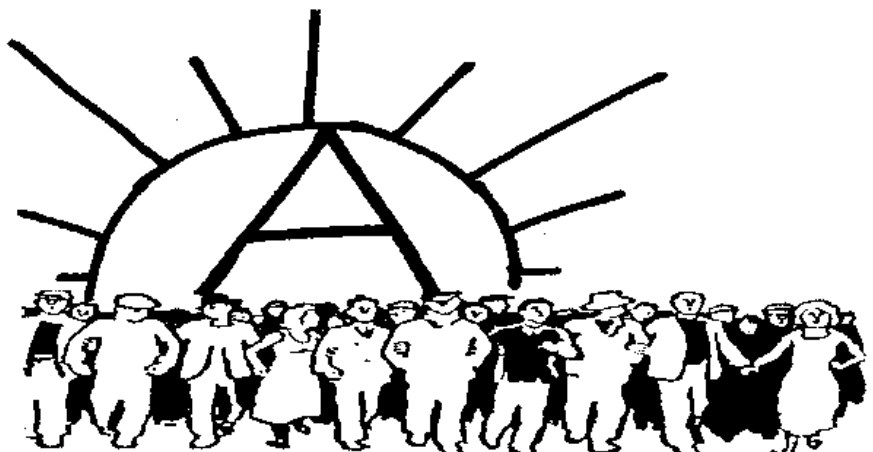
working class struggle that would favour direct action and reject political (i.e. electoral) activity. The Alliance would act within the international to push these politics to the fore. This was necessary because, he wrote, the mass of the workers - being illiterate and working long hours just to survive - would not be won to socialism through abstract ideas alone. Rather Bakunin wrote

"It follows then that in order to touch the heart and gain the confidence, the assent, the adhesion, and the co-operation of the illiterate legions of the proletariat - and the vast majority of proletarians unfortunately still belong in this category - it is necessary to begin to speak to those workers not of the general sufferings of the international proletariat as a whole but of their particular, daily, altogether private misfortunes. It is necessary to speak to them of their own trade and the conditions of their work in the specific locality where they live; of the harsh conditions and long hours of their daily work, of the small pay, the meanness of their employer, the high cost of living, and how impossible it is for them properly to support and bring up a family."[23]

This was the work that Bakunin came to see as necessary in the preparation of the revolution. But he did not see the higher tiers commanding the lower, quite the opposite he also insisted that *"the peoples' revolution … will arrange its revolutionary organisation from the bottom up and from the periphery to the centre, in keeping with the principle of liberty".[24]*

"As regards organisation of the Commune, there will be a federation of standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade, one per street or per district, these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times."[25]

An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set by the capital, to reorganise along revolutionary lines for a start and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of these deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces in furtherance of the same principles and to organise a revolutionary force with the capability of defeating the reaction. Not official revolutionary commissars in any sort of sashes, but rather revolutionary

propagandists are to be dispatched into all the provinces and communes and particularly among the peasants who cannot be revolutionised by principles, nor by the decrees of any dictatorship, but only by the act of revolution itself, that is to say, by the consequences that will inevitably ensure in every commune from complete cessation of the legal and official existence of the state".[26]

This is not simply a historical question. It is true that in western countries revolutionaries are in general free to sell papers and hold meetings in a manner they were generally not in Bakunin's time. Yet this liberalism from the state is largely a result of the fact that most revolutionary organisation is not seen as a serious threat. Where revolutionaries of one form or another have been seen to be a threat, from the Black Panthers, to the Irish civil rights movement, to 1970s Italy, the gloves have come off and the full array of state oppression, including infiltration and provocation have been deployed against them. At the moment the relatively trivial threat of the Black Blocs on the globalisation demonstrations is seeing an increasing array of state oppression being deployed, including now a fatal shooting. Bakunin's writings provide us with one starting point for looking at the apparent contradiction between wanting to create a libertarian society and needing to overthrow a powerful and authoritarian state to do so.

Footnotes

Most of the texts here with a URL can also be accessed via the Bakunin web page at http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin.html

1 Quoted in To the Finland Station, Edmund Wilson, Fontana 1960, p271

2 Bakunin in Who am I, p126, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, taken from La Commune de Paris et la notion de l'Etat 1870, Oeuveres IV, p249ff

3 Quoted in Brian Morris, Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom, 1993, p14

4 Appeal to the Slavs (1848), in Bakunin on Anarchism, Sam Dolgoff, Black Rose Books, 1972, p63-68

5 Brian Morris, Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom, 1993, p26

6 Sam Dolgoff, ed, Bakunin on Anarchy, New York, 1973, p388

7 Quoted in Brian Morris, Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom, 1993, p29

8 Daniel Guerin in No Gods No Master Vol 1, p 132

9 Brian Morris, Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom, 1993, p30

10 Bakunin in The Program of the Brotherhood (1865) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p138

11 No Gods No Master Vol 1, p 132

12 Bakunin in The Program of the Brotherhood (1865) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p142

13 Bakunin in The Program of the Brotherhood (1865) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p133 - 137

14 Report from a Russian positivist quoted in Brian Morris, Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom, 1993, p34

15 Bakunin, Statism and anarchism, Appendix A (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p212

16 Bakunin, Statism and anarchism, Appendix A (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p215

17 Bakunin, Statism and anarchism (1873), ed Marshal Shatz, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p6

18 The capitalist system, http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin/writings/capitalist_system.html

19 Bakunin in Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood (1868) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p156

20 Bakunin to Nechayev on the role of secret revolutionary societies, June 2, 1870, http://struggle.ws/anarchists/bakunin/writings/nechayev_secret_disagree.html

21 The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State (1871), http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/bakunin/paris.html

22 Bakunin in The Program of the Brotherhood (1865) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p139

23 Founding of the Workers International, http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/bakunin/bakunin3.html

24 Bakunin in Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood (1868) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p155

25 Bakunin in Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood (1868) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p155

26 Bakunin in Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood (1868) as published in God and the State, No Gods, No Masters Vol 1, p156

Bashing the Black Bloc?

Although the basic idea of the Black bloc has been around for years, it only really entered the public consciousness after the Seattle demonstrations. But after two years of Black Blocs at all the major summit protests, has the Black Bloc tactic reached the end of its usefulness? What role should anarchists play in the anti-globalisation protests? Are they still relevant at all?

The four main summits of the last four years - Seattle, Prague, Quebec, and Genoa - have all been different, and the Black Bloc has been different at each one. The Seattle protest, though it involved far fewer people than some of the later protests, was probably the most effective. Because it was the first protest of its kind the police and the summit organizers weren't prepared, and protestors were able to block access to the summit for most of the day, causing major disruption. The Black Bloc played a relatively small part in the blockade, but received a major part of the news coverage. The two types of action - blockades and property destruction - pointed to a new kind of protest, protest that was visible, illegal, and more concerned with getting results than with making a symbolic point.

Since Seattle, summit organizers have been more prepared, and they know that they'll have to deal with protests, so each summit has seen an increased level of security. In Prague, all entrances to the summit were guarded by the police, making it impossible for the protestors to mount an effective blockade. Different sections of the protest had different reactions. One group, the Pinks, marched around the conference center, and didn't try to breach the perimeter (though they did enter the summit area when they found an unguarded section). Another, the Yellows, were led by Ya Basta, and chose to take symbolic action. Their attempt to simply push their way

through the police lines could never succeed, but was intended to show that they were going beyond simply passive demonstrations. The third block, the Blue block, wanted to take more direct action, and tried to punch through the police lines to get to the summit, or at least the subway station that would be transporting the delegates, blockading them inside the conference center. In their willingness to destroy property, and actually fight the police, this group consciously thought of themselves as an anarchist Black Bloc.

In Quebec, the level of security increased again, and again the situation changed. The erection of the perimeter fence, and the raids on squats in the days before the summit, raised the stakes even higher. Like in Prague, the protestors responded by dividing the protest area into zones, so people could choose the level of illegality and confrontation with which they were comfortable. Here, as in Seattle, there was a separate Black Bloc, though unlike in Seattle this Black Bloc concentrated on attacking the summit, confronting police and trying to get through the perimeter fence.

Most recently, the Genovese protests, on the day of direct action at least, operated on the understanding that different tactics would be used by different groups of protestors, each in different areas. Although poor advance co-ordination was a factor, the major problem protestors faced in Genoa was

the large, and very active, police presence. As well as having formidable perimeter fencing, the police attacked the protestors on their way to the perimeter, stopping some groups from getting near the fence and forcing other elements of the protest together. The Black Bloc, which intended to try to break into the summit, ended up destroying banks and shops in the streets of Genoa.

With every summit, with every escalation of security, the conditions that made Seattle possible are getting further away. In Seattle it was possible to have large numbers of people taking part in an action that wasn't especially illegal or confrontational (any more than a Reclaim the Streets or Critical Mass) and yet directly achieved its aims of closing the summit. But now that the barricades have gone up, protestors seem to be left with two alternatives - return to symbolic, peaceful protests, that have no (direct) effect, or move on to very illegal and highly-planned protests that might be directly effective. (And every time summit security is increased, the level of illegality and planning required to breach that security is also increased.)

Alongside this growing problem there is the constant question of the Black Bloc. Its difficult to even define what the Black Bloc is, let alone to decide what part it could play in the summit protests. It may have started out as a purely anarchist grouping (though one which many anarchists avoid) but it's not a permanent grouping, it's just something that comes together at protests. Being in the Black Bloc just means being willing to break the law, destroy property, or fight with the police to achieve the aims of the protest. As such, many non-anarchists will happily join the block, to the extent that one of the Black Blocs in Genoa contained a group of Maoists.

The Black Bloc's willingness to destroy property may be what sets them apart from other protestors, but there is also some division within the block about what this should mean. On the one hand, there are those willing to use 'violence' for a particular purpose, to take down a fence or barricade, or get past police lines, as part of disrupting a summit. At the other extreme are those who think that opposing global capitalism means opposing all of its manifestations, and attacking shops, cars, and the police whenever possible. Most people seem to be somewhere in the middle, not having a problem with people attacking banks or chain stores, but sometimes questioning whether it's being done at the expense of more important things, or thinking that people should take more care in their choice of targets.

The continuing increase in the level of summit security is going to particularly affect the Black Bloc. We saw in Genoa that the police are ready to stop large,

amorphous groups like the Black Bloc from getting close to a summit. So, added to the choices of symbolic, peaceful protests, or highly planned, very illegal protests, anarchists can also join a Black Bloc which, from the outset, won't be able to do any more than attack shops and banks.

Revolutionary cells?

There is already an activist tradition of going underground to carry out actions. Arson attacks on corporate property generally aren't advertised in advance, any more than Animal Liberation Front raids. If secrecy is the price of effective action, then plenty of people are willing to pay it. But is it worth it?

What made the Seattle blockade effective? At first glance, Seattle - and all of the summit protests - have been important because they used direct action. Protestors didn't restrict themselves to polite lobbying of politicians, or to polite demonstrations that stayed within the approved routes - they set out to stop the summits themselves. But stopping the summits isn't much of a goal in itself. No-one believes that stopping the WTO or G8 from having these large meetings will actually stop them from operating. Nothing happens at these meetings that couldn't be organized some other way.

The summits are themselves symbolic acts - opportunities for the powerful to assert their authority, publicise and legitimize their institutions, and reinforce the belief that their way is the only way for the world to run. This means that the protests against the summits are also symbolic actions, no matter how effective they are. In themselves, they don't change the world, any more than the summits do. But they demonstrate an alternative - they show that you don't have to leave decisions up to others, that it's possible for large numbers of people to come together and organize themselves, that direct action and direct democracy are possible.

That is the real point of the summit protests, and that's what we must remember when we work out how to deal with future summits. Mass democratic participation is not just a tactic to be adopted or discarded - it's the most important thing about these protests. That's what's wrong with, to take one example, some of the plans being circulated for stopping the G8 summit in Alberta. It's all very well to suggest that groups of anarchists should live in the woods for the month before the summit, planning various acts of sabotage - some of the plans may even be workable. But why bother? What is the possible gain from a tiny group of people adopting tactics that, by their nature, exclude the vast majority of people? It's not going to

stop any decisions being made by the G8, because those decisions will be made anyway, somewhere else if not there. And there is no 'public relations' victory to be won - that was won the day the G8 admitted that they had to meet in such an isolated location.

The same arguments can be made when the summits are in more accessible locations, protected by lines of fences, armoured cars and riot police, rather than miles of wilderness. By their adoption of such extreme security measures, the G8/WTO/World Bank admit that they have lost a lot of public support. The summits no longer function as self-congratulatory press conferences when they are held in a militarized zone,

to the extent that even people who support the World Bank or the G8 wonder what purpose the summits serve. So we have to ask what we would be gaining by disrupting them, especially given the tactics that would be required.

For all that activist cells and secret societies have long been part of the revolutionary tradition, they are deeply problematic for anarchism. While Leninists and authoritarians of all descriptions have no problems with decisions being made by an elite minority, a central tenet of anarchism is that decisions should be made by the people affected by them. That kind of democratic control is ruled out if the movement, or the anarchist part of it, goes underground - we'll be left with small groups doing what they think is in everyone's interests, instead of everyone getting a chance to make their own decisions.

It would be disastrous for anarchism in the long term too. Again, the Leninists think it's possible for a small group of people to take control, and usher in a better society, but it's not that simple for us. Anarchism has to be the free and conscious creation of the majority of people in society, which means that a lot of people are going to have to be convinced that it's a good, workable idea. That work is almost impossible if we can't show our faces in public, if at every demonstration the anarchists are hidden in the crowd. The bourgeois media will always be happy to portray anarchism as mindless violence - if we don't show that there's also a positive side to anarchism, no-one else will.

That doesn't mean that we have to become absolute pacifists, or that we have to rule out all violence/property destruction, before or during the revolution. There may still be cases when 'violence' is the best solution to the problem - fighting fascism for example. But there are costs to this course of action, and all too often they seem to be ignored. The decisions about which tactic to use isn't based on what's best for advancing anarchism, its about how exciting it is to mask up and break things, against how boring it is to try to persuade people. If the Black Blocs continue at summit protests, will it be because people have weighed up their pros and cons and decided they are the most effective tactic, or because people like to dress up in gas masks and bandanas?

Of course there's another reason for the Black Block. As well as using violence/property destruction as a means to an end, to try to break police lines and close down a summit, there's an argument that destroying corporate property (or just private property) is a useful goal in itself. (Though it can also end up advancing other goals - I'm sure one reason so few cities are keen to host summits these days is because of the level of small-scale destruction they can expect to endure. They can seal off the conference centers, but they can't barricade every business in the city). How could it be alright to attack a World Bank meeting, but wrong to attack a high street bank? They are both elements of the same system, just operating on a different scale. How can it be wrong to attack a summit that paves the way for sweatshops, but wrong to attack a company that is directly involved in those same sweatshops? Or to attack a shop that sells sweatshop-made goods? Or sells food produced in equally horrendous conditions?

There is some legitimacy to these arguments. Sure, breaking up a McDonalds isn't going to stop global capitalism, but neither is breaking up a

summit meeting. We don't accept that damaging property is the same as injuring people - in fact, it's a pretty sad reflection of our current society that the two are equated - so why is this even being argued about? If a company participates in, or just supports, the oppression of actual, existing people, what's wrong with breaking their windows? Why should we shed tears for Nike?

On the other hand, what does it actually accomplish? Smashed windows won't even dent the profits of a multinational, especially not if they can pass the cost on to someone else. Broken windows don't convince anyone either. If they come at the end of a long campaign, people may understand why a particular shop was attacked, but otherwise it's just seen as random. (And, in Genoa at least, some of it was completely random) So it comes back to the same question again - are we choosing based on our wish to see an anarchist society? Or are we just blowing off steam?

It's not quite that simple, because there's something to be said for blowing off steam. There are so many restrictions on life in capitalist society that it's worth taking the chances you get to throw off those restrictions. Being an anarchist activist shouldn't mean sitting through endless meetings and paper sales, we also have to seize our freedoms when we can, and if a demonstration can be turned into a party, that's great. But one demonstration isn't going to change society, and no matter how good the party is - or how destructive the riot is - as long as capitalism continues all our victories can only be temporary. So we've got to keep a balance, making sure our short-term gratification isn't making our long term goals harder to reach. We're fighting for the whole world, and not just for a week.

Perhaps the biggest challenge the anti-globalisation movement faces at the moment is to realize that this first round is over, and we've won. Summits will never be the same again - instead of open displays of power and confidence, staged in the major cities of the west, the World Bank, WTO, IMF, and G8 have to meet in the Canadian wilderness, or in a repressive state like Qatar. They've been forced onto the defensive - they're the ones that have to justify their existences, and they have to do so from behind lines of barricades and riot cops.

As they've withdrawn, we've gained in confidence. The world is full of networks of activists, sharing information and working together on a scale few would have dreamed of a few years ago. And these networks have been built democratically, from the ground up. Delegates and spokescouncils, ideas that few had heard of a couple of years ago, are now common currency. Many new
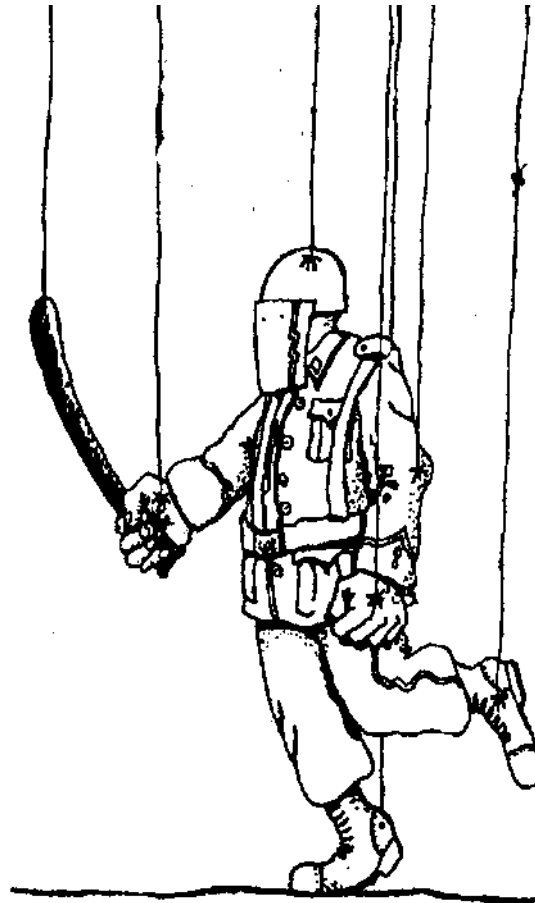
groups organize without leaders as a matter of course, and more and more people are questioning the idea that people need rulers at all, whether they call themselves capitalist, socialist, or communist.

But things can't continue as they are for much longer. We can't continue to use the same tactics against the same targets and expect to keep being successful. So what's going to change? So far the movement has been open, democratic, and has mostly used fairly peaceful direct action. As these tactics prove less successful there will be calls to change. To prevent police infiltration, some will cry for appointing small groups of leaders who will decide how demonstrations will be run, rather than having open discussions. Others are withdrawing from discussions altogether, preferring to stage their own actions. And if these trends catch on the result will be that most demonstrators will be reduced to passive participants, cut out of the important decisions, reduced to spear-carriers in someone else's army.

The alternative is to change targets. Instead of focusing on the major summits, take smaller actions against a broader range of targets. Military installations, corporate AGMs, refugee detention centers …. the list goes on. All of these things are important to oppose, and they can't all have as high a level of security as the summits, which means we don't have to resort to undemocratic tactics to take them down. And for the big, spectacular actions? Cities

themselves. J18 or Seattle style tactics still work fine if you don't have to get past serious barricades, which means that people can get involved - and involved in making decisions, not just following orders - with a minimum of training and experience.

As anarchists, we have to remember why we're involved in the first place. We need to improve the situation immediately, taking what victories we can whenever we can. That's part of the reason we emphasise direct action, because it should have immediate positive effects. But we're also in this for a larger goal, to create an anarchist society. That means convincing people that anarchism is possible, not just by argument, but by showing how anarchist decision-making can really work, how people can make decisions themselves without relying on experts and professionals to do their thinking for them. So we have to remember the importance of making campaigns accessible, and keeping them democratic. This is not a revolutionary situation, and most of the people protesting with us aren't about to devote their lives to living in squats or going to meetings. So we have to make sure that this doesn't stop people from having a say in our campaigns, that we're not putting up barriers that end up creating an unofficial leadership that's as bad as the Leninist 'official' one. And that means fighting to continue the type of campaign, and the sorts of organizations, that really involve people, rather than allowing ourselves to be pushed into a ghetto.

Additional writings on globalistion and reports from some of the European black blocs will be found at
http://struggle.ws/wsm/global.html

Stirner, the individual & anarchism

Max Stirner is a relatively obscure figure in anarchist and left wing thought. He has influenced many who regard themselves as anarcho-individualists such as the Americans, Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker and modern polemicists such as Bob Black. He also has some following among anarcho-communists, notably in Glasgow where a Stirnerist tradition has persisted to this day. Stirner was an egoist who railed against all doctrines and beliefs which demanded a subordination of the individual will to their leadership. So you might ask why I should be interested in trying to outline some of his ideas in the magazine of an organisation committed to a collective anarcho-communist vision of society? I would say for two reasons.

Firstly Stirner's ideas are the perfect corrective to those expounded by authoritarian socialists. Indeed, they came to realise this very quickly and condemned Stirner almost from day one. Marx and Engels devoted a whole 300-page book to denouncing his ideas – *"The German Ideology"* published in 1846. The semi hysterical and personal nature of the criticisms tell us just how worried they were. They condemned him as *"the emptiest, shallowest brain among the philosophers"* whose *"whole activity is limited to trying a few, hackneyed, casuistical tricks on the world handed down to him by philosophical tradition."* This effort alone such surely alert us that the fact that he might be saying something interesting! Stirner's absolute contempt for those who would be masters allowed him to clearly and accurately predict the disaster that happened when socialist ideas were elevated to the level of a state religion:

> *"Society, from which we have everything, is a new master, a new spook, a new 'supreme being' which 'takes us into it service and allegiance.'"*

There's a second and deeper relevance to his thinking though. All anarchists strive to maximise individual liberty. In the Workers Solidarity Movement our aim is to maximise individual freedom through collective means. But in order to do this it is important that people are committed to the ideas of collectively organising with others. This is an idea that is common to anarchists and many others on the left. However much less time is devoted, even by anarchists, to thinking about what it would actually mean to live in an anarchist society. Freedom cannot be handed out. It is only meaningful to people who really desire it and that means strong individuals knowing what they want. What does it mean to be free or as Stirner puts it *"self owned"*? Unless we really appreciate what this means and how valuable it is then we might as well give up and let the state and the capitalists do our thinking for us!

What were his ideas?

Surely if socialism is anything it is the opposite of selfishness and egoism. In fact opponents often argue that, while the ideas of socialism and anarchism are attractive, human greed makes it unrealisable in practise. We are told that it's the *"natural"* greedy condition of humanity that makes socialism an impossible dream. Yet what if it was all turned on its head? What if socialism sprung firstly from a greedy snatching at life's possibilities to turn them to personal advantage? What if it was our own individual greed and egoism that pulled us out of capitalism and into a new world? The great are only great because we are on our knees; what happens if we all get up? This is the paradox suggested by Stirner in "*The Ego and Its Own*"

Max Stirner (real name Caspar Schmidt) was a member of a small group of left leaning German intellectuals styling themselves *"the free"* and including Marx and Engels. Stirner wrote many essays, compiled and edited *"a history of reaction"* and translated works by Adam Smith. However this book is his only completed original work. Before I launch into some of the ideas contained in the book, it is only fair to warn anyone who does get their hands on it that it is not an easy read. In fact it is very badly written and I can only pity the translator. Firstly Stirner can sarcastically quote summaries of other people's ideas as if he agreed with them and then suddenly switch to his own views. Secondly there is a high level of abstraction in the book with often the same word such as "man" being used to mean very different things within the same paragraph. That having been said a patient reading will give many rewards!

The book is a searing attack on all abstract belief systems, starting and working out from religious ideas to encompass all political beliefs as being religious in nature. The first paragraph sets the tone, with Stirner sarcastically putting forward what he sees as the enemy's line:

> *"What is not supposed to be my concern, first and foremost, the good cause, then*
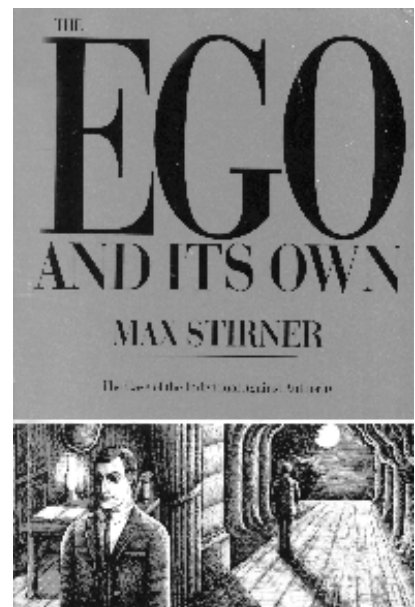
> *God's cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice, further, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland. Finally even the cause of mind and a thousand other causes. Only my cause is never to be my concern "shame on the egoist who thinks only of himself."*

He starts with religion. He believes that the concept of spiritual man first emerged among the Greeks and then was reinforced with Christianity. The idea of spiritual man is that man's earthly concerns take second place. The thesis is first sold of a spiritual and ideal person beyond the present ordinary earthly person. In contemplation of this idealised spirit that dwells in everyone (in the sense that they are supposed to be *"God's image"*) all immediate bodily concerns fall away. The Christian aims to do away with *"the vanity"* of the present world and *"renounce"* their immediate life in favour of a future paradise.

He goes on to the first philosophers to question religious beliefs – they *continued* to accept the spiritual world as the important one. Descartes declares, *"I think therefore I am"* not I eat therefore I am or I have a smoke therefore I am! People are defined by their thinking which is abstract and spiritual in the general sense (you could argue that thinking does draw a considerable amount from real experience but he doesn't go into this). So spiritual things outside the actual real experienced life of the person were still elevated above and alienated from their day to day lives.

Stirner's most original idea, to my mind, is to show how secular liberals and socialists, in aiming to do away with God and spirituality, just erected a new edifice onto which day to day concerns could be sacrificed. This edifice was *"man"* (apologies but I have to stick to his wording – presumably he meant this to mean both sexes).

According to Stirner, liberals,

humanists, communists, anarchists and so forth have just replaced God with man. So some ideal future vision is expounded for humanity as a whole to move towards. Where you are at present is not nearly as important as what you might one day become. They are interested in man in the abstract not the actual lives of individual persons. This leads to an interesting statement of what psychologists today sometimes call *"deferred gratification"* – you are always trying to reach some ideal version of yourself:

> *"Therefore over each minute of your existence, a fresh minute of the future beckons to you, and, developing yourself, you get away 'from yourself.'"*

In other words you are something to be reached. An ideal version of yourself is held over you as a target to aim for. You never really start from yourself because you're always trying to reach it. You are alienated from yourself!

OK perhaps now it is becoming apparent just how abstract some of the ideas are! But there are immediate practical implications. If you sketch an ideal of what we must become you can also impose restrictions on us. If everyone obeys the law out of respect then you need very few cops. Ideas are internalised and self-discipline turns out good citizens. Now there is always some abstract morality, some party line that has to be guiltily adhered to.

From an early age concepts of property, sin and guilt are drummed in to us through family, church, school, media and politicians. These set the limits for what you can and can't do. The ideas - or *"spooks"* as Stirner terms them of morality, respect for private property etc keep people in line. You could live in poverty from birth but, as he puts it, "*You must not pick up a pin unless you have got leave to do so."*

These ideas are programmed in and even respected and encouraged by those aiming to change society. Once they are accepted and internalised people obey the rules not because they are forced to but because they think it is right and proper to do so: **"Every Prussian carries his gendarme in his breast"**

Egoism in Practise

Stirner's critique is far reaching but what does he offer as a solution and how can it be realised given that the ideas seem to rule out getting involved in any collective struggle towards an abstract idea of how things should be done!

First of all he dismisses all talk of freedom. Stirner views the concept of freedom as a dangerous *"spook"*. It implies absence of want (freedom from something) rather then confers any particular benefit. It's a negative definition and easy for anyone to use as a platform from which to sell their ideas.

Instead he calls for people to become *"self owned."* This means simply to put yourself at the centre of things and then to make as much of the world as possible *your property*. So you own the ideas and belief systems rather than vice versa and everything is analysed according to how useful it is to you. Of course, as he makes clear, you first of all have to know who you are as separated out from the ideas or passions which may be in charge at any given moment. In an idea, which was later, to be pinched by Nietzsche (*"Beyond Good and Evil"*) among others he proclaims:

> *"Away with every concern that is not altogether my concern? What's good, what's bad? Why, I myself am my concern and I am neither good nor bad. Neither has any meaning for me"*
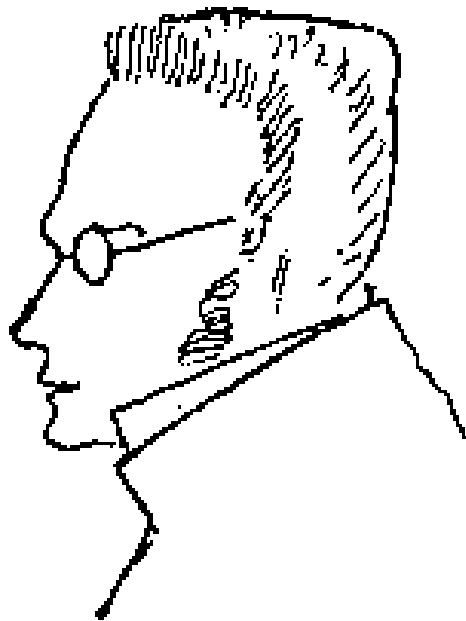
What sort of society would this lead to? Though very much an individualist Stirner gives us a few glimpses of what he terms his *"Union of Egoists".* The union is a voluntary structure formed by its members in their own immediate interests. This is a union of self-confessed selfish people, which they leave as soon as their interests are not being delivered. Stirner has more faith in this system than in any state or political party. In the final analysis he says: *"I would rather be referred to men's selfishness than their kindness."* Of course he would not favour any form of collective action to realise this society. The only route he comes up with is the rather worrying *"war of all against all".* He calls for an insurrection of all individuals aiming not to overthrow existing institutions but to move beyond them in some vague way.

What is his relevance today?

Many would agree that Stirner had some interesting ideas and could see him as something of a figure for individualists or even libertarian free marketeers. Does Stirner have relevance to anarcho

communists though? As mentioned earlier I think he has.

Firstly, of course, he serves as a continuous warning against lefties, nationalists, religious fanatics and anyone who lets abstract ideas run away with them. As long as groups exist with abstract schemes to *"liberate"* or *"free"* *"suffering and oppressed"* humanity there will be new states, new rules:

> *"The hierarchy lasts as long as the parsons, that is, theologians, philosophers, statesmen, philistines, liberals, schoolmasters, servants, parents, children, married couples, Proudhon, George Sand, Bluntschli and others have the floor, the hierarchy will endure"*

Secondly he locates the urge to rebel – the need to rebel - within people's real and actual conditions of life. One of the points he constantly hammers home is that the rich are rich because the poor do not see clearly their own self-interests. People who voluntarily submit to oppression lose the right to complain. Anyway if they only complain or use abstract concepts of rights and freedoms to be handed to them by their masters they will be ignored. People have to rise up to realise their own self-interests – *"To what property am I entitled? To every property to which I empower myself."* If you feel you are under valued you must raise your price!

Finally the concept of the individual is central to anarchist beliefs. We (unlike Stirner) wish to maximise individual freedom *through collective means*. However the role of the individual in revolution is not greatly explored. The final version of an anarchist society should, I think, look very like Stirner's Union of Egoists – with people freely associating in pursuit of their own interests (OK these might be long term rather than immediate). Unless it is built by *"self owned"* people then it can easily be defeated or driven in a Statist direction. People who have really found themselves and know they are fighting for themselves don't give in too easily. A stateless society can only be built by people who see it as being in their own real interests. As Stirner puts it:

> *"The impudent lads will no longer let anything be whined and chattered into them by you, and will have no sympathy for all the follies for which you have been raving and drivelling since the memory of man began… If you command them, 'bend before the Most High' they will answer. If he wants to bend us, let him come himself and do it; we, at least, will not bend of our own accord."*

Commissars of the Free Press

The media & the Afghan war

I'm not going to argue that there is a bias in the media, I'll let a journalist do that for me:

"By the mid- 1980s, the AP [Associated Press – a news agency supplying reports to the international media] *used 'terrorist' about Arabs but rarely about the IRA in Northern Ireland, where the agreed word was 'guerrillas', presumably because AP serves a number of news outlets in the United States with a large Irish-American audience.*

The BBC, which increasingly referred to Arab 'terrorists', always referred to the IRA as 'terrorists' but scarcely ever called ANC bombers in South Africa 'terrorists', probably because the BBC, in its wisdom had decided that the ANC's cause was more 'justified' than the Palestinians or the IRA's.

Tass and Pravda, [Tass being the Russian version of AP] *of course, referred to Afghan rebels as 'terrorists'.*

The Western press would never do this, even though the Afghan guerrillas – 'freedom fighters' or 'insurgents' were alternative descriptions – murdered the wives and children of Communist party officials, burned down schools and fired rockets onto the civilian population of Kabul.

A startling example of double standards occurred in September 1985, when a British newspaper reported that an airliner carrying civilian passengers had been 'downed by rebels'. Something wrong here, surely. Terrorists destroy civilian airliners. No one was in any doubt about that in 1988 when a bomb exploded aboard a Pan Am Boeing 747 over Scotland, killing all on board.

"But 'terrorism' no longer means terrorism. It is not a definition; it is a political contrivance. 'Terrorists' are those who use violence against the side that is using the word.

"To adopt the word means that we have taken a side in the Middle east, not between right and wrong, good and evil, David and Goliath, but with one set of combatants against another. For journalists in the Middle East, the use of the word 'terrorism' is akin to carrying a gun.

Unless the word is use against all acts of terrorism – which it is not – then it's

employment turns the reporter into a participant in the war. He becomes a belligerent." (From "Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War" by Robert Fisk page 439)

Nor am I going to argue that the media often inhibits an understanding of situations, particularly in regard to foreign policy issues, where almost all of us are dependent on 'second hand' information and where most of us receive our 'second hand' information from the corporate media. Again, I'm going to let some one else do this.

"in surveys carried out by the Center for Studies in Communication of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, those who watched the most television on the Gulf War were the least informed about basic facts of life in the region.

Among the most frequent watchers, 32 percent thought Kuwait was a democracy; only 23 per cent were aware that there were other occupations in the Middle East besides Iraq's, and only 10 per cent had heard of the intifada, the most sustained revolt in modern Middle East history.

When queried as to which three nations vetoed the recent United Nations resolution calling for an international peace conference (the United States, Israel, and Dominica), 14 per cent correctly identified the U.S., but another 12 per cent thought it has to be Iraq. The Center's polls showed that only 13 per cent of these TV viewers were aware of what official U.S. policy was toward Iraq before the August 2 invasion." (From 'For Palestine' by Jay Murphy page iii)

What I'm going to do is ask 'Why?'.

Why don't we have a media which attempts to be unbiased and objective?

Why don't we have a media which presents all relevant information rather than selecting some information for prominent display and largely rejecting other information?

Why don't we have a wider diversity of opinion in the media?

Firstly, there is a weighty concentration of ownership.

We all know the media barons, the Blacks, Maxwells, Murdochs, Berlusconis, and O'Reillys.

It requires a great amount of start up capital to get up and going in this business and that restricts ownership of major media to a tiny number of the super rich or to giant mega corporations themselves owned by a slightly larger circle of the super rich.

The point is not that the owner directly influences what goes into the newspaper, although that can happen as former *Daily Mirror* journalist John Pilger shows in his book *Hidden Agendas.*

The point is that there is not a 'level playing field' where anyone can set up a media outlet and compete – you have to be enormously wealthy to do so.

Secondly, the primary market for all media, at least all non-State owned media, is not the general public but advertisers.

Who places advertisements? Why corporations of course and it is to them the media is sold, which is why you can have T.V. stations and newspapers without paying for them, or why T.V. stations and newspapers advertise themselves as reaching a large audience.

To look at what this means consider a recent issue of 'The Economist' (That of September 22nd – 28th).
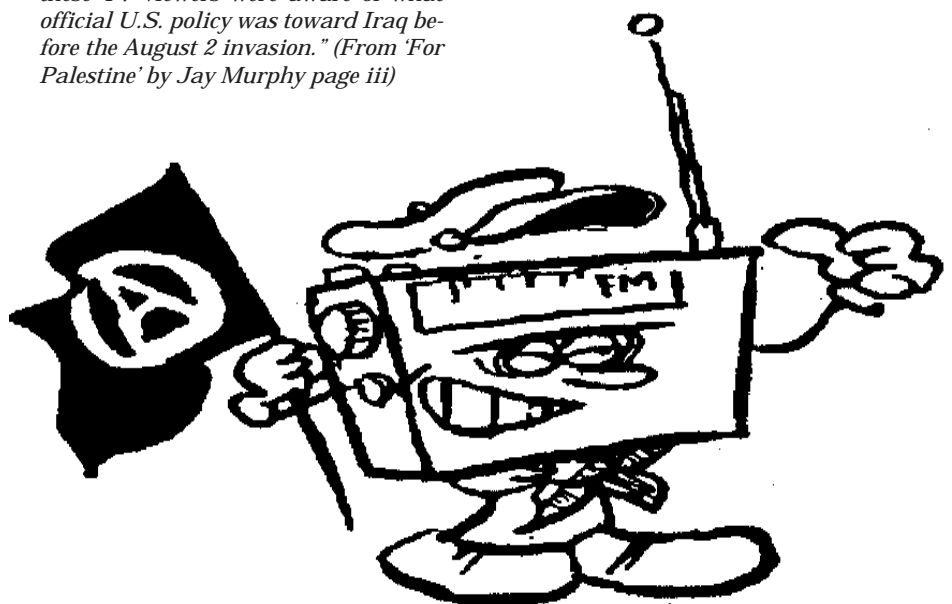
On page 12 we have a clear rejection of the idea that there is any link between US power in the Middle East and the September 11th attacks – *"the idea that America brought the assault on itself is absurd."*

On page 5 we have a full page ad. extolling the virtues of investment in Saudi Arabia, paid for by 'The Ministry of Information' (you couldn't make it up!) of Saudi's ruling family aka government.

On page 27 you have a job advertisement on behalf of Saudi Aramco, the Saudi national oil company.

Clearly it is totally incompatible to sell yourself to these people and to run a piece to the effect that the Middle East has been a battlefield for the competing forces of US Imperialism and indigenous nationalism for decades, and that now that battlefield includes New York.

Given that a major aspect of U.S. Imperialism in the region is the relationship with the rulers of Arabia.

To say such is to be anti-American, or a supporter of Islamic fundamentalism, or to justify terrorism. Which means that at least one segment of the Pentagon is anti-American, supporters of Islamic fundamentalism and justifies terrorism.

How come? Because a 1997 U.S. Department of Defence study found that: *"As part of its global power position, the United States is called upon frequently to respond to international causes and deploy forces around the world. America's position in the world invites attack simply because of its presence. Historical data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist attacks against the United States."* (Quoted in the CATO website http://www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefs/fpb-050es.html)

Now it is not that advertisers order the media not to run a certain story or put pressure on the media, although that can happen.

It is simply that a publication which even in just 25% of its copy ran stories highly critical of corporate power, opinion pieces and editorials questioning the basis of our society, could hardly expect to get advertising revenue from those same corporations.

Thus a publication which did so could not compete in the market place.

Perhaps of more concern in regard to domestic issues is the fact that advertisers are aiming for groups in the 'high income' brackets with the greater disposable income to spend on consumer goods. 'The Irish Times' for instance sells itself by saying "8 out of 10 senior business people read" it.

Thus newspapers, and media in general,

which appeal to the interests and concerns of the better off are more likely to get advertising revenue.

Again doing the opposite will effect your ability to compete.

Thirdly the media, like any industry, is dependant on its supply of raw material.

In this case information. Where does it get this information? What are its sources? In the context of a war the primary sources are government/military, and they do their utmost to make sure it stays that way.

Journalist Peter Preston describes the situation during the Falklands War:

"Those of us who yomped through the Ministry of Defence in the Falklands soon got the changed hang of things. Top chaps in dark suits would summon up the full authority of their office and lie like troopers."

"The Falklands war was more than a distant side show. It hugely impressed the Pentagon. Ensure that reporters are cooped upon on aircraft carriers or minded by Mod male nurses far from the front and, as long as you keep decent clamps on back at the political ranch, there is total information control." (The Guardian 8/10/01)

The United States military, as so often before, took the example from their British colleagues and employed it in Grenada, Panama and the Gulf.

Consider the coverage during the Second Gulf War, and the build up to it.

Firstly we had the reports of Iraqi troops massed at the Saudi border poised to invade the personal property of the House of Saud, a gang of oil rich religious fanatic depots. O.K. I'm lying Saudi Arabia was not described like that, but nonetheless Iraqi armour was about to sweep down into Saudi in a Hitlerian blitzkrieg. We were originally told that

U.S. troops were going out there to protect Saudi Arabia. Except this story was completely false. As was later admitted by U.S. Generals, and known to be false both by the media (but never reported) and the Pentagon, because satellite photos existed which saw Iraqi withdrawals back into Iraq's pre-August 2nd 1990 borders.

Secondly we had the 'Iraqi soldiers kill babies by throwing them out of incubators' story. Again false. Not only had the Iraqi Army not done this but the hospital where it was supposed to have happened didn't even have enough incubators for the 300 babies supposedly slain.

Thirdly we had the "smart bombs". Which is probably the single thing which will be most remembered from the Second Gulf War (except for Iraqis who will remember deaths, injuries and fear). Except even if we accept the premise that these "smart bombs" only hit what they were supposed to and that what they were supposed to hit was not power stations, bridges, water works etc.., still only 7% of the missiles and bombs used were "smart".

We saw just how "smart" these bombing campaigns are during the air strikes on Yugoslavia. The difference then was that with a body of international journalists on both sides of the frontline it was far harder for the Pentagon and the MoD to impose total control on what was being reported. Nonetheless the factors detailed above still worked to ensure that when "accidents" happened the spin, slant, and interpretation given to events remained one which favoured the war effort.

In other words a report of an event which exposed the reality of war, but coupled with an interpretation which accepted the paradigm of the war party.

For example: 'the bombing is killing innocent people and not doing the job,

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we must send ground troops'(assuming that a full scale invasion would not do the same and not questioning the goals but just the means).

Or: 'what can NATO do to ensure that there are no civilian deaths?' (supporting the war effort, assuming that such a thing is possible and assuming that the apparatchiks of NATO give a fuck so long as their bloody handwork is not on the Six o'clock news) .

We now have defence experts (creatures of Ministries of Defence and Defence industries), retired officers and serving officers pontificating upon what is happening in Afghanistan. Surely a more accurate answer to that question could be given by interviewing survivors from the bombing of Japan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iraq and Yugoslavia.

We are seeing maps with troop dispositions, bases, and aircraft carriers surely pictures of the effects of previous wars would be just as apt. We have diagrams of warplanes showing their attributes but no pictures of what they do to the bodies of human beings.

So what impact is this having on the American media?

As it stands today hardly a glimmer of dissent is tolerated. According to film director Michael Moore :

"Our media, it's so pathetic and embarrassing"

"I've been called by the CBC, BBC, and ABC in Australia.

I've been on the nightly newscast of every Western country practically, and I've not had a single call from the American networks……Because I'm going to go on there and say the things they don't want to hear. I'm going to be off message. I'm not going to sing with the chorus. And the media is part of the chorus now. They're wearing their ribbons and they're not being objective journalists and they're not presenting all sides." (Toronto Globe and Mail 6/10/01)

Michael Moore, has had, in a further silencing of dissent, the distribution of his latest book halted by the publishing company (owned by Rupert Murdoch) which was bringing it out.

Furthermore at least two journalists have been fired for criticising President George Bush Jnr. The boss of one of them wrote a front page apology for the fact a member of his staff had criticised Dubya ending it with:
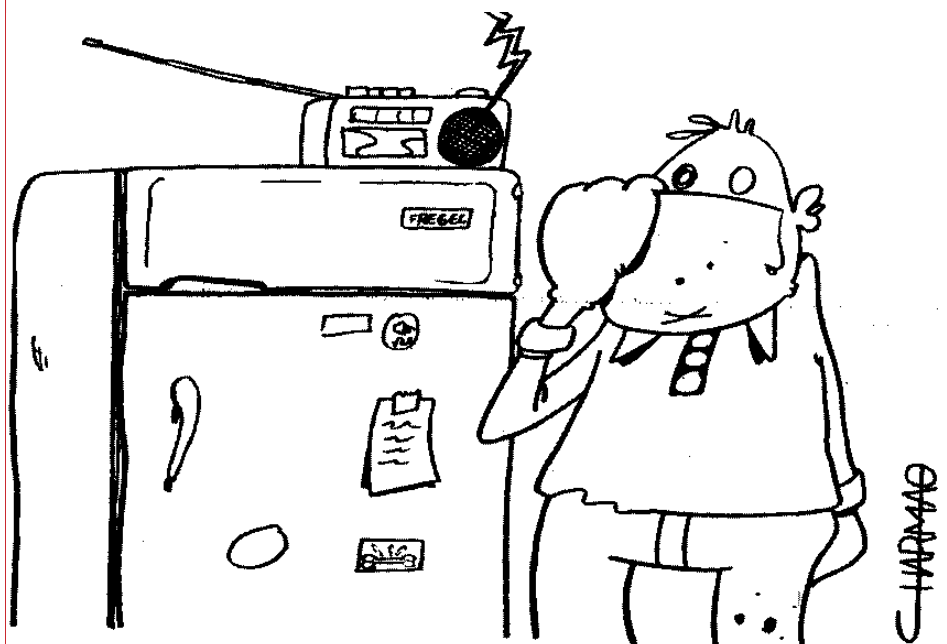
"May God Bless President George W. Bush and other leaders. And God Bless America!". (Toronto Globe and Mail 6/10/01)

Outside the United States, there have been more dissenting voices and more of a debate in the media.

Still it has been primarily dissenting voices questioning the means not the end of Western policy, questioning the injustice of sanctions on Iraq or the injustice of support for Israeli Defence Forces repression but not relating this to corporate investments in the Middle East oilfields.

Or debate within a very narrow spectrum which accepts the supposed goals of Western military intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia, with the dissenting voices merely asking for more United Nations involvement or to give more opportunity for the Taliban to hand over Bin Laden.

Never are the dots joined and the connection made between corporate investments and markets in the Middle East, military intervention to defend them, support for client states such as Israel and Saudi Arabia to do likewise, the rise of indigenous nationalist movements and September 11th's attacks. There is a war for control of the Middle East, and there has been for decades, but you might never know it.

Anarchist news and discussion online

Ireland

Ainriail - a low volume list that carries announcements of Irish anarchist activity and occasional news reports. Send an email to ainriail-request@struggle.ws with the subject subscribe or visit
http://www.struggle.ws/mailman/listinfo/ainriail
Irish Anarchism - a moderated discussion list, email irishanarchism-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or visit
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/irishanarchism/

International

Ainfos - international anarchist news-service, visit http://www.ainfos.ca for the latest news
Organise - international discussion list for anarchists who agree with the organise list statement. See
http://struggle.ws/org_list.html
Anarchist Platform - organising list for anarchists who broadly agree with the sort of ideas in this magazine and who agree with the anarchist platform statement, see
http://struggle.ws/platform.html

More on the web at http://struggle.ws/wsm.html