
Red & Black *Revolution*

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A magazine of libertarian communism

Number 2

Which way to the



Revolution?



**Chomsky on
anarchism**

**IRA: Hungerstrikes
to Ceasefire**

A—Comment—A

Welcome to issue two of *Red & Black Revolution*.

The idea of revolution is central to anarchism. In this issue we look at just what a successful revolution requires and in what conditions it is likely to occur. We bring news of work being done now to build a new anarchist movement in Russia and of the links being forged between anarchist organisations in Europe.

Anarchism however does not sit and wait for the revolution. It fights today against all aspects of capitalist oppression. This means working alongside people who do not share our world view but who do wish to tackle some of the worst aspects of capitalism. We look at the way broad based projects, aimed at combating the worst elements of capitalism can become part of the mechanism ensuring social stability.

Unions, community groups and unemployment centres all represent at least in part peoples' desire to fight back. Capitalism in recognising this has adopted two strategies. The earlier one was of direct attack, attempts to smash these organisations. As capitalist control mechanisms have developed and the need for stability increased new methods have been devised, ones that aim to incorporate activists into the control mechanisms of capitalism itself.

So we have unions that argue for competitiveness, unemployed groups that argue for funding cuts and community groups in partnerships with the same companies that are devastating their communities. Anarchists involved in fighting alongside fellow workers today have to be aware of where these problems arise and how we can start to tackle them.

Back Issues

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featured articles on the collapse
of the left, the new organisations
needed, Russia 1917-21, Marx &
the state, syndicalism, the EZLN
& more

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About the WSM

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

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

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

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

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

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



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1995 - 1996

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Red & Black Revolution is published by the Workers Solidarity Movement. The deadline for the next issue is June, 1996. Submissions are welcome and should be sent either as 'text only' files on Mac or PC format computer disks or typed on plain white paper. Disks are preferred. Letters are also welcome. All correspondence should be sent to Red & Black Revolution, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland.

Incorporation

A Spoonful of Sugar...

There are many ways in which governments can prevent opposition. Some are more open and obvious than others. When police attack protests, when pickets are broken up, when opposition is imprisoned it is clear what the State is up to. However there are subtler tactics, one is the way in which opposition movements are 'incorporated' and made part of the system. This article looks at some examples, mostly from Ireland, but the same process can be seen at work internationally.

So what is incorporation and how does it happen? It is the process by which radical individuals or groups are integrated into the State structure thus neutralising them as an effective opposition. Incorporation is integral to the operation of most advanced Capitalist countries. It is a mechanism by which, day to day, opposition can be diluted and disarmed.

Incorporation is mediated through an organisation's needs for funding. Whoever pays the piper calls the tune. This old saying is well understood by the State and the bosses who are prepared to pay a limited amount in order to ensure social stability.

Basically an incorporated opposition group rather than fighting against the State has become a quasi-independent arm of that State. They are the spoonfuls of sugar which aid the medicine in its passage downwards. Some are born incorporated, some become so. One example of an organisation conceived and born as incorporated is the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU).

The INOU is a federation of anti-unemployment groups and union funded advice centres. They also have individual membership for any unemployed person who wants to join. The INOU claims that it represents the unemployed in the 32 counties. Hence the by-line in all their publications; *"the unemployed-speaking for ourselves, fighting for our rights"*. In practice they answer mainly to their funders rather than to their members.

More directly the State may enter what the Irish government describe as *"social dialogue arrangements"* in the PCW (Programme for Competitiveness and Work.) This is the latest in a series of national wage agreements signed between employers, unions and government in Ireland that tie the unions into wage moderation and a promise of industrial peace.¹ These agreements have wider pretensions to bring about a form of consensus politics selling the lie that we're all in the same boat. It gives the bosses the stable conditions they need to keep raking in the profits.

In April 1995, the Irish Minister for Enterprise and Employment Richard Bruton,

announced a 15% cutback in Community Employment Schemes². There was no opposition from the parliamentary 'socialists' of Labour and Democratic Left as both were part of the government that was implementing the cuts! There was, of course, some opposition from unions, church groups and community groups. One small group, the Scheme Workers Alliance, even attempted to organise a scheme workers' strike to coincide with the European week of action against unemployment.

Publicly the INOU were loud in their opposition to the cuts. But in their April 1995 bulletin they published their more considered response. They had carried out a survey among all their affiliates. The purpose of this was to ask members how they thought the cutbacks should be implemented.

While everyone was busy making friends unemployment in the inner city has increased by 30%

The report found that there was a high degree of consensus among the affiliated groups that responded. There was a preference for selective cutbacks. They were in favour of eliminating some projects at the end of their 12 month period and *"targeting specific projects for protection against any cutbacks"*. The survey showed

"That there was a clear agreement that less effective projects should be 'weeded out', this method was seen to be in the interest of the participants on the weak project and to the benefit of other projects".

It should be said, in fairness, that not all groups went along with this. Some felt that the approach was *"divisive"* and wanted no role in setting criteria for cuts.

As it happened, on this occasion, the government was just testing the waters. As

such they must have been delighted to see a group claiming to represent the unemployed telling them how they should take their medicine. The INOU and nearly all of its affiliates had proved to be classic cases of incorporation in action.

Partners in Progress?

The Dublin Inner City Partnership is another such example. It is one result of the PESP deal (see footnote 1) signed in 1991. It was established to *"take a fresh and radical approach to the issue of long-term unemployment"*³. The stated aim was to bring together employers, government agencies and community groups to co-operate on job creation. The real deal goes back to the idea of social partnership and keeping areas of the inner city (where generations of unemployment and deprivation could explode into anger) stable and under control.

The 'partnership' is part of the whole government strategy of agreement and alliance between bosses and workers. This is the idea of social partnership put forward in successive national agreements since 1987. In the past real struggles have emerged from Dublin inner city, e.g. the Corporation rent strike in the 1970s. The powers that be are prepared to be generous or so it would appear. The partnership's programme for action 1992-1993 was hoping for £10 million⁴. But addressing the real problems would cost a hell of a lot more. For example, a massive programme of State housing and a Corporation rent freeze would go some way towards solving Dublin's housing crisis but it would cost many times this figure.

The 'partnership' has incorporated potentially radical groups like the Larkin Unemployed Centre, the Building Allied Trade Union and the National Painters Union and companies like Guinness who have been responsible for the loss of hundreds of jobs in the inner city. The State too gets well represented with FAS, CERT (State training agency for catering) and the Eastern Health Board on the board⁵. Everyone is supposed to have a shared interest in helping the unemployed.

As a policing exercise it has worked. Unions, unemployed groups and community groups keep the peace in some of the most deprived areas of Dublin. In some cases this policing aim was quite specifically laid out. A community leadership course has been set up. The aims are given as:

"To enhance the skills and expertise of local community activists and to develop an effective response by local organisations to the growth of the complex problems with which they are faced."

Reading between the lines the desire is to take out effective, active community leadership and re-educate them in the new realities of 'partnership'. While everyone was busy making friends unemployment in the inner city has increased by 30% between the launch in 1991 and July 1994.⁶

Other groups do not start off incorporated. Community groups, tenants' organisations, women's groups and other such groups are often founded with an agenda for change. These groups result from people organising to better their lives. They wish to educate and organise but usually arise from people agitating around a particular issue. Those who want change find themselves opposed by those who wish to keep the status quo. They are drawn into struggle with existing power groups, especially the State.

As these community based organisations grow and develop, their need for funding often leads them away from their original goals. The funders, be they the church, charities, the State or transnational funders like the European Union begin to impose their ideas. The purse comes with strings attached. This immediately leads to professionalisation. Funders always like a manager, co-ordinator, administrator or some such leader they can deal with.

The groups become less democratic, also they begin to water down their original aims. While lip service is still paid to the founding goals in reality they become a dead letter. Anyone raising the original policy is seen as utopian, out of touch or even as a danger to funding! Such groups lose sight of the idea of social change. They often lose *any* sense of having a long-term aim or direction.

Incorporated groups become grant-adicted. Extra funding buys new premises, computers, offices and workers. However then bills for rent, electricity and wages and so on begin to mount up. A vicious spiral is created where funding assumes top priority. This means, firstly, that more time is wasted looking for funding. Secondly and most importantly the funders get a veto over activity they don't like. Activity is dictated by them and by what they will tolerate.

This process of becoming incorporated is described very well in the book "*Community, Art and The State*"⁷ by Owen Kelly. This book describes the development of the community arts movement in Britain. In the late 1960s and early 1970s many wished

to involve ordinary people in art with a view to using it to help effect social change. Increasingly they became obsessed with funding especially from the British Arts Council. He describes how

"naively community artists thought they could take the money and run."

This led to:

"a progressive loss of control over the direction of the movement and its ability to construct a programme to put its aims into practice."

Any debate on ideas or long-term direction was seen as utopian. Later, incorporated groups begin to worry about **any** debate seeing the danger of public splits. They become terrified of scaring funders.



Most funders (especially the state) are clever enough never to provide anywhere near to the amount of funding asked for. The cash dosage is kept deliberately low. This keeps the organisations constantly begging like addicts who can't score enough to feed their habits. The funders drop and take up groups according to the public profile of the group and the trendiness of the issue. If it is international year of the disabled those groups do well and so on.

Destructive fights for funds may break out. In order to keep a good vein open for supply members get on to funding committees themselves and so get in on the game of dividing the cake.

Incorporation in practice

The INOU shows clearly how the mechanism of incorporation functions. It is funded by FAS, the unions, church and State.⁸ It has two members sitting on government committees doling out E.U. cash.⁹ It is registered as a limited company. The main voices in the organisation are its full-time paid officers and the full-time "co-ordinators" of advice centres. According to figures on page 15 of its own 1991 report (see footnote 8) "*Almost half the associa-*

tions (within the INOU) reported that their development had been limited by restrictions placed on them by funders".

The INOU is a good service provider. The advice supplied in the centres is good and professional. As a campaigning organisation it is utterly useless. It confines itself to ineffectual media stunts often bringing in groups like *Machnas* (a professional arts group who put on shows for campaigns like that for the release of the Birmingham 6) to put on a good show "on behalf" of the unemployed. These are not seen as a group to be mobilised in defence of their own rights but 'a deprived section of society' to be helped by professional do-gooders.

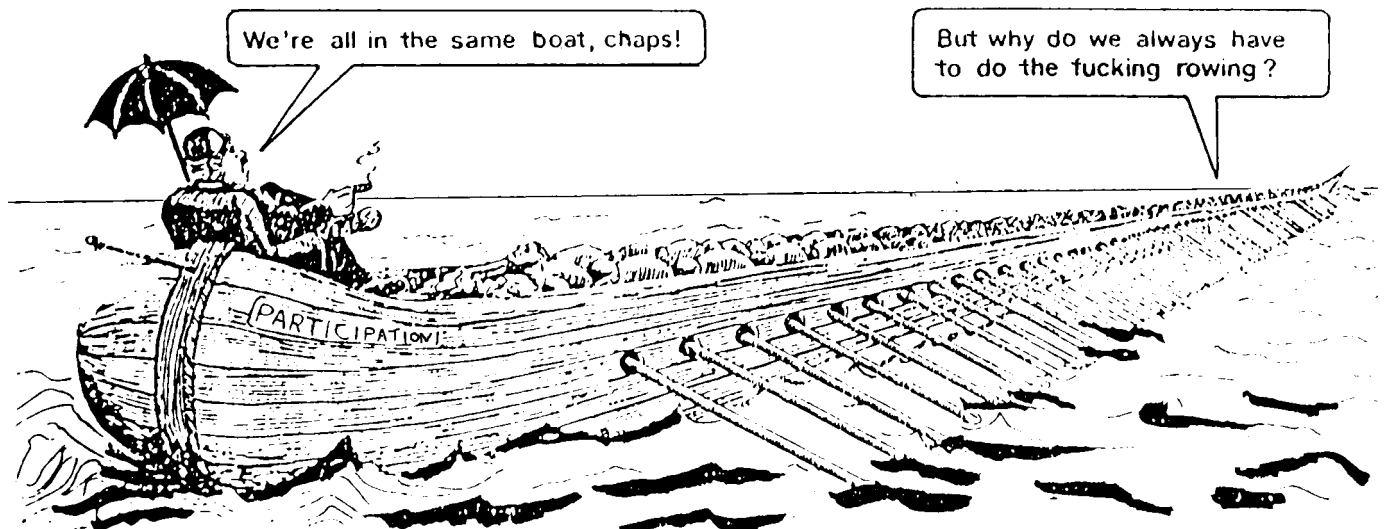
The consequences are seen in cases such as the proposed CE cutbacks. The INOU did little to mobilise scheme workers. But on hearing of the Scheme Workers Alliance's (SWA) attempt to organise a strike and march they sprang into action. They told their co-ordinators to close the INOU centres and organised a march an hour earlier than the SWA march. They refused to co-ordinate with SWA and managed to disrupt and split a potentially good protest.

In another case a campaign was fought within the INOU in 1991 against the then new national deal, the PESP (Programme for Economic and Social Progress). According to an ex-member of its executive the INOU were told, unofficially that if any anti-programme motions were passed their centres would lose union funding. This is how incorporation functions to police and stifles protest and dissent.

Fighting back

Incorporation by its nature is very difficult to fight. As anarchists we know that it is not enough to be back seat drivers in the struggle for social change. We know that we have to become involved in campaigns and struggles; to test our anarchism in practice. This means becoming involved in real campaigns and groups and pointing out and trying to fight incorporation on the ground.

This is not easy. Those within a group that feel it must be fought will find themselves isolated and without funds. So they may



have to fight a double fight both for their rights as women, unemployed, Travellers or whatever and against the 'professional core' of the group.

There are some steps that new groups may take to fight or minimise incorporation. It is important to be open, democratic and entirely transparent (to members) in organisation. It is important that the group reflect a real need and is set up and controlled by the people effected. Nothing will come out of parachuting in activists to 'help' others.

It is also vital that members know and understand fully the shared aims and long-term direction of the group. A group must be fully democratic and be open to continuous debate and education so that all members have a say in where it's going.

It is possible to distinguish two types of community organisation. One is set up to provide services such as an unemployed centre or tenants' rights advice centre. The other specifically to campaign to improve things. Some groups claim to do both but there will be a clash and a choice must be made. Any group which relies on money from institutions like the State will, inevitably, be compromised in fighting against that State. Genuine campaign groups cannot afford to accept this compromise.

Any community group will have to face compromises in its day to day operations. It is important that these are made with the consent and understanding of all the members. Decisions on funding, taking on Community Employment workers and other potential compromises must be made in an open way and on a case by case basis.

The main stumbling block will always be funding. One idea is a tithe. This is a small voluntary subscription from members and supporters. Basically this is how unions were originally built. Tithing means that the money comes from within the group and is totally independent and it gives members a sense of involvement. Campaign groups can sometimes get money from unions. However it is important to appeal directly to workers through their branches. Any approach to the bureaucracy would be avoiding the chance to build genuine solidarity and probably doomed to total failure anyway.

Other fund-raising events such as concerts, pub-quizzes, race nights etc. also have the advantages of involving members directly in raising money and deciding how it is spent.

Usually and unfortunately, this won't raise enough money. For service based groups external funding will have to be sought. This should not be rushed into on a 'grab it where you can' basis. The funding with least strings should be looked into first. Funding should be sought for individual planned projects rather than becoming dependant on a regular income. Where possible multiple funding for projects should be sought to minimise the control of any one funder.

This only applies to voluntary service groups. Genuine political or campaign groups should never accept State money.

Above all the group has to be clear in its aims and direction and know when it is compromising and how far it can go. It must be prepared to debate out compromises on a case by case basis. It must also be realised that, short of a revolution, most long-term campaign and community groups can only go so far and that isn't far enough.

Footnotes

- ¹ The Programme for National Recovery (1987), Programme for Economic and Social Progress (1991) and the Programme for Competitiveness and Work(1993).
 - ² These schemes are government sponsored training where one works for a sum roughly equivalent to the dole (similar schemes exist in England and Northern Ireland and throughout Europe). Though they are voluntary and not workfare as such the training is often quite limited and they are usually a source of cheap labour and are often used to replace full-time jobs .
 - ³ Turning the Tide; A Review of Progress and Future Plans. (Dublin Inner City Partnership 1994)
 - ⁴ This included; £2,531,000 from the European Union (money from the Global Grant, Community Reserve, Horizon, Euroform, N.O.W) and £6,922,000 through FAS and the VEC. Private Enterprise held its side of the "partnership" with a measly £218,999.
- SES = Social Employment Scheme (A former particular scheme now grouped under the general Community Employment banner).
 FAS = The Irish State Employment Service.
 VEC = Vocational Education Committee.
 NOW = New Opportunities for Women scheme.
- It should be pointed out that these figures were expectations and proved wildly optimistic. Also in

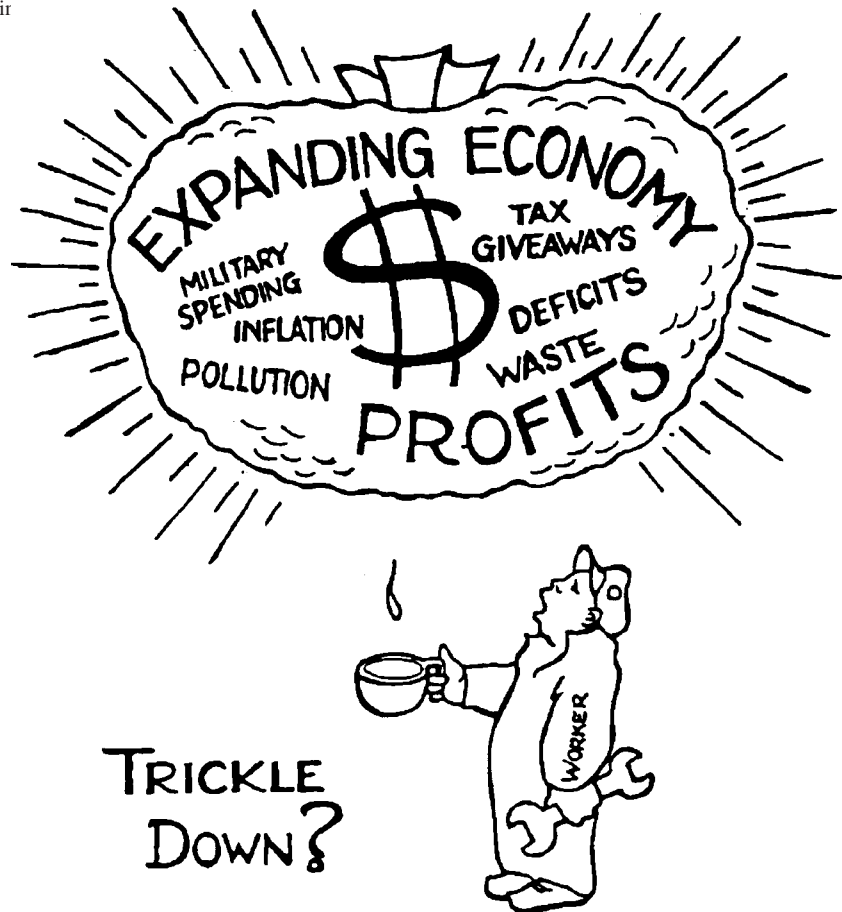
and would have gone in anyway regardless of the programme. At present (according to a source within the partnership) they are budgeting for about £3.5 million over the next 4 years.

- ⁵ ibid. page 36.
 - ⁶ ibid. page 1
 - ⁷ Co-Media, London 1984
 - ⁸ According to its own publication "*Organising against Unemployment*" (Pat Mc Ginn and Michael Allen INOU Dublin 1991) the Projects of INOU centres were funded as follows;
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| FAS/SES | 29% |
| DED/ACE | 3% |
| Trade unions | 14% |
| Local authorities | 9% |
| Irish American/Ireland funds | 9% |
| Religious bodies | 7% |
| Other government agencies | 5% |
| Voluntary trusts | 5% |
| European Community | 3% |
| Combat Poverty Agency | 3% |
| Other sources | 12% |

FAS is the Irish State Employment service. DED/ACE were the employment schemes in the North when the report was published.

⁹ The total amount available through the EU is huge (though community groups see very little of it). In 1993 the amount of social funds paid to Ireland alone was £312 million along with Regional Development Funds of £464 million. A grand total of £8 billion was promised between 1994 and 1998. Other funders include; the Ireland Fund (set up after the Anglo-Irish Agreement on Northern Ireland and mainly funded through Irish/American business and the US government), the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, funds realised under the Programme for Competitiveness and Work and other direct grants from government departments.

Thanks to Aileen O'Carroll for help in writing this article.



The Dunnes Strike & *Managing Change*

— the two souls of Irish trade unionism.

For three weeks, in June-July, nearly 6,000 mostly young and part-time workers struck against Ireland's largest private sector employer, the firmly anti-union Dunnes Stores, over Sunday trading, zero-hours contracts, the proportion of full-time jobs and other issues. But the principal, and unstated, issues were probably union recognition and the organisation of the newly emergent semi-casual, part-time, young (and mainly female) section of the labour force. The result, while disappointing on the concrete 'economic' issues, was generally greeted as something of a breakthrough on the latter 'political' issues.

Power in the darkness.

The Dunnes Stores strike came upon a sickly, scared and handcuffed trade union movement with the healing touch of restoration. It stood in sharp contrast to the grim series of industrial disputes that preceded it. Previous disputes at Packard, TEAM Aer Lingus, Irish Steel, Pat the Baker, Nolans resulted in demoralising defeats which seemed to deliver further body blows to a downwardly debilitating movement.

Everybody in the labour movement seems to agree on the positive significance of the Dunnes strike. The Biennial Conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in Tralee, which overlapped last July with the final week of the strike, was reportedly overjoyed at the outcome. Peter Cassels, ICTU General Secretary, congratulated the Labour Court on its recommendation.

At the other end of the spectrum responses were even more enthusiastic if with a different focus. *"The Dunnes strike was a turning point"*, said *Socialist Worker*¹. *Militant* declared: *"The Dunnes strike can be the start of a general fight back by the working class"* and *"In many ways it has an historic significance."*²

The Dunnes strike revealed to all that not alone was there still fight left in the trade union movement, but it was present where it was widely unexpected, among young, unorganised, part-time workers. It provided almost the first example in the last three years of a successful strike. Furthermore the Dunnes workers received the almost universal support of the general public, the media, the political parties, the Church, the state (which paid them the dole!), celebrities (even Boyzone!) and the trade union leadership. What refreshment, after the pillorying of the Irish Steel and TEAM craftworkers, the isolation of the Pat the Baker and Nolans Transport strikers, the (varying) sympathy for, but apparent helplessness of the Packard Elec-

tric workers.

Preceding elation was relief, on all sides of the movement. The left dreaded another defeat.³ Even the Congress leaders could see that a defeat for MANDATE⁴ in Dunnes

would be a devastating blow to trade union strength and what place have generals without an army? On top of that Dunnes would have scored this triumph *outside* of the carefully built-up industrial relations machinery to which officialdom is so committed.⁵

Why the Dunnes strike won

Different sectors interpreted the victory in different ways. Two remarkable features of the strike were the professional public relations campaign of MANDATE and the overwhelming support of shoppers in refusing to enter the stores. Michael Foley,



"So long, partner!"

WANT TO HELP OUT?

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

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

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

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the Media Correspondent of the *Irish Times*, under a sub-heading stating, "the Dunnes Stores strike was fought and won on television, radio and in the newspapers", wrote: "The picket line in the Dunnes Stores dispute was not a way of ensuring that the stores remained closed or a method of convincing others not to trade with the company, but a media event, a photo opportunity and an opportunity for sound bites".⁶

On the same page it was reported, in relation to "the success of the strike", that "senior members of the ICTU took the opportunity of the organisation's biennial conference in Tralee this week to hammer home repeatedly to members the importance of using industrial relations procedures to the maximum and the necessity of mobilising public support, as well as industrial muscle, if disputes were going to be fought and won."⁷

Here the accidental is emphasised over the essential. The Dunnes strike revolved around two issues. The first is that MANDATE had the numbers and used them, not least in legally dodgy mass pickets. The second is that the refusal of the company to use the industrial relations procedures underlined the irrelevance of any mediating machinery to the workers without industrial action.

A more satisfying analysis was given by Dermot Connolly writing in *Militant* as follows: "In contrast (to the half-hearted conduct of previous disputes by the unions) the Dunnes strike was superbly organised. They (MANDATE's officials and executive) knew that Dunnes were out to break the union and worked non-stop for six weeks to prepare the membership and counter every attempt by management to sow confusion and split the ranks. A national shop stewards committee was formed along with strike committees in the shops, mass picket-

ing was encouraged. ICTU was pressured into calling for a boycott of Dunnes and urging workers with their suppliers not to pass pickets. They didn't hide behind the need to call ballots before doing this as they have claimed to be the case in other disputes. A glimpse of the real potential power of the trade union movement was shown, and at the same time the fact that all the weaknesses of the unions to-day, the so-called decline in solidarity,⁸ the inability to organise serious struggles comes from the top."⁹

The emphasis here is on shop floor organisation, militancy, industrial solidarity and the mass activity of the members themselves (rather than token picketlines) as the key essentials to the success of the strike.

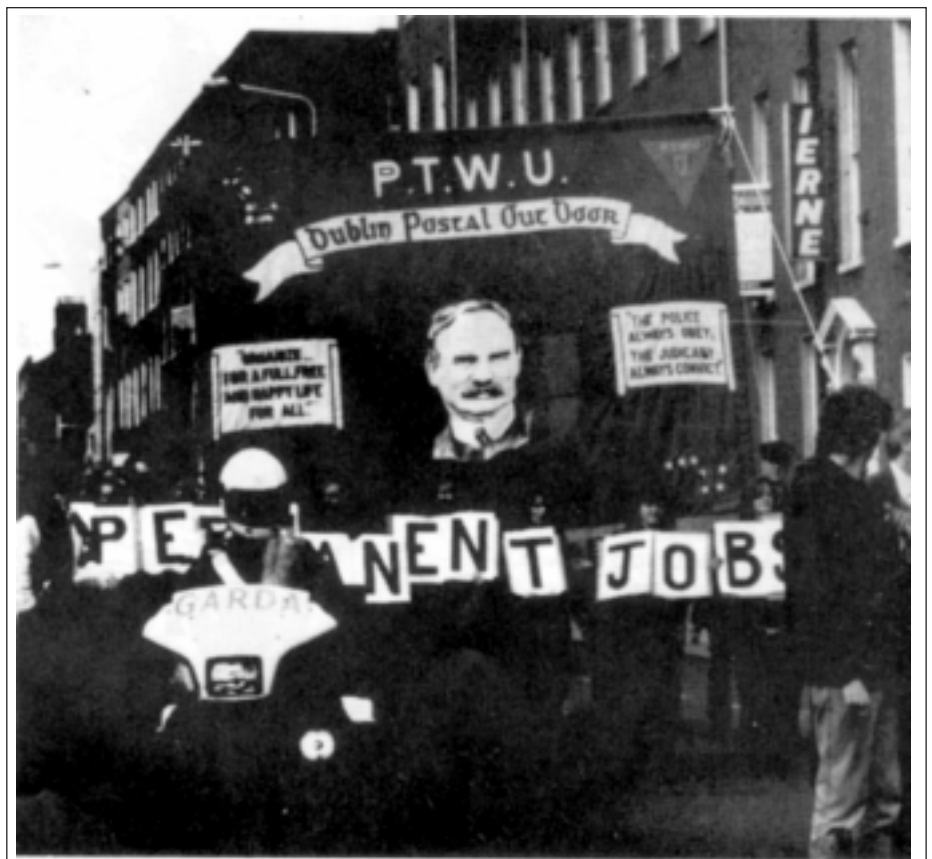
Managing Change

If the Dunnes strike was a 'turning point', there was also another turning point (or rather, another turn of the screw) at the same time. The Biennial Conference of the ICTU showed the second of the two souls of Irish trade unionism. The ICTU planted yet another milestone in the road of 'partnership' and 'consensus' with the adoption of the document *Managing Change* and Motion 19.

Managing Change is the latest development of what Peter Cassels, ICTU General Secretary, refers to as "the trade union agenda for a new century".¹⁰ It follows a long line of Congress documents including "New Forms of Work Organisation" from the 1993 Conference.

The 1993 paper advised a new co-operative or participatory approach to such things as human resource management, world class manufacturing and total quality control: precisely the kind of new management techniques that lay-activists had hitherto been warned about as undermining trade union organisation. Commenting on the paper Peter Cassels said, "to innovate effectively... requires a **high trust environment** with workers and their unions accepted by companies as **partners in the enterprises**."¹¹

Local consensus was taken some steps further at this year's conference, where 1995's



theme paper was *Managing Change*. The *Irish Times* précisised its contents thus: "Accepting that global markets and the speed of technological change now make company restructuring an almost constant process, Congress wants member-unions to become pro-active in this situation. Traditionally unions have resisted change and have focused on defending members' rights. ICTU wants to reverse that role."¹²

Plainly Congress has no problem with the logic of redundancies and worsened conditions. As the trade union leadership entered into a joint economic, social and (on many issues) political strategy with the government and the employers through the National Programmes, embracing austerity in the '80s, it has now accepted a consensus approach to new management techniques and 'rationalisation', in the individual firm, embracing competitiveness in the '90s. At both levels the same strategy is applied: accommodation rather than resistance. At both levels the same justification is given: let us get in on it, in order to influence it!

Myth and Reality

The reality of the workplace is remote from the myth of cosy partnership. Relentlessly employers have continued to 'rationalise' and 'restructure' with redundancies, natural wastage, conversion to contract labour, new 'yellowpack' starting rates, flexibility and new work practices often gained by threats of closure. It's not just at Packard that things thought long-buried, like straight wage cuts or longer working weeks, have returned from labour history. The very unions themselves are being undermined by their 'social partners' through the dismantling of shop floor organisation, 'no-strike' clauses, generosity to non-union people and, of course, 'human resource' techniques.

Matt Merrigan, former President of Congress, says it in his own inimitable style: "Trade unionists in the workplace see no evidence of the shared duties, responsibilities and decision-making that are inferred in the texts of these programmes. Consensus and partnership are not in the lexicon of individual employers at plant level, rather it is: comply or else."¹³ Perhaps the current President of Congress might give us a lexicon of the companies with a "high trust environment". Aer Lingus, Allied Irish Banks....Zoe Developments?

This year's model, *Managing Change* develops workplace partnership from the general operation and development of the firm into the specific area of 'change'. Thus Congress addresses a current concern of the pundits of capital: the globalisation of capital and the consequent 'need' for rationalisation and 'downsizing' as general and constant features rather than just in the odd ailing company. It also addresses the continuing restructuring, part privatisation and exposure to competition of the semi-state sector - as seen in the past at An Post, Irish Steel, TEAM and in the coming

year at the ESB¹⁴ and Telecom Eireann.

A new world?

The motif of 'competitiveness' running through workplace partnership and the current union-employer-government agreement (the Programme for Competitiveness and Work) does not make a good match with trade unionism, which one was led to believe arose as an antidote to competition between companies and between workers themselves.¹⁵ It blends well though with a revamped world-view placing the trade union eggs in the basket of the EU, the Maastricht Treaty, a strong currency and the European Social Charter. A world view that sees itself getting behind the perceived dawn of new technology. A world views that seeks to sail with a restructuring capitalism and the ascendancy of new right ideology. One which compensates for the decline in labour militancy by seeking to place trade union relevance elsewhere than in the class struggle. This results in a half-belief in the end of the working class as an entity and the transformation of its members into consumers.

It is a political economy based on the OECD, the ESRI and the NES¹⁶. Once, and not so long ago, the economic policies of trade union leaders was based largely on state enterprise and the public sector. This underlying doctrine has been replaced without acknowledgement. A discredited statism has been replaced by a fatalistic adoption of the market; a loss of belief in any kind of 'socialist' alternative replaced with a 'new realism' that contends there is no basic alternative.

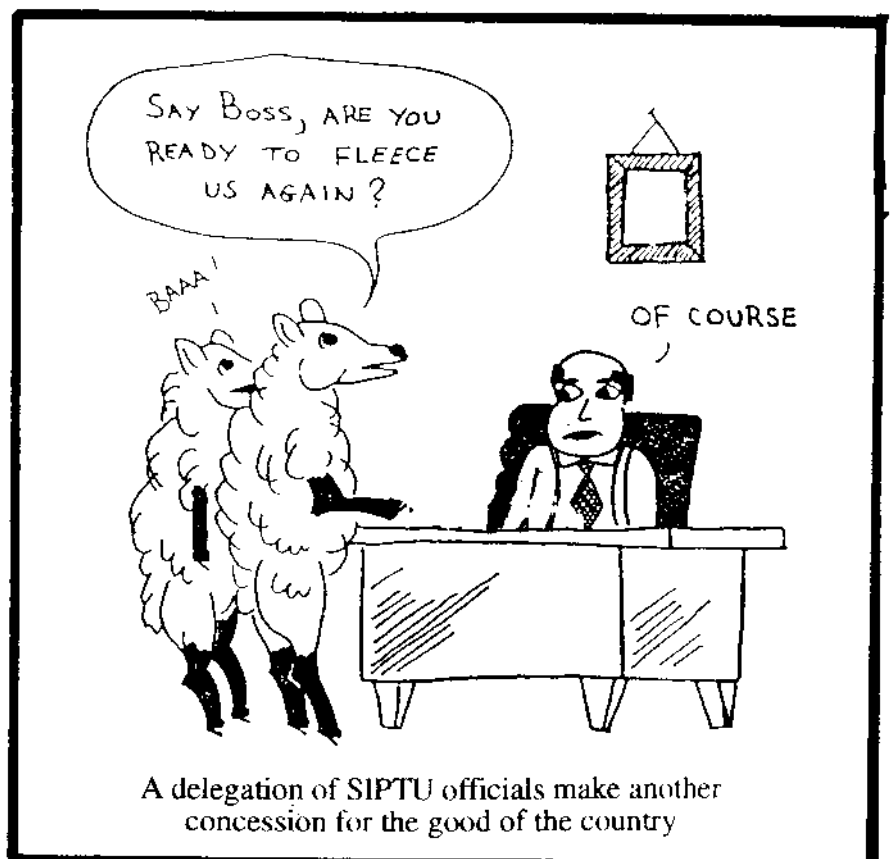
This creeping conversion has to some extent been fuelled latterly by the collapse of

the 'Soviet' bloc, towards which many union leaders and backroom gurus sidewardly looked.¹⁷

Just how far into the business ethos things have gone is illustrated in the ICTU 1995 Pre-Budget Submission, which declares: "Improved competitiveness is crucial for economic growth and job creation and must be protected from upward pressure on pay and inflation." Once it was the employers and government ministers who said that wage rises cause inflation and unemployment. John O'Dowd, General Secretary of the Civil and Public Services Union (CPSU), writing in the *Sunday Tribune* in August about the need for confidence in the "change process" in Telecom Eireann (i.e. the cutting of several thousand jobs) said, "competition is here to stay and Telecom staff depend on achieving, and sustaining competitive advantage within this new environment."¹⁸

As with much of the unions' thinking over the past decade *Managing Change* is a legislation of existing practice. There is nothing new about union officials arguing for an employer's proposals - or a compromise version of them - on the job. Congress brought this to a high point in 1994, the centenary of its foundation, by becoming the 'persuader' in Irish Steel and TEAM Aer Lingus alongside employers, politicians and the media. Actually, *Managing Change* and Motion 19 arose directly out of a review group established by Congress to investigate 'what went wrong' in these two cases (where some workers were hard to persuade).

Managing change - never had a policy a more apt title. The system requires regu-



A delegation of SIPTU officials make another concession for the good of the country

lar change, to ensure competitiveness and profitability. There's a need for an apparatus - complete with apparatchiks - for its smooth operation. The rough edges of the employers' proposals may have to be trimmed. The workforce will be delivered up to accept the essence of the changes all systematised through a prepared procedure. No more cliff-side ballots, no more embarrassing blockades on the Airport Road, no more 'workers vote for suicide' newspaper articles, no (perish the thought) importation of Air France-type direct action resistance.

In the new schema, of course, it is the rank and file who live with the changes, while the leaders enter the corridors of power and increase their salaries. (The three General Officers of SIPTU receive

£70,000 per annum, according to the *Sunday Independent*.¹⁹ That's before car and expenses.)

Bureaucrats as policemen.

Managing Change extends the domain of the persuader and of the police officer within the industrial relations process. Peter Cassels, answering criticism²⁰ that the ICTU might "whip the trade unions into line", said: "And if that requires us telling a trade union they're off-side we'll say they're off-side. And if it requires telling union members they're off-side, then we'll tell them they're off-side."²¹

In defending the proposal for 'a pro-active approach to changes in work-practices' he said: "We have a choice, we can leave it to the employers to set the agenda and do what trade unionists have been doing in other countries and react. Or we can try and shape the future." The *Irish Times* report continues: "He cited the fight to save jobs at Waterford Crystal and the Cost and Competitiveness Review in the ESB and Telecom Eireann as situations in which unions have seized the initiative in shaping change".²²

These citations were unfortunate and upon them any 'traditionalist' can rest his or her case. The instance at Waterford Crystal was a signal defeat, the breaking of arguably the strongest and most class conscious group of Irish workers at the time. The ESB and Telecom reviews are all about the loss of thousands of the best (and best-unionised) jobs in the country and the unions' happy cooperation with same!

Motion 19 puts *Managing Change* into specific points of policy. And here alarm bells ring as Congress once again ties the hands of its members. Motion 19 proposed "the conclusion of a Framework Document with employer bodies on how change in the workplace should be negotiated."²³ Congress not only want to "lead the charge for change" (Peter Cassels again) but it wants a centralised agreement to govern how it is approached. The local element as a feature of workplace partnership didn't get very far, did it?

This codified procedure would, without doubt, lay down how, when and where to negotiate and, above all, what to negotiate. Any pre-cooked negotiation schedule would have to give an assurance to the employers that the unions would not rule out negotiation, at least, on any proposal from local employers. Then the matter would go to the Labour Relations Commission (as specified in Motion 19) after which workers would be expected to ballot (or the Editorials would want to know why not) on a 'compromise' third-party recommendation.

As the National Programmes have, since 1987, removed the (offensive) power of workers to put claims to their own employers, this new centralised departure would remove, or severely undermine, the (defensive) power of workers to reject adverse changes in their own employment. Any

'framework agreement' that emerges should go to a ballot and be campaigned against.

Furthermore Motion 19 calls for a measure that you might, if you were not up to speed with the charge to the right of the ICTU, have expected union leaders to denounce if IBEC, the employers' organisation, proposed it. This is the introduction of mandatory use of third party machinery in procedures and disputes²⁴. The first consideration is the fatal delay and sidetracking that can be involved in processing urgently needed industrial action through the labyrinth. The second is the bias and the malleability of the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour Court.

Compulsory conciliation is, of course, well established in Irish industrial relations: in SIPTU (in practice), in the public service and legally for 'individual' disputes under the 1990 Industrial Relations Act. What Motion 19 would do is to extend and copperfasten it into (here it comes again) national arrangements with government and employer organisations.

Finally, the Motion establishes aggregate ballots where in certain situations Congress can insist on a single vote on a change package. This is Congress' response to the Irish Steel crisis in which the craftworkers rejected the company's 'survival' plan which the majority (mainly SIPTU) general workers accepted. Congress and SIPTU supported the plan and will support similar plans in future situations. So *Managing Change* infers that the rejection of worsened conditions by an independent section is perceived, not as an opportunity upon which to build stronger opposition, but as a problem to be overcome by the majority votes of the already persuaded. This

..it is the rank and file who live with the changes, while the leaders enter the corridors of power

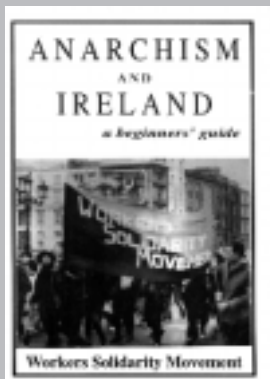
pseudodemocracy takes no account of valid craft demarcations or cases where one section are asked to take more odious changes than another.

Two Souls

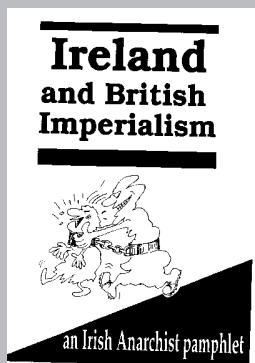
Overlapping as it was with the ICTU Conference, the Dunnes Stores strike (and its resolution) provided a special occasion to view the two souls of Irish trade unionism together. Connections between the two were real enough, and some others were made by Congress leaders adopting the Dunnes experience and by journalists juxtaposing two major industrial events.

Pamphlets from the Workers Solidarity Movement

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The Dunnes dispute was used specifically by Phil Flynn as an example of the need for "mandatory third-party reference of disputes".²⁵ Through Dunnes and their refusal to even attend the LRC - the 'innovators' have been able to portray mandatory mediation as a constraint upon the employers while overlooking its suffocating effect on workers' action. This portrayal is easily achieved because third-party referral is now almost automatic on the union side, because of the unions' own dispute procedures and because of the prevalent lack of confidence among workers about having a straight fight. It's the employers who are perceived to be beyond this due process and who need to be tied into it through a tripartite commitment.

Commentators painted the strike as a watershed to which the ICTU's Tralee agenda corresponded. Pdraig Yeates, Industry and Employment Correspondent of the *Irish Times* first appeared to acknowledge the **differences** between them: "In many ways the Dunnes Stores strike is a very traditional one, about defending basic workers' rights rather than mediating change to meet the needs of 'global competition'. This perception notwithstanding he goes on, "yet delegates are keenly aware that the Dunnes Stores dispute is just as relevant to the ICTU's modern agenda." By way of explanation for this relevance he continues: "It is the first national strike involving a new generation of part-time workers who are only just beginning to join unions."²⁶ This was precisely the strike's significance, but not its relevance to the modern agenda.

Perhaps Pdraig Yeates was reflecting the connection which Congress thinkers make to justify the modern agenda, as an adaptation to the emergent generation of casualised and unorganised young workers - through consensus rather than struggle! In *Towards A New Century*, a veritable manifesto of new unionism, Peter Cassels writes: "Labour market changes are also producing a 'new' and growing workforce of part-time, temporary, casual, contract and home workers... The changing composition of the workforce is changing the content of the trade union agenda which in turn is changing how we process that agenda."²⁷

The Dunnes strike has demonstrated that the road ahead, in trade union terms, for this new generation is not the 'new agenda'. A good old fashioned strike has more claim to that (more but not all - some real tactical head-scratching is needed, for example, in relation to struggle at mobile multinationals).

"The start of a general fightback" it could be, yet even its own resolution was a steady reminder that the other soul (the consensus loving one) envelopes even the great Dunnes strike with its deadening presence. An outsider might conclude that MAN-

DATE halted the march just when they had Dunnes on the run. One insider described it as, "Let's not lose, rather than win".²⁸

Of course the recommendation to call off the strike after three weeks may have been prudent, rather than weak-kneed, leadership: avoiding a long industrial campaign with raw recruits. The same insider claims, however, that "the general feeling of the activist layer in MANDATE was against the Labour Court recommendation"²⁹ The *Sunday Tribune* quotes one shop steward as saying, "we've been sold out."³⁰ The recommendation was accepted by nearly four to one in MANDATE.

One way or the other, a great triumph of the strike was that a powerful and determinedly anti-union employer, employing a 'new' and casualised workforce, was forced to grant de facto recognition to the union. But the settlements on the particular issues upon which the strike was fought represent rather modest gains and, in some cases, could set unfavourable precedents in the retail industry.

The settlement

Compulsory Sunday working was accepted and extended to the previously exempt pre-October 1994 workers. It seems a kind of mockery that European law and practice is continually used to get workers to take changes and comply with the norm while Ireland is the only state in the EU where Sunday trading is permitted without any regulation.

The elimination of 'zero-hour' (on-call) contracts was a major achievement. Under the settlement there's a minimum of fifteen hours a week work for part-timers and split shifts are abolished.

Although the Labour Court recommend time-and-a-half for Sunday working (as against Dunnes' demand for flat-rate working for new workers) this sets up two pay rates for the same work (senior workers

keep double time) and is below rates enjoyed in some other union stores. On the ratio of full-time to part-time posts the settlement (two hundred extra full-time posts) makes no qualitative difference in a workforce of 6,000.

Our 'insider' reflects as follows: "In drawing up a balance sheet of the strike it would be wrong to say that defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory, or even that the outcome was a draw. From where this dispute started, the gains won were greater than the concessions made. Dunnes set out to break the union, and achieved the opposite. The union is stronger than at any time in the past. The members are more confident and a new layer of militants will come into activity."³¹

a ..determinedly anti-union employer... was forced to grant de facto recognition to the union.

Perhaps the main achievement was the 'political' one of the moderately successful arrival of this large sector of atomised young workers - feared by some to be beyond the pale of trade unionism - on the stage of organised working class struggle. Plus, perhaps, the uplifting impact of the strike on the consciousness of workers in general.

It might have been expected that in the aftermath of the strike the official trade union milieu arrived at some new conclusions on how to organise industrial struggle. This certainly didn't happen



immediately. At the end of the same month, at another retail giant, the Marks and Spencer stores in Dublin, there was another three-week strike, this time by SIPTU warehouse workers centring on changes in shift patterns. On approaching the (Mary St) store it was evident that while the usual amount of shoppers was down there was still a good number inside. Where had the remarkable support of shoppers gone in three weeks? A large part of the answer was surely that the vast majority of the workers, including the shop assistants who are MANDATE members, were still working away! It seemed that the Dunnes strike had made little impact on the official world of SIPTU (who were absurdly asking shoppers not to patronise Marks and Spencer where their fellow trade unionists were quite clearly waiting to serve them). Neither had MANDATE been greatly effected as they seemed to have developed a sudden attack of forgetfulness, thereby enabling the very thing they'd feared a month earlier - the public passing the picket and a staff there to meet them.

A SIPTU picketer offered the information that they didn't want to ask the MANDATE members to come out at that stage. Some of the picketers did not maintain this relaxed view of the picketline throughout, expressing strong disagreement with large vehicles, insisting on a relaxed approach of their own. Part of the settlement of this strike was, incidentally, the establishment of a joint participative review of the warehouse operation which sounds awfully like an early application of *Managing Change*.

Padraig Yeates finished his thoughtful *Irish Times* commentary with: "*The Dunnes Stores dispute highlights the crisis facing the trade union movement. It will be up to the delegates (to the ICTU Conference) this week to decide if Congress is coming up with the right solutions.*"³² At the end of that week it would seem to be confirmed that the (at least) moderate success of the Dunnes strike, and the methods it employed, militant, organised and imaginative, met the crisis, and highlighted that Congress is coming up not with solutions but with problems.



Footnotes

¹ *Socialist Worker*, 8-21 Jul. '95.

² *Militant*, Jul.-Aug. '95.

³ Sporadic victories such as Blooms Hotel (Dublin), the Eastern Health Board (IMPACT) and Knightingales (Dublin store) had been stars too remote to lighten the darkness.

⁴ MANDATE, the main striking union, representing most Dunnes workers.

⁵ The ICTU's public intervention emphasised Dunnes' refusal to co-operate with the Labour Relations Commission.

⁶ *Irish Times*, 8-7-95.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The desert that was Dunnes answered, belatedly but baldly, the comment of the General Secretary of SIPTU (Ireland's largest union), Billy Attley, at a Union conference, that the Pat the Baker strikers (1993) had been beaten not by anything the unions did or didn't do but by the "lack of solidarity" (by which he meant, people bought the bread).

⁹ *Militant*, op.cit.

¹⁰ P. Cassels, *Towards A New Century in Trade Union Century*, ed. D.Nevin (Mercier Press, 1994) p.427.

¹¹ *Sunday Tribune*, 1-8-93 (my emphasis).

¹² Padraig Yeates, Industrial and Employment Correspondent, *Irish Times*, 3-7-95.

¹³ Matt Merrigan, *Co-operation is a capitalist asset*, *Irish Reporter No.17* (1995).

¹⁴ Electricity Supply Board.

¹⁵ Peter Cassels was this year appointed to the Competitiveness Advisory Group of the European Union (EU).

¹⁶ The last two are Irish economic think tanks.

¹⁷ Democratic Left are ex-stalinists currently in the Irish governing coalition. An article in their magazine *Times Change* (don't they just) on **The Future of Work** by Sean Kelly ends: "In the global competitive trade wars that are now being witnessed it appears that the only source of job security for workers is satisfied customers." (*Times Change*, Autumn/Winter 1994.).

¹⁸ *Sunday Tribune*, 13-8-95.

¹⁹ *Sunday Independent*, 20-8-95. SIPTU (Services Industrial Professional Technical Union)

²⁰ from TEEU delegate Tim Lawless at Tralee

²¹ *Irish Times* 6-7-95.

²² *Ibid.* 6-7-95.

²³ *Ibid.* 3-7-95.

²⁴ The reporting of this clause as proposing compulsory arbitration has sown confusion. Compulsory arbitration is the compulsory acceptance of a third-party decision while compulsory conciliation (the Motion 19 proposal) is the compulsory referral to a third party for recommendation. There's one hell of a difference, and even I would not expect Congress to suddenly call a complete ceasefire in the class war. Apparently, it was 'clarified' at the Conference that this section was not 'prescriptive' and there would be 'consultation' with unions further on.

²⁵ *Irish Times*, 3-7-95. Phil Flynn, ICTU President, in the same interview, says that Dunnes Stores "*is not anti-union, but non-union*".

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-7-95

²⁷ *Towards a new Century*, P.Cassels, op.cit. p.425.

²⁸ A 'prominent Mandate activist' (anonymous), *Militant* op.cit.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Sunday Tribune*, 9-7-95.

³¹ *Militant*, op. cit.

³² *Irish Times*, 4-7-95.



Which way to the Revolution?

From the 1870's the world has been rocked by revolutions, but all have gone down to defeat. Anarchists believe they understand why previous revolutions have failed, but do we know how a successful revolution can be made? Are there steps we can take today to prepare and nurture such a revolution, or is it a question of waiting for the ripening of time?

The first thing to consider is the kind of revolution that we are fighting for, because the ends we have in mind will, to a large extent, determine the means we use. We are not interested in exchanging one set of rulers for another; when we speak of revolution we do not mean a coup d'état. Anarchist revolution is a fundamental change in the way society is ordered - we want to replace the dictatorship of a minority, not with the dictatorship of another, but with freedom for all.

What we reject is **political** revolution. Whether they use the ballot box or the Armalite, we know better than to trust our would-be leaders. No matter how well-intentioned they may be, a minority cannot deliver real change from above. Real socialism comes from below, through mass participation. As Daniel Webster (American revolutionary) said, *"In every generation, there are those who want to rule well - but they mean to rule. They promise to be good masters - but they mean to be masters."*

A **social revolution**, on the other hand, is a much broader change in society, involving a much greater number of people. An anarchist revolution cannot happen without both this widespread mood for change, and some idea of what change is necessary. The best example of this is the revolution

in Spain in 1936.

What is striking about the Spanish Revolution, particularly in Catalonia and Aragon, is how profoundly life was transformed. Certainly, the economic changes were amazing enough, with most industries in Barcelona being collectivised, run by the workers, as well as many farms in Aragon. The revolution was not limited to economic change, rather this went hand in hand with social change. Of course, the revolution wasn't perfect, and in the end was defeated by a combination of Stalinism, fascism, and the mistakes that were made¹. For a time though, living, breathing socialism could be seen, and this in a spirit of liberty, with no need for, indeed sometimes contrary to, orders from any central authority.

Of course, the whole point of the Spanish Revolution was that it took place from the ground up, and the same effects could never be produced through seizing government in a political revolution (How do you legislate for freedom?). But could a similarly far-reaching change take place this way, introduced by a caring and progressive party? The historical evidence would suggest not (not that we can point to many examples where it's been tried). Why is that? To understand that, we have to examine those factors that lead to a revolution.

What causes a revolution?

The simple answer to that is, of course, capitalism. Capitalism, as an economic system, and its chief weapon, the state, are dedicated to one thing - maintaining the ascendancy of a minority over the majority. It is the major cause of wars, of famines, of sexism, racism, poverty, unemployment and too many other social ills to list, let alone describe. All these things mean that most people have little stake in keeping society from changing, indeed most would welcome change. The problem is that people don't see any alternatives, or dismiss those they are presented with as

utopian and unreachable.

Although this problem is exacerbated by the low level of struggle at the moment, this does not mean that people's minds are totally closed to radical ideas. Capitalism sows the seeds of its own destruction. It brings workers together into workplaces, forcing them to organise collectively, and the relentless drive for profit constantly reminds workers that they have collective interests, diametrically opposed to those of the ruling class. This means that, even when the confidence of the class as a whole is at its lowest, there will still be areas where people are fighting back. For example, in the past few years, the WSM has been involved in struggles for union recognition, for abortion rights, against racism, and against increasing taxation of working class people. Even though these campaigns may have started small (and some of them stayed small!), people got involved because they knew that things had to change. This recognition that there are problems in the way society is run, though it may be focused on one issue initially, can lead people to realise that tinkering with the system isn't enough, real improvement requires real change - revolutionary change.

In theoretical terms, the direct cause of a revolution is generally expressed in terms of two sets of conditions - objective and subjective factors.

Objective Factors are the things outside your head, independent (at least directly) from your thoughts and emotions. If you get laid off work, if a war starts, if it rains on you on your way to the pub, you can't change things by closing your eyes and wishing them away. Of course, your thoughts may have an indirect effect, when they lead to action, like joining a union or remembering your umbrella, but generally you don't have much control over what happens in the world.

The objective factors in a revolution are events outside the control of any individual or small group, such as a stock-market crash or an invasion, which lead people to re-examine their society, and, possibly, act to change it. For example, changes in British society at the end of the second World War² were triggered to a certain extent by the hardships of war. In Russia, in 1917, rather than lead to renewed opti-

even when the confidence of the class as a whole is at its lowest, there will still be areas where people are fighting back



mism, the experience of war generated a deep anger directed towards the Tsar and the system that was causing so much hardship.

Subjective Factors, on the other hand, are the things inside your head - your thoughts on life, the universe and everything, down to whether you think it will start raining while you're on your way to the pub (it will - bring your umbrella!).

every revolt can be seen as part of a process, the continuation of previous struggles

Since the subjective factors in a revolution are those that depend on individual people, they are obviously the ones that revolutionary groups try to change. Of course, there can be no strict division between subjective and objective factors - it is the thoughts in your head that decide whether or not you will join a union, vote for a strike or pass a picket, which side of the barricade you will be on. Equally, your decisions, and the actions that result from them, will have an effect on the ideas of the people

around you.

Opportunity for revolution only arises at particular times, when both the subjective and objective conditions necessary for success are present. In other words, some crisis occurs, and the level of consciousness of the people is such that they choose revolution. Even though tension is usually building for some time beforehand, when the moment comes it can come with breathtaking speed, and can be triggered by even the smallest events.

For example, in France a massive increase in strikes in 1967 was followed in 1968 by student demonstrations which grew into a general strike that almost toppled DeGaulle's government. In Budapest in 1956, it was a student march that started the Hungarian Revolution, which saw, in the short weeks before it was crushed by Soviet tanks, over twenty independent newspapers set up, and a Parliament of Workers' Councils which proclaimed the right of the workers themselves to manage their workplaces.

Although these uprisings can sometimes look as if they come out of nowhere, this is far from true. Rather it is as if a rising tide of militancy reaches some critical point and breaks the dam - sudden, yes, but not spontaneous. Before the Hungarian Revolution strikes were widespread, before the October Revolution in Russia there was a series of strikes and struggles, which themselves followed on from the unsuccessful

revolution in 1905. So with hindsight, every revolt can be seen as part of a process, the continuation of previous struggles.

More Than Marking Time

Anarchism is a very simple and very natural idea, but when you're used to capital-



ism it can seem a little weird just because of this simplicity. Although people may want change, nearly everybody thinks, at first anyway, that all that's really needed are a few adjustments to the system, and everything will be fine. Then when you

Anarchism in Action The 1931 Barcelona Rent Strike

The Barcelona Rent Strike of 1931 not only served to reduce rent costs for working class families but was also an education in self-organisation for thousands of workers. It, along with other struggles in those years, created an organised working class that in 1936 made the most successful attempt yet to overthrow capitalism and create libertarian communism.

Shanties and Slums

In the 15 years leading up to the strike Barcelona's population had increased by 62%. The city was one of the fastest growing in Europe. Inflation was running rampant but wages had not risen. There had been rent increases of up to 150%. Only 2,200 council houses had been built. Barcelona was in the midst of a huge housing crisis as shanty towns grew around the city.

The CNT¹ was an illegal organisation during the 1920's and thus many members had been reduced to the role of passive spectators as dedicated militants battled with the police and pistoleros. The dictator, Primo de Rivera, had fallen in 1930 and the new government (who declared a

republic in '31) let the CNT re-emerge.

As anarchists, the CNT wished to widen the union into a real participatory social movement. To do this they had to broaden its realm of influence. They knew that only via mass organisation, participation and struggle could the foundations be laid so that people would acquire the skills to construct a new society.

The Idea

In January 1931, *Solidaridad Obrera*² published an article calling for action around the housing crisis. In April that year the CNT construction workers set up the Economic Defence Commission (EDC) and said they would study the "expense that corresponds to each worker for the wage earned" in relation to rents. On May 1st the EDC presented its first basic demand that there should be a cut of 40% in rents. Three articles quickly appeared in *Solidaridad Obrera*. The EDC followed these up, demanding

- a 40% reduction in rents.

- that the unemployed enter the workplaces to demand that the bosses hire 15% more men.
- that food prices would be agreed and local defence groups would weed out speculators.

After the publication of these demands individual actions began to take place. Workers re-installed an evicted family on May 4th. The EDC sought to encourage this action by holding meetings in working class areas of Barcelona and the surrounding towns. Many of these meetings were held through June and into July.

Large numbers of women attended and got involved as it was usually left to them to pay the bills and rent. Mass leafleting took place and a huge rally was built for. On 23rd June an evicted family was re-housed by the local people in Hospitalet and this caused great discussion in that part of the city.

The mass rally on July 5th declared the demands of the campaign to be:

- For July the security (deposit) should be taken by landlords for rent.
- From then on rent would only be paid at 40% of the previous rate.
- That the unemployed should not have to pay rent.

pass that stage, and realise that the whole world needs to be 'adjusted', it is easy to think that such a jump needs a vastly complicated body of theory, and possibly a few great leaders, if it is to succeed.

On the other hand, when anarchism is put into practice, it works, and it's always more convincing to point at a house than to point at a blueprint. In Spain during the Revolution, huge numbers of industries and farms were collectivised by their workers, and the militias were run on anarchist lines. Would all of this have happened if people had not already seen that anarchism worked?

What role then does the revolutionary group have to play in the build-up to a revolution? In general where there is no established channel through which the desire for revolutionary change is expressed, those that arise will tend to have a libertarian form³, but sometimes there are established 'alternatives'. In France in '68, a potentially revolutionary movement got side-tracked into voting for the Communist Party, because they were seen as the only potential alternative to capitalism. We must remember that vanguardist ideas and organisations will not automatically become irrelevant. If people have had little prior experience in politics, it can take time for them to realise how manipulative and deceitful vanguardist groups are, by which time it may be too late.

Rather than waiting for the revolution to come, and then hoping that people don't go down another initially promising dead-end, we have to think about what kind of organisation we would like to see arise, and then start laying the framework for it today. In Spain we had an example of how things **could** work. For all our problems with anarcho-syndicalism (see last issue), the fact that the CNT was established as a revolutionary union long before 1936 meant that, when people started looking for a different way of doing things, they could see that anarchism wasn't just a nice idea, it actually **worked**. Most people, in Catalonia and Aragon at least, would have had some experience with the CNT, and so would have seen that things could actually be run by the workers themselves.

Our Role Today

How we can provide examples of anarchism working today, and prepare the ground for the development of forms of organisation that could play a part in an anarchist revolution, is linked to the second main role of an anarchist group, to spread the ideas of anarchism.

Earlier in this article, we looked at the objective and subjective factors that lead to a revolution, and said that the subjective factors were the ideas people had, about contemporary society, and about other, different societies. Also, we said that, in situations of potentially revolutionary change, people can sometimes get drawn



into groups and organisations which will lead nowhere. These two are linked, in that people are more likely to be drawn into dead-ends when they are just looking for something that will change their society, but don't know what kind of change they want, or what kind of society they would rather live in.

If the landlords refused to take the reduced rent then they would get nothing as a rent strike was recommended.

No rents for Landlords.

The EDC claimed that there were 45,000 strikers in July growing to 100,000 in August³. Every working class estate became organised so that the authorities did not have enough guards to prevent evicted families from being re-entered onto property.

From the end of July onwards the repression of the strikers grew with the Chamber of Catalonia (i.e. Chamber of Commerce) ordering the arrest of all organisers. The EDC rally and leafleting due to be held on July 27th was banned.

In early August the EDC began to publish a series of articles exposing landlord tax-fraud, pointing out how there was one law for the rich and another for the poor. In turn the state arrested 53 members of the CNT. This led to a riot inside the prison and a general strike outside. By October, the EDC were forced to go underground after the CNT had been heavily fined for not turning over the names of those involved.

The strike was ending, however it never entirely ended in many districts. What successfully broke it was the practice of arresting tenants when they returned to their homes. Some tenants put their hope in a Rent Decree (December 1931) which depended on legal ways of pursuing a claim for fair rent, but unsurprisingly it proved completely useless.

The Fruits of the Rent Strike

It had taken major repression by the state to end the strike but a valuable journey had begun. For many young people this was the first time they had been exposed to the ideas of anarchism and direct action. They would go on to join the CNT and become the revolutionaries of 1936. The rent strike was the beginning of many campaigns which established anarchist ideas and practices in the communities. People were exposed to playing a vital part in fighting their own oppression. They became fuelled with a belief in challenging the way things were. All illusions in the Republican government were quickly shattered.

The lessons of mass action and self organisation would later be put to use by the people who went on to make history in 1936.

When the fascist coup happened in 1936 in Spain, the left there and in other countries called for the state to put down the fascists. The more radical Marxist groups called upon the state to 'arm the workers' (earlier the same demand was heard when the fascists took power in both Italy and Germany). Yet the anarchists of the CNT got out onto the streets, took the arms for themselves and immediately began to defeat the fascists.

Why did this happen? Anarchism has a proud tradition of self-activity and mass participation. The anarchists in Spain did not cry out for the state to put down the fascists. In 1936 tens of thousands of anarchists were ready to seize arms and fight the fascists. No leaders, no calls on the state, just people who knew what to do and went out and did it. This self-organisation was in part the legacy of the Barcelona rent strike of 1931.

Dermot Sreenan

¹ National Federation of Labour, a union organised along anarchist lines.

² *Solidaridad Obrera* (The paper of the CNT)

³ *Solidaridad Obrera* (5th and 8th August 1931.)

If our aim was just a political revolution, then we would be happy to channel general discontent into equally general support, not for our ideas, but for us. A social revolution, though, has to be a positive revolution, directed towards some goal. Therefore, if we are to be successful, we must start by informing people about what anarchism means, about what an anarchist society would be like, so that, when people think of revolution as a real possibility (which, at the moment, most don't) they will know what there is to be fought for. Producing papers, pamphlets and books is an important way of achieving that, but when people don't see the relevancy of revolution, they are hardly likely to be interested in reading about the kind of society that a revolution should create.

This is not always the case, though. When people are involved in struggle, even for limited goals, this causes them to question wider issues, and become more open to new and radical ideas. For anarchists, involvement in these struggles means that, as well as getting the chance to spread anarchist ideas, by putting forward democratic methods of organisation, you also demonstrate how anarchism works in practice. When anarchist forms of organisation are shown to be effective, they are more likely to be used in other struggles.

We should always be ready to work in campaigns, to add our experience and commitment to the struggle, but if people are always looking to us to set up campaigns, and to provide the ideas, then we are failing as anarchists. Self-activity is the key to anarchism, that is the self-confidence to do what needs to be done without looking for others to step in and take over. For this reason our role is to work with people and

not for people. It is important that others gain experience in organising activities and so in the future will institute campaigns themselves. Our aim should not be to organise revolutionary activity, but to inspire it in others.

It's not over yet

In 1967, George Woodcock said that anarchism, though a good idea, had missed its chance, and could now only serve as an aspiration, never to be realised. A year later, the French government was brought to its knees by a wave of strikes, riots and marches that were definitely libertarian in their forms of organisation. Though revolution may sometimes seem no more than a distant dream, we would do well to remember how fast things can change, sometimes when we least expect it.

After all, anarchism **is** a good idea, and an anarchist society would fulfil people's needs much more successfully than capitalist society ever could. It's not as if we have to convince everybody that capitalism is a bad system, it is continually creating and recreating the conditions of its own downfall. Poverty, starvation, unemployment, alienation - everybody's lives are lessened by capitalism, and at some stage, people always think, 'There must be a better way'.

At the same time, we are surrounded by examples of how life could be, if we were to have the confidence to reach out and grab it. Workers who know that they could run their workplaces much better than their bosses, and have found that, when they stand together, they are stronger. Volunteers who, in caring for others prove that there are stronger motives than greed. Even any normal group of friends, who show that

we don't always have to be divided into leaders and led, into rulers and ruled.

There will always be revolts, but if they do not have any aims, or any idea of how to get there, they will probably end up being bribed away by reforms, or led into the blind alley of statism. What we can do today, what we must do now, before things have already started and it becomes too late, is to spread the ideas of anarchism, and, in our campaigns, demonstrate how real democracy can be achieved, and how well it can work.

Society will change, but even if there were a million anarchists we could not set a time and date for this change, we can only know that it is coming. We don't want a revolution led by anarchists, the revolution doesn't even have to call itself anarchist. What is important, and what will happen, if we work now (and have a little luck), is that it will **be** anarchist.

Footnotes

- ¹ For more details, see *Anarchism in Action*, a brief history of the Spanish Revolution (available from the WSM Bookservice).
- ² i.e. the introduction of the welfare state.
- ³ i.e. non-hierarchical, decentralised, controlled by all of those involved rather than a select few. A contemporary example would be the network of groups organising against the Criminal Justice Act in Britain. More consciously anarchist, or directly revolutionary examples could be given, but this should give you the idea.

Adelante, juventud; a luchar como titanes!



Noam Chomsky on Anarchism, Marxism & Hope for the Future

Noam Chomsky is widely known for his critique of U.S foreign policy, and for his work as a linguist. Less well known is his ongoing support for libertarian socialist objectives. In a special interview done for *Red and Black Revolution*, Chomsky gives his views on anarchism and marxism, and the prospects for socialism now. The interview was conducted in May 1995 by Kevin Doyle.

RBR: First off, Noam, for quite a time now you've been an advocate for the anarchist idea. Many people are familiar with the introduction you wrote in 1970 to Daniel Guérin's *Anarchism*, but more recently, for instance in the film *Manufacturing Consent*, you took the opportunity to highlight again the potential of anarchism and the anarchist idea. What is it that attracts you to anarchism?

CHOMSKY: I was attracted to anarchism as a young teenager, as soon as I began to think about the world beyond a pretty narrow range, and haven't seen much reason to revise those early attitudes since. I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom. That includes political power, ownership and management, relations among men and women, parents and children, our control over the fate of future generations (the basic moral imperative behind the environmental movement, in my view), and much else. Naturally this means a challenge to the huge institutions of coercion and control: the state, the unaccountable private tyrannies that control most of the domestic and international economy, and so on. But not only these. That is what I have always understood to be the essence of anarchism: the conviction that the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met. Sometimes the burden can be met. If I'm taking a walk with my grandchildren and they dart out into a busy street, I will use not only authority but also physical coercion to stop them. The act should be challenged, but I think it can readily meet the challenge. And there are other cases; life is a complex affair, we understand very little about humans and society, and grand pronouncements are generally more a source of harm than of benefit. But the perspective is a valid one, I think, and can lead us quite a long way.

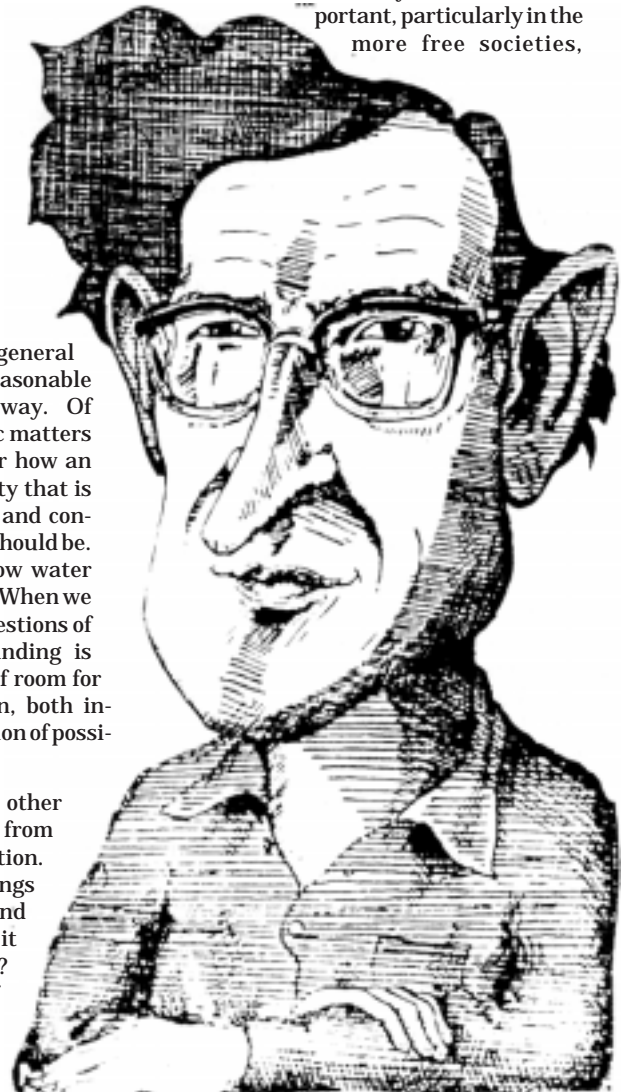
Beyond such generalities, we begin to look at cases, which is where the questions of human interest and concern arise.

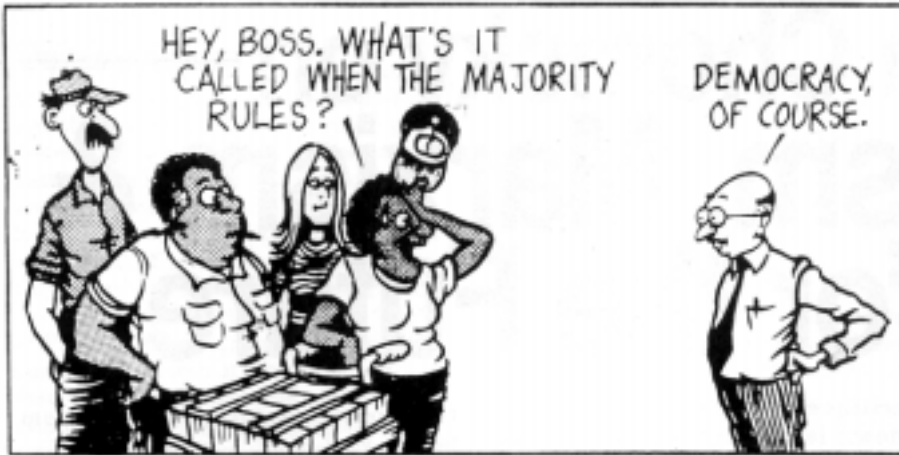
RBR: It's true to say that your ideas and critique are now more widely known than ever before. It should also be said that your views are widely respected. How do you think your support for anarchism is received in this context? In particular, I'm interested in the response you receive from people who are getting interested in politics for the first time and who may, perhaps, have come across your views. Are such people surprised by your support for anarchism? Are they interested?

CHOMSKY: The general intellectual culture, as you know, associates 'anarchism' with chaos, violence, bombs, disruption, and so on. So people are often surprised when I speak positively of anarchism and identify myself with leading traditions within it. But my impression is that among the general public, the basic ideas seem reasonable when the clouds are cleared away. Of course, when we turn to specific matters - say, the nature of families, or how an economy would work in a society that is more free and just - questions and controversy arise. But that is as it should be. Physics can't really explain how water flows from the tap in your sink. When we turn to vastly more complex questions of human significance, understanding is very thin, and there is plenty of room for disagreement, experimentation, both intellectual and real-life exploration of possibilities, to help us learn more.

RBR: Perhaps, more than any other idea, anarchism has suffered from the problem of misrepresentation. Anarchism can mean many things to many people. Do you often find yourself having to explain what it is that you mean by anarchism? Does the misrepresentation of anarchism bother you?

CHOMSKY: All misrepresentation is a nuisance. Much of it can be traced back to structures of power that have an interest in preventing understanding, for pretty obvious reasons. It's well to recall David Hume's *Principles of Government*. He expressed surprise that people ever submitted to their rulers. He concluded that since *"Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. 'Tis therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular."* Hume was very astute - and incidentally, hardly a libertarian by the standards of the day. He surely underestimates the efficacy of force, but his observation seems to me basically correct, and important, particularly in the more free societies,





where the art of controlling opinion is therefore far more refined. Misrepresentation and other forms of befuddlement are a natural concomitant.

So does misrepresentation bother me? Sure, but so does rotten weather. It will exist as long as concentrations of power engender a kind of commissar class to defend them. Since they are usually not very bright, or are bright enough to know that they'd better avoid the arena of fact and argument, they'll turn to misrepresentation, vilification, and other devices that are available to those who know that they'll be protected by the various means available to the powerful. We should understand why all this occurs, and unravel it as best we can. That's part of the project of liberation - of ourselves and others, or more reasonably, of people working together to achieve these aims.

Sounds simple-minded, and it is. But I have yet to find much commentary on human life and society that is not simple-minded, when absurdity and self-serving posturing are cleared away.

RBR: How about in more established left-wing circles, where one might expect to find greater familiarity with what anarchism actually stands for? Do you encounter any surprise here at your views and support for anarchism?

CHOMSKY: If I understand what you mean by "established left-wing circles," there is not too much surprise about my views on anarchism, because very little is known about my views on anything. These are not the circles I deal with. You'll rarely find a reference to anything I say or write. That's not completely true of course. Thus in the US (but less commonly in the UK or elsewhere), you'd find some familiarity with what I do in certain of the more critical and independent sectors of what might be called "established left-wing circles," and I have personal friends and associates scattered here and there. But have a look at the books and journals, and you'll see what I mean. I don't expect what I write and say to be any more welcome in these circles than in the faculty club or editorial board room - again, with exceptions.

The question arises only marginally, so much so that it's hard to answer.

RBR: A number of people have noted that you use the term 'libertarian socialist' in the same context as you use the word 'anarchism'. Do you see these terms as essentially similar? Is anarchism a type of socialism to you? The description has been used before that "*anarchism is equivalent to socialism with freedom*". Would you agree with this basic equation?

CHOMSKY: The introduction to Guerin's book that you mentioned opens with a quote from an anarchist sympathiser a century ago, who says that "*anarchism has a broad back,*" and "*endures anything.*" One major element has been what has traditionally been called 'libertarian socialism'. I've tried to explain there and elsewhere what I mean by that, stressing that it's hardly original; I'm taking the ideas from leading figures in the anarchist movement whom I quote, and who rather consistently describe themselves as socialists, while harshly condemning the 'new class' of radical intellectuals who seek to attain state power in the course of popular struggle and to become the vicious "*Red bureaucracy*" of which Bakunin warned; what's often called 'socialism'. I rather agree with Rudolf Rocker's perception that these (quite central) tendencies in anarchism draw from the best of Enlightenment and classical liberal thought, well beyond what he described. In fact, as I've tried to show they contrast sharply with Marxist-Leninist doctrine and practice, the 'libertarian' doctrines that are fashionable in the US and UK particularly, and other contemporary ideologies, all of which seem to me to reduce to advocacy of one or another form of illegitimate authority, quite often real tyranny.

The Spanish Revolution

RBR: In the past, when you have spoken about anarchism, you have often emphasised the example of the Spanish Revolution. For you there would seem to be two aspects to this example. On the one hand, the experience of the Spanish Revolution is, you say, a good example of 'anarchism in action'. On the other, you have also stressed that the Spanish revolution is a good example of what workers can achieve

through their own efforts using participatory democracy. Are these two aspects - anarchism in action and participatory democracy - one and the same thing for you? Is anarchism a philosophy for people's power?

CHOMSKY: I'm reluctant to use fancy polysyllables like "*philosophy*" to refer to what seems ordinary common sense. And I'm also uncomfortable with slogans. The achievements of Spanish workers and peasants, before the revolution was crushed, were impressive in many ways. The term 'participatory democracy' is a more recent one, which developed in a different context, but there surely are points of similarity. I'm sorry if this seems evasive. It is, but that's because I don't think either the concept of anarchism or of participatory democracy is clear enough to be able to answer the question whether they are the same.

RBR: One of the main achievements of the Spanish Revolution was the degree of grassroots democracy established. In terms of people, it is estimated that over 3 million were involved. Rural and urban production was managed by workers themselves. Is it a coincidence to your mind that anarchists, known for their advocacy of individual freedom, succeeded in this area of collective administration?

CHOMSKY: No coincidence at all. The tendencies in anarchism that I've always found most persuasive seek a highly organised society, integrating many different kinds of structures (workplace, community, and manifold other forms of voluntary association), but controlled by participants, not by those in a position to give orders (except, again, when authority can be justified, as is sometimes the case, in specific contingencies).

Democracy

RBR: Anarchists often expend a great deal of effort at building up grassroots democracy. Indeed they are often accused of "*taking democracy to extremes*". Yet, despite this, many anarchists would not readily identify democracy as a central component of anarchist philosophy. Anarchists often describe their politics as being about 'socialism' or being about 'the individual' - they are less likely to say that anarchism is about democracy. Would you agree that democratic ideas are a central feature of anarchism?

CHOMSKY: Criticism of 'democracy' among anarchists has often been criticism of parliamentary democracy, as it has arisen within societies with deeply repressive features. Take the US, which has been as free as any, since its origins. American democracy was founded on the principle, stressed by James Madison in the Constitutional Convention in 1787, that the primary function of government is "*to protect the minority of the opulent from the majority.*" Thus he warned that in England, the only quasi-democratic model of the day, if the general population were allowed a say

in public affairs, they would implement agrarian reform or other atrocities, and that the American system must be carefully crafted to avoid such crimes against "the rights of property," which must be defended (in fact, must prevail). Parliamentary democracy within this framework does merit sharp criticism by genuine libertarians, and I've left out many other features that are hardly subtle - slavery, to mention just one, or the wage slavery that was bitterly condemned by working people who had never heard of anarchism or communism right through the 19th century, and beyond.

Leninism

RBR: The importance of grassroots democracy to any meaningful change in society would seem to be self evident. Yet the left has been ambiguous about this in the past. I'm speaking generally, of social democracy, but also of Bolshevism - traditions on the left that would seem to have more in common with elitist thinking than with strict democratic practice. Lenin, to use a well-known example, was sceptical that workers could develop anything more than "trade union consciousness" - by which, I assume, he meant that workers could not see far beyond their immediate predicament. Similarly, the Fabian socialist, Beatrice Webb, who was very influential in the Labour Party in England, had the view that workers were only interested in "horse racing odds"! Where does this elitism originate and what is it doing on the left?

CHOMSKY: I'm afraid it's hard for me to answer this. If the left is understood to include 'Bolshevism,' then I would flatly dissociate myself from the left. Lenin was one of the greatest enemies of socialism, in my opinion, for reasons I've discussed. The idea that workers are only interested in horse-racing is an absurdity that cannot withstand even a superficial look at labour history or the lively and independent working class press that flourished in many places, including the manufacturing towns of New England not many miles from where I'm writing - not to speak of the inspiring record of the courageous struggles of persecuted and oppressed people throughout history, until this very moment. Take the most miserable corner of this hemisphere, Haiti, regarded by the European conquerors as a paradise and the source of no small part of Europe's wealth, now devastated, perhaps beyond recovery. In the past few years, under conditions so miserable that few people in the rich countries can imagine them, peasants and slum-dwellers constructed a popular democratic movement based on grassroots organisations that surpasses just about anything I know of elsewhere; only deeply committed commissars could fail to collapse with ridicule when they hear the solemn pronouncements of American intellectuals and political leaders about how the US has to teach Haitians the lessons of democracy. Their achievements were so substantial and frightening to the powerful that they had

to be subjected to yet another dose of vicious terror, with considerably more US support than is publicly acknowledged, and they still have not surrendered. Are they interested only in horse-racing?

I'd suggest some lines I've occasionally quoted from Rousseau: "when I see multitudes of entirely naked savages scorn European voluptuousness and endure hunger, fire, the sword, and death to preserve only their independence, I feel that it does not behoove slaves to reason about freedom."

RBR: Speaking generally again, your own work - *Deterring Democracy, Necessary Illusions*, etc. - has dealt consistently with the role and prevalence of elitist ideas in societies such as our own. You have argued that within 'Western' (or parliamentary) democracy there is a deep antagonism to any real role or input from the mass of people, lest it threaten the uneven distribution in wealth which favours the rich. Your work is quite convincing here, but, this aside, some have been shocked by your assertions. For instance, you compare the politics of President John F. Kennedy with Lenin, more or less equating the two. This, I might add, has shocked supporters of both camps! Can you elaborate a little on the validity of the comparison?

CHOMSKY: I haven't actually "equated" the doctrines of the liberal intellectuals of the Kennedy administration with Leninists, but I have noted striking points of similarity - rather as predicted by Bakunin a century earlier in his perceptive commentary on the "new class." For example, I quoted passages from McNamara on the need to enhance managerial control if we are to be truly "free," and about how the "undermanagement" that is "the real threat to democracy" is an assault against reason itself. Change a few words in these passages, and we have standard Leninist doctrine. I've argued that the roots are rather deep, in both cases. Without further clarification about what people find "shocking," I can't comment further. The comparisons are specific, and I think both proper and properly qualified. If not, that's an error, and I'd be interested to be enlightened about it.

Marxism

RBR: Specifically, Leninism refers to a form of marxism that developed with V.I. Lenin. Are you implicitly distinguishing the works of Marx from the particular criticism you have of Lenin when you use the term 'Leninism'? Do you see a continuity between Marx's views and Lenin's later practices?

CHOMSKY: Bakunin's warnings about the "Red bureaucracy" that would institute "the worst of all despotic governments" were long before Lenin, and were directed against the followers of Mr. Marx. There were, in fact, followers of many different kinds; Pannekoek, Luxembourg, Mattick and others are very far from Lenin, and their views often converge with elements of anarcho-sindicalism. Korsch and others wrote sympathetically of the anarchist revolution in Spain, in fact. There are continuities from Marx to Lenin, but there are also continuities to Marxists who were harshly critical of Lenin and Bolshevism. Teodor Shanin's work in the past years on Marx's later attitudes towards peasant revolution is also relevant here. I'm far from being a Marx scholar, and wouldn't venture any serious judgement on which of these continuities reflects the 'real Marx,' if there even can be an answer to that question.

RBR: Recently, we obtained a copy of your own *Notes On Anarchism* (re-published last year by Discussion Bulletin in the USA). In this you mention the views of the "early Marx", in particular his development of the idea of alienation under capitalism. Do you generally agree with this division in Marx's life and work - a young, more libertarian socialist but, in later years, a firm authoritarian?

CHOMSKY: The early Marx draws extensively from the milieu in which he lived, and one finds many similarities to the thinking that animated classical liberalism, aspects of the Enlightenment and French and German Romanticism. Again, I'm not enough of a Marx scholar to pretend to an authoritative judgement. My impression, for what it is worth, is that the early Marx was very much a figure of the late Enlightenment, and the later Marx was a highly authoritarian activist, and a



critical analyst of capitalism, who had little to say about socialist alternatives. But those are impressions.

RBR: From my understanding, the core part of your overall view is informed by your concept of human nature. In the past the idea of human nature was seen, perhaps, as something regressive, even limiting. For instance, the unchanging aspect of human nature is often used as an argument for why things can't be changed fundamentally in the direction of anarchism. You take a different view? Why?

CHOMSKY: The core part of anyone's point of view is some concept of human nature, however it may be remote from awareness or lack articulation. At least, that is true of people who consider themselves moral agents, not monsters. Monsters aside, whether a person who advocates reform or revolution, or stability or return to earlier stages, or simply cultivating one's own garden, takes stand on the grounds that it is 'good for people.' But that judgement is based on some conception of human nature, which a reasonable person will try to make as clear as possible, if only so that it can be evaluated. So in this respect I'm no different from anyone else.

You're right that human nature has been seen as something 'regressive,' but that must be the result of profound confusion. Is my granddaughter no different from a

rock, a salamander, a chicken, a monkey? A person who dismisses this absurdity as absurd recognises that there is a distinctive human nature. We are left only with the question of what it is - a highly nontrivial and fascinating question, with enormous scientific interest and human significance. We know a fair amount about certain aspects of it - not those of major human significance. Beyond that, we are left with our hopes and wishes, intuitions and speculations.

There is nothing "regressive" about the fact that a human embryo is so constrained that it does not grow wings, or that its visual system cannot function in the manner of an insect, or that it lacks the homing instinct of pigeons. The same factors that constrain the organism's development also enable it to attain a rich, complex, and highly articulated structure, similar in fundamental ways to conspecifics, with rich and remarkable capacities. An organism that lacked such determinative intrinsic structure, which of course radically limits the paths of development, would be some kind of amoeboid creature, to be pitied (even if it could survive somehow). The scope and limits of development are logically related.

Take language, one of the few distinctive human capacities about which much is known. We have very strong reasons to believe that all possible human languages are very similar; a Martian scientist observing humans might conclude that there is just a single language, with minor variants. The reason is that the particular aspect of human nature that underlies the growth of language allows very restricted options. Is this limiting? Of course. Is it liberating? Also of course. It is these very restrictions that make it possible for a rich and intricate system of expression of thought to develop in similar ways on the basis of very rudimentary, scattered, and varied experience.

What about the matter of biologically-determined human differences? That these exist is surely true, and a cause for joy, not fear or regret. Life among clones would not be worth living, and a sane person will only rejoice that others have abilities that they do not share. That should be elementary. What is commonly believed about these matters is strange indeed, in my opinion.

Is human nature, whatever it is, conducive to the development of anarchist forms of life or a barrier to them? We do not know enough to answer, one way or the other. These are matters for experimentation and discovery, not empty pronouncements.

The future

RBR: To begin finishing off, I'd like to ask you briefly about some current issues on the left. I don't know if the situation is similar in the USA but here, with the fall of the Soviet Union, a certain demoralisation has set in on the left. It isn't so much that people were dear supporters of what

existed in the Soviet Union, but rather it's a general feeling that with the demise of the Soviet Union the idea of socialism has also been dragged down. Have you come across this type of demoralisation? What's your response to it?

CHOMSKY: My response to the end of Soviet tyranny was similar to my reaction to the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini. In all cases, it is a victory for the human spirit. It should have been particularly welcome to socialists, since a great enemy of socialism had at last collapsed. Like you, I was intrigued to see how people - including people who had considered themselves anti-Stalinist and anti-Leninist - were demoralised by the collapse of the tyranny. What it reveals is that they were more deeply committed to Leninism than they believed.

There are, however, other reasons to be concerned about the elimination of this brutal and tyrannical system, which was as much "socialist" as it was "democratic" (recall that it claimed to be both, and that the latter claim was ridiculed in the West, while the former was eagerly accepted, as a weapon against socialism - one of the many examples of the service of Western intellectuals to power). One reason has to do with the nature of the Cold War. In my view, it was in significant measure a special case of the 'North-South conflict,' to use the current euphemism for Europe's conquest of much of the world. Eastern Europe had been the original 'third world,' and the Cold War from 1917 had no slight resemblance to the reaction of attempts by other parts of the third world to pursue an independent course, though in this case differences of scale gave the conflict a life of its own. For this reason, it was only reasonable to expect the region to return pretty much to its earlier status: parts of the West, like the Czech Republic or Western Poland, could be expected to rejoin it, while others revert to the traditional service role, the ex-Nomenklatura becoming the standard third world elite (with the approval of Western state-corporate power, which generally prefers them to alternatives). That was not a pretty prospect, and it has led to immense suffering.

Another reason for concern has to do with the matter of deterrence and non-alignment. Grotesque as the Soviet empire was, its very existence offered a certain space for non-alignment, and for perfectly cynical reasons, it sometimes provided assistance to victims of Western attack. Those options are gone, and the South is suffering the consequences.

A third reason has to do with what the business press calls "the pampered Western workers" with their "luxurious lifestyles." With much of Eastern Europe returning to the fold, owners and managers have powerful new weapons against the working classes and the poor at home. GM and VW can not only transfer production to Mexico and Brazil (or at least threaten to, which often amounts to the same thing), but also to Poland and Hun-



gary, where they can find skilled and trained workers at a fraction of the cost. They are gloating about it, understandably, given the guiding values.

We can learn a lot about what the Cold War (or any other conflict) was about by looking at who is cheering and who is unhappy after it ends. By that criterion, the victors in the Cold War include Western elites and the ex-Nomenklatura, now rich beyond their wildest dreams, and the losers include a substantial part of the population of the East along with working people and the poor in the West, as well as popular sectors in the South that have sought an independent path.

Such ideas tend to arouse near hysteria among Western intellectuals, when they can even perceive them, which is rare. That's easy to show. It's also understandable. The observations are correct, and subversive of power and privilege; hence hysteria.

In general, the reactions of an honest person to the end of the Cold War will be more complex than just pleasure over the collapse of a brutal tyranny, and prevailing reactions are suffused with extreme hypocrisy, in my opinion.

Capitalism

RBR: In many ways the left today finds itself back at its original starting point in the last century. Like then, it now faces a form of capitalism that is in the ascendancy. There would seem to be greater 'consensus' today, more than at any other time in history, that capitalism is the only valid form of economic organisation possible, this despite the fact that wealth inequality is widening. Against this backdrop, one could argue that the left is unsure of how to go forward. How do you look at the current period? Is it a question of 'back to basics'? Should the effort now be towards bringing out the libertarian tradition in socialism and towards stressing democratic ideas?

CHOMSKY: This is mostly propaganda, in my opinion. What is called 'capitalism' is basically a system of corporate mercantilism, with huge and largely unaccountable private tyrannies exercising vast control over the economy, political systems, and social and cultural life, operating in close co-operation with powerful states that intervene massively in the domestic economy and international society. That is dramatically true of the United States, contrary to much illusion. The rich and privileged are no more willing to face market discipline than they have been in the past, though they consider it just fine for the general population. Merely to cite a few illustrations, the Reagan administration, which revelled in free market rhetoric, also boasted to the business community that it was the most protectionist in post-war US history - actually more than all others combined. Newt Gingrich, who leads the current crusade, represents a superrich district that receives more federal subsi-

dies than any other suburban region in the country, outside of the federal system itself. The 'conservatives' who are calling for an end to school lunches for hungry children are also demanding an increase in the budget for the Pentagon, which was established in the late 1940s in its current form because - as the business press was kind enough to tell us - high tech industry cannot survive in a "pure, competitive, unsubsidized, 'free enterprise' economy," and the government must be its "saviour." Without the "saviour," Gingrich's constituents would be poor working people (if they were lucky). There would be no computers, electronics generally, aviation industry, metallurgy, automation, etc., etc., right down the list. Anarchists, of all people, should not be taken in by these traditional frauds.

More than ever, libertarian socialist ideas are relevant, and the population is very much open to them. Despite a huge mass of corporate propaganda, outside of educated circles, people still maintain pretty much their traditional attitudes. In the US, for example, more than 80% of the population regard the economic system as "inherently unfair" and the political system as a fraud, which serves the "special interests," not "the people." Overwhelming majorities think working people have too little voice in public affairs (the same is true in England), that the government has the responsibility of assisting people in need, that spending for education and health should take precedence over budget-cutting and tax cuts, that the current Republican proposals that are sailing through

Congress benefit the rich and harm the general population, and so on. Intellectuals may tell a different story, but it's not all that difficult to find out the facts.

RBR: To a point anarchist ideas have been vindicated by the collapse of the Soviet Union - the predictions of Bakunin have proven to be correct. Do you think that anarchists should take heart from this general development and from the perceptiveness of Bakunin's analysis? Should anarchists look to the period ahead with greater confidence in their ideas and history?

CHOMSKY: I think - at least hope - that the answer is implicit in the above. I think the current era has ominous portent, and signs of great hope. Which result ensues depends on what we make of the opportunities.

RBR: Lastly, Noam, a different sort of question. We have a pint of Guinness on order for you here. When are you going to come and drink it?

CHOMSKY: Keep the Guinness ready. I hope it won't be too long. Less jocularly, I'd be there tomorrow if we could. We (my wife came along with me, unusual for these constant trips) had a marvellous time in Ireland, and would love to come back. Why don't we? Won't bore you with the sordid details, but demands are extraordinary, and mounting - a reflection of the conditions I've been trying to describe.



••• Racism in Ireland •••

TRAVELLERS FIGHTING BACK

IRISH TRAVELLERS are a very small minority group in Ireland, constituting less than 1% of the population. Their numbers currently stand at approx. 23,000 people in the Republic and another 1,500 in the North. There are also an estimated 15,000 Irish Travellers in England, Scotland and Wales and 7,000 in the U.S.A.

The population structure of the Traveller community resembles that of a third world country, with large numbers of children and very few in the older age group. Poor health status, compounded by racist policies and practices, and exclusion from mainstream society are the causes of this situation. 50% of the population is under 15 years. Some health statistics revealed by the Health Status Report of the Health Research Board in 1987 are worth quoting:

- Travellers have more than double the national rate of stillbirths.
- Infant mortality rates are three times higher than the national rate.
- Traveller women live, on average, 12 years less than settled women.
- Traveller men live, on average, 10 years less than settled men.
- Travellers' life expectancy is now at the level that settled people reached in the 1940's.

These are the statistics of racism, clearly demonstrating that Travellers' lives are effected in the most basic ways by their exclusion and marginalisation. Statistics relating to their educational levels reveal the same pariah status. Less than 14% currently make it into post-primary education and the number who have made it into third level can still be counted on one hand.

The majority of the adults, 80%, are illiterate.

Ethnicity & Cultural Identity

Travellers constitute a distinct ethnic group within Irish society. They fulfil all the criteria internationally accepted as defining ethnicity:

- A long shared history of which the group is conscious.
- A cultural tradition of its own including family and social customs.
- Descent from common ancestors - you must be born into the group.
- A common language.
- A common religion.
- Being a minority, or an oppressed or dominated group, within a larger community.

There has been strong resistance to acknowledging Travellers' ethnicity even from people who admit that they do not know what the term means. This attitude stems from the endemic racism towards them which rejects any idea that they could be anything other than *"failed settled people"*. There is a fear that if Travellers' claim to separate ethnicity is conceded that allegations of racism which are currently dismissed out of hand in most circles, would have some credence.

The racism practised against Travellers in Ireland is so all pervasive that it is not recognised as such except by a small minority of progressive people. Most left-wing groups either ignore the issue or contribute to the racism themselves by adopting reactionary positions. Travellers are marginalised and excluded from all of the institutions and structures of Irish society. The racism they experience operates at both the individual and the institutional level.

At an institutional level Travellers have to sign for the dole and for welfare at separate times. In the case of Dublin, Travellers claiming welfare from the Health Board have to do so at a completely separate and segregated clinic. Travellers have to use a separate, segregated, social work service and they are often segregated into separate classes in school. Socially, they are excluded from almost every pub in the country. They are routinely refused service in shops, cafes, cinemas, laundrettes and every recreational and social outlet.

Over the past 18 months, there has been a substantial increase in physical and ideological attacks on them. Incidents recorded include an elderly couple attacked on the beach in Bantry, Co. Cork, by hired thugs with hurley sticks who left the woman with a broken nose. A family was burned out of their caravan in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Travellers were subjected to an organised physical attack in Glenamaddy, Co. Galway, for having the cheek to drink in one of the few pubs that served them. This pub has since lost its licence as a warning to other publicans not to serve Travellers.

The list goes on and covers all parts of the country and every situation where Travellers attempt to live their lives. On an individual level, there is almost total segregation between Travellers and the sedentary population. Social contact is minimal because Travellers have been excluded from such contact.

The effects of this racism are not hard to find. Most Travellers lack self-esteem. Pride in their cultural identity is a very new experience and confined to the minority who have had some adult education and training. Self-destructive and even anti-social behaviour arises out of this total experience of racism. Less than 14% of Travellers currently make it into post-primary education and the majority of the adults are illiterate. Organising politically in this situation is difficult but not impossible as this article will demonstrate.

Irish Travellers share strong cultural ties with other nomadic people especially Gypsies and Travellers in other countries. Within the E.U., Travellers and Gypsies currently form a population of over one million people. Another million live in Eastern Europe.

These groups have faced, and still face, vicious persecution and racism which reached its peak this century with the murder of over a quarter of a million Gyp-



A racist march at the time of the Tallaght confrontation

sies and Travellers by the Nazis. Gypsies and Travellers in Eastern Europe are experiencing brutal racist attacks at the moment. Anti-immigrant agitation and attacks are specifically directed at them in several European countries.

Travellers' resistance

Organised resistance to their oppression is almost certain to have existed at several points in their history. However, the recorded history of this illiterate, nomadic, despised group scarcely existed until the early 1960's in this country. An English journalist, Grattan Puxon, arrived here to live and was immediately struck by the situation of the Travellers. Over the next five years he was involved in organising the Irish Traveller Community, which organised protests and resisted evictions all over the country. Puxon produced a number of pamphlets, the best known of which was titled *The Victims*. This protest movement quickly gained momentum, especially around the tactic of resisting evictions. Support grew both from Travellers themselves, and from students and some left wing activists.

A large group of Travellers based at Cherry Orchard in Dublin, where Puxon himself lived, built what was the first Travellers' school on the site. Dublin Corporation bulldozed it down within three weeks, setting off a wave of protest marches and pickets.

The movement for civil rights for Travellers was gaining strength and confidence and alarming the Government. The Irish Traveller Community held a large public rally at Ballinasloe fair in 1963 at which a committee was elected and plans made to organise throughout the country.

Around the same time, Grattan Puxon was arrested and charged with possessing explosives. He was given the choice of facing a lengthy jail sentence or leaving the country. It was later revealed that the explosives had been planted in his home by the police. Puxon left Ireland in 1964. Dozens of Traveller families left with him and went on to help form the Gypsy Council in England, where they played a prominent role over the next decade.

In Ireland, however, a deal had been done to allow a group of clerics and wealthy philanthropists to represent Travellers' interests. Called the Itinerant Settlement Committee, this group sidetracked Travellers' struggles into endless lobbying and charity work. Over the next twenty years they ensured there was little or no Traveller input into the matters that concerned them.

The next sign of any independent resistance came in 1980 when a Traveller woman, Roselle McDonald, went to court to try to stop the constant evictions from one roadside camp to another which were a feature of Travellers' lives. She won a ruling that Travellers could not be evicted from local authority property without being offered a



Tallaght again: Settled people supporting the Travellers

suitable alternative. Although it was hailed as a great victory at the time, in practice it did not take the authorities long to find ways around it. Usually this was achieved by simply harassing the families through tactics like dumping everything from rubbish to manure beside their caravans. This left them with no option but to move.

In 1981, Dublin County Council tried to open the new Tallaght By-pass, home to over 100 Traveller families, without offering them any alternative site. The events which followed in Tallaght were to be repeated on a smaller scale all over the country. Local residents, with the active support of some local politicians, including a Fianna Fáil councillor, organised protest marches. Vigilante type gangs patrolled around all open space in the area in order to force Travellers out of Tallaght.

A small number of local activists joined with a small number of Travellers to resist this racism and formed the Travellers'

The protests against Travellers in Tallaght were threatening and violent affairs

Rights Committee. This committee existed for almost two years until it gave way to the first ever 'Traveller only' organisation, Minceir Misli, set up in 1983. The Travellers Rights Committee put up a Traveller candidate, Nan Joyce, in the general election of 1982. She ran against the straightforwardly racist 'community' candidate who stood on a ticket of *"Get the Knackers out of Tallaght"*. She got twice as many first preference votes. A few weeks after the election Nan Joyce was arrested and charged with theft of jewellery. This

was widely reported in the papers with headlines such as *"Tinker Queen arrested for theft"*. The charges were dropped because of lack of evidence when it came to court. It turned out that the stolen jewellery had been planted in her caravan by the police themselves in an exact repetition of the frame up they had done on Grattan Puxon over twenty years previously.

The protests against Travellers in Tallaght were threatening and violent affairs. Leaflets were distributed in the doors advising men to leave women and children at home and to bring hurley sticks. No Travellers were physically attacked on these protests, mainly because of the small but highly visible and determined pickets supporting the Travellers.

Minceir Misli lasted almost two years. During this time it organised protest marches, hunger strikes, pickets, and spoke at numerous meetings around the country to galvanise support for Travellers' demands. They initiated contact with the trade unions and, in some unions, got resolutions passed instructing members not to take part in evictions.

However, Minceir Misli was outside consensus politics from the outset and as such could not get access to any funding to carry out its work. In addition, almost all its members were illiterate which made it extremely difficult for them to function effectively. When it folded, the Dublin Travellers' Education and Development Group (DTEDG) was formed in 1984. However, this group was not set up as an agitational one, so there was a vacuum in Traveller resistance once again. The Irish Travellers' Movement (ITM) was set up in 1990 as a lobby and pressure group composed of both settled people and Travellers. However, its interventions to date have been characterised by extreme caution. There is no group with a direct action focus at the moment, even though the number of physical and racist attacks have escalated over the past two years.



Minceir Misli protest in 1984: The woman on the left is Nan Joyce

There have been so many attacks over the past two years that it would take many more pages to list them all. It should be remembered that the Traveller population is very small, so that the impact of this level of physical attacks on such a small community is intense. It generates fear within the whole group and causes further isolation. The better known incidents include:

Bray, Co. Wicklow: Traveller family burnt out of their caravan parked on the edge of a housing estate. Their van was then burnt. Protests prevented them from being offered another site locally. This happened in February 1995.

Glenamaddy, Co. Galway: In April 1994, Travellers were subjected to an organised attack by local people armed with hurley sticks and clubs. Travellers drinking in the *Four Roads* pub were lined up by police and thrown out to a 'lynch mob' of locals. Their vans were turned over and wrecked. One Traveller woman described hiding out in a field all night with her young daughter in fear of being attacked. This episode was provoked by the fact that the owner of this pub persisted in serving Travellers despite police threats, which eventually succeeded, that she would lose her licence.

Most recently, in June 1995 a Traveller family housed in Moate Co. Westmeath have been the focus of anti-Traveller racism. Locals here held public meetings and blocked the main Galway to Dublin road in protest against the Council's decision to house the Travellers a mile outside "their" town. Travellers were called "inferior people".

The only response from the establishment to this latest outrage was an intervention by the Catholic Bishop (who "understood" the bigots concerns). Anti-racist activity was restricted to a spate of letters and articles in the papers. A situation such as this requires a direct action response but no group is currently in a position to organ-

ise it.

Why this increase in Racism?

There has been some speculation in the papers (Fintan O'Toole, Irish Times 16.6.95) about the increase in anti-Traveller agitation over the past two years or so. The fact is that such agitation and bigotry was always there and has surfaced on numerous occasions. Travellers housed in Rahoan in Galway twenty five years ago were subjected to such harassment that the term "Rahoonery" became part of the vocabulary for a time. Travellers in other parts of the country had gunfire directed at them and pig slurry thrown over their caravans.

There seems to have been an increase in racist attacks but this could also be that they are being reported more. The struggles of the various groups described in the previous section for civil rights for Travellers has undoubtedly increased awareness of these issues among people generally. Over the past ten years the emergence of a small number of articulate, politically active Travellers has raised the issue higher on the political agenda. The concepts of ethnic identity and cultural difference have also raised the temperature of the debate. Until fairly recently, Travellers and their supporters were essentially fighting for little more than an end to the worst forms of discrimination. In many cases, especially where middle class do-gooders and liberal clergy were involved, they were appealing to a charity motivation.

However the situation is now very different with Traveller groups throughout the country asserting their right to be treated with respect as an ethnic and cultural minority with their own beliefs, customs and values. By adopting this strategy, Travellers are finally aligning themselves with the struggles of nomadic and indigenous peoples everywhere. Apart from their close affinity with Gypsies and Travellers worldwide, their struggles now have

much in common with those of Native Americans, Aboriginal peoples in Australia, and Maoris of New Zealand, as well as indigenous people in South America. It is this new and very unacceptable (to the bigots) demand for respect as a cultural and ethnic minority that has fuelled the latest outburst of racism against them.

Over the past decade, these concepts gained credibility with a wider range of people. Racist descriptions and abuse in the media have been consistently challenged, with the result that Travellers rights as a separate minority group had begun to gain acceptance in wider circles. Once it was no longer acceptable to define them either as objects of charity or as failed settled people in need of social work and rehabilitation, the alternative was to accept them as different with all the rights and appropriate services they require to live decently in accordance with their cultural values. That such a prospect has proved to be totally unacceptable to many settled people is obvious.

Fianna Fáil Senator Marian McGennis, interviewed for a recent survey stated that Martin Collins, a Traveller activist closely associated with the concepts of cultural and ethnic identity, was responsible for all the anti-Traveller feeling and agitation in the country because he insisted in demanding rights for Travellers! Ridiculous though this statement is, it captures what many settled people really feel.

Ironically, settled society has always considered Travellers to be both different and inferior. Now that Travellers are asserting their right to be different but not inferior, they have provoked outrage.

Issues for Travellers

The key issues for Travellers remain the standard ones of civil rights campaigns: decent appropriate accommodation, access to good quality appropriate education - including adult education because so many of them missed out completely on education as children, appropriate easily accessible health care, and equality of access to all public and private services on a non-discriminatory basis. Central to all these demands is the recognition and resourcing of their cultural identity.

Effective anti-racist and anti-discrimination legislation is put forward as a solution to some of the problems Travellers face but the history of legislation such as the 1967 Race Relations Act in Britain shows that this is no solution. Self-determination is another key issue for Travellers and is complicated by the fact that so many adult Travellers have little or no formal education. The fact that they are such a tiny minority also means that they need the support of other more powerful forces in their struggle.

Current Strategies

Strategies being pursued by the ITM and most of the Traveller support groups are similar to those pursued by all of the major movements for social change over the past

fifty years. Lobbying, influencing policy and legislation, public awareness and education through the media and through workshops and seminars aimed at different groups within the community along with consciousness raising and training for Travellers are the main activities of these groups. There has been some direct action too with pickets of insurance companies who refuse to insure Travellers and several protest marches against the continued lack of accommodation and civil rights.

However, these actions have been few, especially in view of the recent blatant and vicious rise in racist attacks. Whatever mood for radical and direct action strategies there is among Travellers themselves has been mostly neutralised by professional community workers. A great deal of faith has been invested in such activities as the Government's Task Force on the Traveller community, which published its report this summer after nearly two years deliberation. This is despite the fact that there have been reports before, as long ago as the 1963 *"Report of the Commission on Itinerancy"* which produced nothing useful or effective. A great deal of energy and time has been diverted into this kind of tactic at the expense of building up a strong, assertive direct action movement among Travellers and their supporters.

Throughout Europe there is some mobilisation taking place among Gypsy and Traveller groups but most of this is now of a defensive nature. Three Gypsies were killed by a bomb thrown into their site in Austria earlier this year by neo-nazis. Two of those killed were survivors of the Nazi death camps where a quarter of a million Gypsies and Travellers were murdered. This outrage did not even make the papers here. In most countries Gypsies and Travellers are so despised that events such as these are not reported even by the left wing press. Racism against Travellers in Europe has increased with the opening up of Eastern Europe where there has always been a very large Gypsy and Traveller population living in oppressed and poverty stricken conditions. Thousands of these people are now trying to move into Western Europe to achieve a better life. They are the first of these immigrants to be harassed and sent back and physically attacked and even killed when they do manage to get into Germany or any other western country.

In France, Gypsies and Travellers cannot be citizens of the state. They cannot have passports, only travel papers which they must register with the police when they want to travel outside France. Even within France they must register with the police when they travel. In Austria, the Catholic Church set up a special organisation called Pro Juventute to kidnap the children of Gypsies and Travellers and gave them as slave labour to Austrian farmers. This practice went on into the 1970s and was justified by spokespeople for the church

even later. The Austrian Gypsy population was almost wiped out by this practise with Gypsy parents spending years vainly trying to find their children whose names and identities had been changed.

The situation of Irish Travellers is now one of crisis on several fronts. Basic accommodation, education and health needs are hopelessly inadequate despite the tiny size of the Traveller population. But it is on the ideological level that the real crisis is located with the assertion of cultural and ethnic rights by Travellers on the one hand and the total rejection of the implications of these demands by much of settled society.

Travellers' struggle for civil rights should be seen in the context of all the major social and political movements of the past fifty years and not as something separate or peculiar to Ireland or to Irish Travellers. Their struggles bear remarkable resemblance to those of Native Americans and indigenous peoples throughout the world.

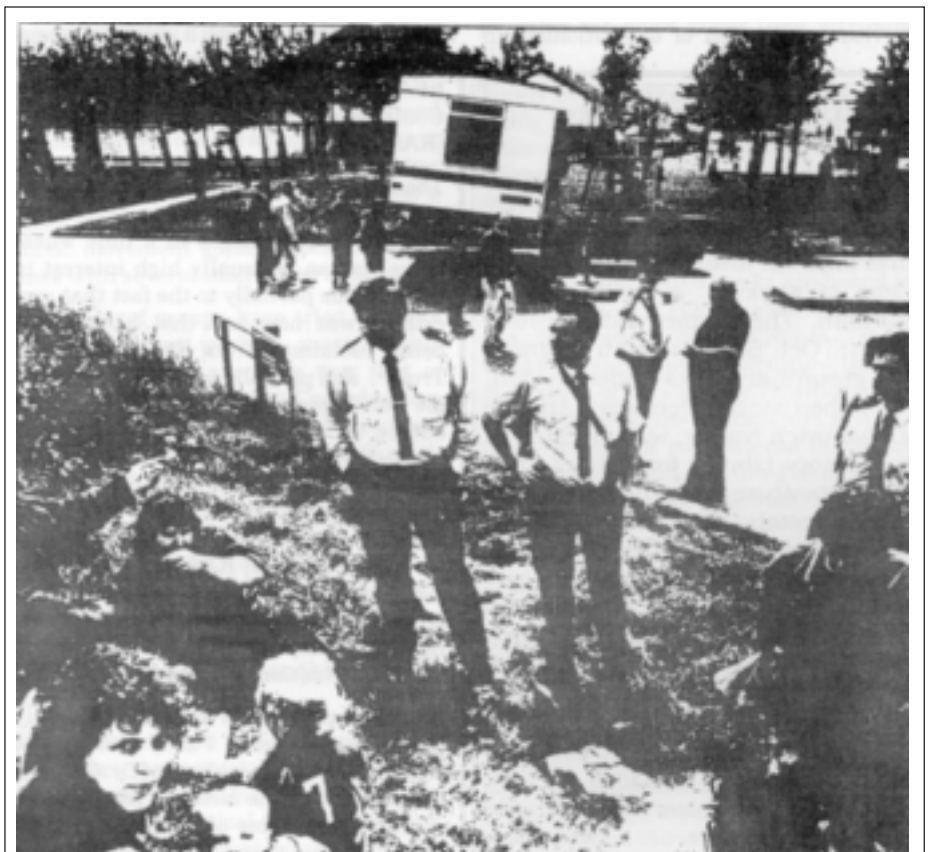
These struggles have to be situated in a context of racism, and the strategies devised must be equal to the challenge of racism. The direct involvement of Travellers themselves in determining specific strategies and tactics is essential, both because anarchists believe that all peoples should control the decisions that effect them and because it is Travellers who have to live with the consequences of such actions. These consequences can include increased harassment and attacks.

Travellers need the active support of progressive forces such as the organised la-

bour movement if they are to succeed in their struggle. Links need to be made with the struggles of working class people and their communities on a range of issues which effect them both. Travellers are often used by local and national politicians as a scapegoat and a distraction away from real demands about conditions in working class communities.

This cynical strategy of deflecting working class anger onto Travellers is unfortunately often successful as we have seen in Tallaght, Blanchardstown and Navan in the recent past. It needs to be challenged and exposed for what it is - playing the racist card in local politics. Traveller organisations need to take up the challenge to engage in direct action strategies if real gains are to be made.

The history of social movements such as the Black movement, the Women's movement and the Gay movement shows that serious gains will not be won by lobbying alone. The Traveller movement is no different and these lessons need to be taken on board by groups working for Travellers' rights. What is needed now is a strong Traveller-directed, direct action campaign to seriously challenge the racism at the root of all Travellers' inequalities. The WSM is committed to such a campaign and urges others committed to the basic principle of *"Traveller control over the decisions made in such a campaign"* to become involved in this struggle.



Same old story: A recent eviction

After the Fall

A New Beginning for Russian Anarchism?

It was only natural that anarchism would reappear in this country where the state has played such an omnipresent role in social life. The role that the state has played in usurping other forms of organisation has led people growing up in this society and those who visit it to contemplate the mechanisms of the state. Negative judgements of these mechanisms are usually formed, so of course some people would come to realise that the state cannot be reformed.

Even though a disproportionate amount of classical anarchist theorists and figures came from Russia, the movement lived a short life; the anarchist movement per se only really started up shortly before the 1905 revolution and was prematurely executed shortly after the consolidation of Soviet power. After a few years of Stalinism, by 1938 there were no signs of anarchist activity to be found. Still, ideas die hard and the spirit of anarchism was revived in at least a few individuals and small groups after the Thaw¹. The first self-proclaimed anarcho-syndicalist group was created in 1958 but it was short-lived, due to the effective work of the KGB. [see box]. Throughout the '60s, up until the Perestroika period, various groups sprang up now and again, but all were rather small and insignificant.

As one can imagine, the beginning of Perestroika and Glasnost signalled the start of a new era. A new type of movement, referred to as 'the informal movement' would grow and take the place of the dissidents. The informals differed from the previous generation of oppositionists in

several vital regards. The dissidents were very few in numbers and lived in their own ghetto, with few supporters amongst the intelligentsia; the informals were much larger in number and found more support in the intelligentsia and elsewhere as political ideas and cultural activity moved out of the dark recesses of society. The informals also worked in a wider range of activity than was possible for the dissidents. They often operated through official organisations, such as ideological, youth and cultural groups and they tried to turn the language of socialist ideology against the Soviet state. It was in the informal movement where the modern Russian anarchist movement took root.

Many of the anarchists who came out of the informal movement started off as critical Marxists. The first members of the Moscow *Obschina* group met while working in the clandestine *Organizing Committee of the All-Union Marxist Workers' Party*. Many of these people were historians and therefore had access to anarchist works that normal people were forbidden to read. They started to publish a samizdat magazine called *Obschina* (Commune) and eventually established an organisation, the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (KAS).

The early post-Perestroika anarchist movement was rather atypical in several aspects. First, it existed in a time where there was an unusually high interest in politics, due partially to the fact that everything was new and that history was being reclaimed from the Ministry of Truth², and partially to the fact that people were hoping for something better to be offered for their future. Second, it was created by people who had no experience of non-governmental organisation from which to draw lessons. Third, it was able to attract a rather substantial number of people in a short time; KAS had up to 2,000 members at one point. All of these things however contributed to what many people regard, perhaps inappropriately, as the fall of the Russian anarchist movement.

Interest in politics has waned considerably in the past decade. Partly this can be explained by the deep shock of Dr. Gaidar's therapy and by the fact that happiness is measured in terms of material acquisitions now more than ever before. Also, the novelty of pluralism has somewhat worn

off, and no grassroots movement ever managed to grow out of the informal movement, essentially leaving the people as disenfranchised from politics and as disillusioned as ever before. The informal anarchists, not quite comprehending what strategies they could work, thought only on a massive scale; no doubt they imagined that the workers could mobilise to take control of their factories on some significant scale and some tried (and succeeded) to get into office at a local level, hoping to effect some pro-worker legislation no doubt. (As for taking control of factories, it would have been a tall order in a country where people are so used to being ruled but also, the privatizers had something else in mind and apparently their promises of future material wealth held out more promise to workers.)

It is hard to say exactly how many anarchists there are in the former Soviet Union, particularly because there have been too many people and groups that label themselves anarchists but cannot be identified as such by their politics. (Such gross mutant groups, like anarcho-monarchists



Post-Stalin...1957

A group of people from the History Department of Moscow State University began to gather in 1957 and discuss different ideas, among them the ideas of workers' councils and of Bakunin. They formed a clandestine group in Oct. '58 and wrote a program. The group's activities ended in Jan. 1959 when one of its founders, Anatoly Mikhailovich Ivanov, was arrested in the History Library for writing anti-Soviet literature and sent to a psychiatric hospital. He was released in 1960 and people began to gather again. (Some people were poets and some political people so there were two tendencies in their loose group.) Then in 1961, before the Party Congress, three of them, Osipov, Ivanov and Kuznetsov, were arrested for plotting to kill Krushchev. Apparently they had seriously entertained this idea as they believed he would start a large-scale war. None of the three resumed anarchist activities afterwards.

and anarcho-democrats have existed; they obviously must be dismissed as quacks). Still one can safely estimate the number of people who consciously consider themselves anarchists and who have some contacts with others as 200-300 people.

The largest federations were FRAN (the Federation of Revolutionary Anarchists) and KAS which accounted for about 150 people. This however will probably change since the creation of other organisations - Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists (KRAS), which wants to join the International Workers Association (IWA); the Ukrainian-based, Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (RKAS), which considers affiliation with the IWA not to be on the agenda right now and the Siberian Confederation of Labour (SKT) which wants to concentrate on creating a syndicalist union and is not interested in taking sides in the conflicts between



people had with each other; community was to extend no further than the nuclear family, a structure which dominates Soviet life and creates various barriers to organisation. (Although few people here realise this.)

Isolated into their minute cubicles, many people have retreated into the home, preferring it to the harsh new world of capitalist Russia. There are no real leftist events, depriving anarchists of one of their traditional grounds for recruiting new people and there is little alternative media so to speak of. (The exception being in Kharbarovsk where local anarchists do a radio show.)

Those problems could be expected and we imagine that they plague people in other parts of the world as well. There are many places in the world that have very weak anarchist movements for much the same reasons; perhaps only the fact that there was Bakunin, Kropotkin and Makhno can explain why a small movement has grown in Russia. There are also problems endemic to the Russian scene. Most people are rather poor and it is difficult to fund activities so some people became rather dependent on fund raising from abroad, often creating mythologies around their groups and engaging in political prostitution. Also, due to the strange alliance between 'left' authoritarian forces and 'right' authoritarian forces, some people wishing to add warm bodies to the count often hang out with not only leftists but fascists. Naturally those people with half a brain have been trying to disown these people from the anarchist movement and the injustice they do to the movement is probably far more grave than anything else.

Slowly but surely a few dozen people are trying to develop their ideas about anarchism and figure out how to organise something. Personal politics are not an issue as yet and this reflects their status in society as a whole, but this will change. Gradually anarchist texts will be translated into Russian and some native works are bound to appear as well. The development of an anarchist movement may depend on what will happen in the near future; threats of a return of wholesale authoritarianism always loom on the horizon and it is unclear whether or not material conditions will improve. Still one thing is clear: we are now laying the foundations for the future.

Footnotes by R&BR

¹ After Stalin died and Khrushchev came to power, when the penalties for oppositional activity and the level of surveillance were reduced slightly.

² An Orwellian reference (1984) to the fact that before Glasnost history could only be written in a way that vindicated the current leadership of the Communist party and its past actions. History was a machine for justifying the party.

³ In the west a zine is typically a small circulation, crudely produced magazine distributed through personal contacts and by post rather than through selling in shops or other locations. We presume this is also the meaning here.

various sections of the international syndicalist movement. Many smaller groups exist inside and outside of these groups; a typical group may have between 3 and 10 people and like everywhere else, they are connected by their similar ideas on what anarchism is and what needs to be done. There are also a number of individuals around the country who are quite active but belong to no group.

If previously an anarchist could be considered to be a person who read one of the journals, signed up and was a warm body at meetings, nowadays anarchists are forced to take a much more active role. Most of the self-styled leaders who wrote programs and manifestos in the early days of post-Perestroika anarchism are gone, and although a few individuals have been more active than others in propagandising their ideas, small groups must meet and decide the eternal question: what is to be done? In this regard they are not unlike small groups in other parts of the world, particularly in isolated places with no real contacts with any sort of radical community.

Projects

Anarchists have started different projects, with varying degrees of success. In Moscow some anarchists and other sympathetic listeners gather every Thursday to give lectures on various topics, including anarchism and other philosophies. This is very important for people as we lack good books on anarchism in Russian and people need to understand it better. Still, the question then becomes one of how is to conduct these lectures on a larger scale and how to advertise them so that people can show up and listen. And how to attract people when so many are indifferent to politics? Some people wanted to form a

cultural centre but the person who found space wants to run things herself. Instead of creating a space for different collectives to use, the space has become a hang out joint, sometimes visited by skinheads and other idiots but occasionally host to some discussion or concert as well. In Tver and Kharbarovsk, concerts are sometimes held and in every city with some anarchist presence you might find a picket now and again.

One thing where anarchists have been somewhat productive is in creating zines³ and papers, although they are of varied quality. Still this activity is limited as printing costs are prohibitively high and typically people cannot afford to buy them; the publications must be subsidised if they are to have any distribution. At least a dozen come out sporadically, ranging from idiotic movement gossip sheets to larger zines with several interesting articles.

A number of groups have tried to make contact amongst workers, most notably some Ukrainian anarchists now part of RKAS (the Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists, not to be confused with the Russian group KRAS, the Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists). Some people have formed 'unions', but many of these are purely symbolic, usually consisting of two or three people. Obviously, these people are at a loss over what to do. There are no (and have not been) any grassroots movements here, in years, and so everything must be started from scratch.

The anarchists face an uphill battle here. People are very accustomed to having the state handle everything for them and this attitude is antithetical to the anarchists' principles of self organisation. The state also did a good job of destroying most ties

Rebels at Ruesta International Libertarian Meeting

LAST SUMMER saw the red and black flag of anarchism flying high in the mountains of Spain. Alternative Libertaire of France organised an international meeting for libertarian socialists, anarcho-syndicalists and anarchists, which saw over 100 delegates gather at the village of Ruesta in the Spanish Pyrénées. Unlike the average holiday resort, this village is owned by an anarcho-syndicalist trade union (the Spanish CGT). Comprising two hostels, two bars, a restaurant, a campsite, a lake, a church which has been turned into a small hall for meetings, a shop and about twenty buildings in need of major renovation, Ruesta is run as a leisure centre for members of the CGT (and anyone else who wants to visit).

The majority of the delegates came from the CGT, *Alternative Libertaire* (France), and the *Libertarian Socialist Organisation* (Switzerland). Smaller numbers came from *Libertarian Alternative* (Lebanon), the *Polish Anarchist Federation*, the *Italian Libertarian Communism* and the *Workers Solidarity Movement*, as well as from two other anarcho-syndicalist unions: the SAC of Sweden and the Spanish *Solidaridad Obrera*.

France

AL-F have about 150 members, many of them established activists in trade union and campaigning work, which includes a lot of work in DAL ('Right to Housing'). France seemingly has more empty houses than homeless people, which has given rise to a squatting movement which takes in single people and families, native French and immigrants. A number of AL members hold national and local positions in DAL, which indicates that they are active in the struggle and not just talking about it. Another area of activity is AC! ('Against Unemployment'), which has recently won free public transport for the unemployed in several cities. Other struggles mentioned were abortion rights and anti-nuclear.

In the unions they also seem to be pretty busy, and they say it was AL-F members who took the initiative to form the radical independent SUD union in the Post Office & Telecom, after the CFDT union bureaucracy expelled a branch during a dispute. SUD is now the second largest union in the Post Office. Similar unions have been formed in the health service and tax offices.

On the negative side of things we were bothered by their attitude that supporting candidates in parliamentary elections is just a tactical question. They do not see the massive contradiction that exists between anarchism and involvement in electoral politics. After all, we want to get rid of rulers, not help to prop up the division into rulers and ruled.

They see themselves as "libertarian communist" rather than anarchist, in the sense that they wish to add parts of other traditions to anarchism. They mentioned Rosa

Luxemburg and Karl Marx but didn't tell us which bits they wanted, nor what they saw as the 'failings' of anarchism (as opposed to wrong strategies or tactics).

Switzerland

The politics and culture of the OSL appear to be very similar to AL-F. With about 80 members they are active in both the French and German speaking cantons of Switzerland, though they seem to be much stronger in the French speaking regions. They spoke about their involvement in anti-militarism, squatting, anti-racism and opposition to 'workfare' schemes. They said the libertarian CRT trade union is primarily based on the watchmakers of the Jura (the people who took the anarchist side over 120 years ago in First International!) and is small, but does have some influence on other unions.

We also had any notion that Switzerland is a reasonably progressive country shattered when we learned that the last canton to give the vote to women only did so in 1994!

Lebanon

Very much linked to the French AL, this is a relatively new group. Their situation is one of working in a country which endured 17 years of civil war, where parts are occupied by Israel, where Syria is a force to be reckoned with, where religious sectarianism is institutionalised in law and repression of dissidents is increasing.

A handful of people operating in difficult circumstances, they have just begun distribution of their Arabic translation of Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism, from theory to practice* (towards the production of which the WSM made a donation). They intend to distribute 2,000 copies in the Lebanon and another 2,000 to Arabic speaking workers in France.

Poland

The Polish Federation are a looser body than the others who attended. At a national level they have no common political project, strategy or tactics. Their exact membership is unknown, even to themselves, but they have about 30 local affiliates which vary from 3 or 4 people up to 30 in some cases.

Activity has included big actions and ongoing campaigns on the Russian invasion of Chechnya, pensions, anti-racism/anti-fascism (four people were killed by nazi skinheads last year) and anti-militarism.

These comrades attended because they wanted more contact with Western anarchists, rather than because of any particular interest in *Alternative Libertaire's* desire for an international federation of 'platformist' and libertarian communist organisations.



The publications of some of the groups at Ruesta

The revolutionary unions

The people from the SAC, CGT and SO carried no mandates but were an inspiration, a living proof that anarchists can win workers in their tens of thousands. And they are not being won by militant trade unionism alone. At present the SAC is debating the future direction of their union, centring on whether to spend money on more ombudsmen (elected full-time officials who can be called upon by branches if they need assistance) or to improve the weekly SAC newspaper instead. Some members feel that, essentially, this is about whether to be primarily a union or primarily a libertarian political organisation. Whatever we may think about the relative merits of either proposition, it is a healthy sign that members are debating like this. (Not the sort of discussion you come across in SIPTU or IMPACT!)

As well as participating in the debates, the WSM delegates gave a formal presentation dealing with the situation in Ireland. This covered the historical weakness of 'left' politics; the problem of partition; the historical attraction of radical nationalism for rebellious youth, and the activities of the WSM. The latter covered our work to explain and popularise anarchism; and our activity in the trade unions and campaigns for abortion rights and against the water charges.

Conference declaration

A draft declaration was discussed, which was to be sent to all the participating organisations for discussion. Essentially this would commit the political organisations (not the unions) to further discussion, translation of texts, further meetings in 1996 and 1997, and a common protest at the G7 summit in Lyon next year. The WSM have signed (see letter).

Clearly many questions arise: How broad should this project be/what is the minimum political agreement required, what are the immediate objectives of co-operation? What should be the relationship to the revolutionary unions? The question of calling for the building of specific anarchist-communist organisations in Spain and Sweden? How will it be understood in the broader anarchist movement?

The bosses are well organised, we need to be better organised than them. While there is much co-operation across borders by anarchists, and some international bodies (like the syndicalist International Workers Association), the Ruesta meeting was a long overdue event. It brought together anarchists and libertarians who see themselves as coming from a tradition whose points of reference include the *Organisational Platform*, the Friends of Durruti, and the *Manifesto of Libertarian Communism*; the current among anarchists known as 'platformism' (which also needs a better name!) Debate, discussion and joint work can only help us move forward.

Declaration agreed at the end of the libertarian conference held in Ruesta (August 1995).

This international meeting of libertarians held in Ruesta allowed anarchists, militants, sympathisers, libertarian socialists, libertarian communists, anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary syndicalists to discuss our analyses of and methods of intervention in the social movements (i.e. the struggles against unemployment, sexism, imperialism, racism etc. and in the unions).

Discussions from different viewpoints also took place around ex-Yugoslavia and the rebellion in Chiapas. The debates showed there was a common wish to transform a world now dominated by many forms of oppression (Capitalism, imperialism & sexism). They also revealed differences in how we analyse and fight these oppressions.

Exploring these differences opens up a way for improving each group's understanding. It gave each organisation a chance to reflect on its practice and current position. The meeting was a small step forward in the construction of a new international political culture, one based on libertarian and revolutionary values. One also determined to bring together the oppressed to strengthen future revolts and struggles to create a new society.

This meeting is just a start. From it we drew up the following proposals and commitments.

1. In 1996 to hold a meeting to look at improving international co-ordination and collectivise discussions and interventions.
2. To translate our political texts & publish them in French, English and Spanish (at least).
3. To co-ordinate a large mobilisation (to include a counter-summit, demonstration and meeting) in Lyon, France, in June 1996, as part of the week of activity against the G7¹ summit.
4. To co-ordinate anti-sexist struggles. In particular to carry out solidarity actions with the Irish comrades in relation to the fight for divorce and abortion rights. To intervene in the fight of 3rd world and immigrant women and to prepare a common initiative for March 8th, 1996².
5. To campaign against nuclear weapons and in particular against the resumption of nuclear tests by the French government and against nuclear tests in China.
6. To actively support the march against unemployment planned for Autumn 1995 by parts of the Spanish union movement and unemployed associations.
7. Within two years to hold another libertarian conference, like the one at Ruesta but larger and with more ambitious objectives.

¹ Summit of the seven most powerful imperialist countries.

² International women's day.

Some comments by WSM on the declaration

September 1995

The Workers Solidarity Movement recognises the need for international co-operation among anarchists and libertarian socialists. Capitalism is an international system, organised on an international basis.

To combat it anarchists need international organisation. Such organisation would require agreement on major issues such as the role of anarchist organisations, activity within the trade unions and relations with the anarcho-syndicalists, how to combat racism and fascism, the type of struggle needed to advance the movement for women's freedom, how to relate to anti-imperialist conflicts. It would also need an agreed international strategy, the capability of fostering international debate among anarchists, and the ability to give aid to weaker sections or to those engaged in mass struggle.

In order to move towards the building of such an international organisation we welcome co-operation, discussion and debate with other anarchists and libertarians.

We place ourselves within the historic anarchist tradition. Anarchism has identified the goal we desire: a classless society where production is organised to satisfy needs and where people control their own lives in a truly free society. We do not wish to go 'beyond anarchism', there is no need. Anarchists have, of course, made mistakes but that is to be expected. The point is to learn from those mistakes and avoid repeating them, to grow and mature within the anarchist tradition.

It is in the interests of furthering debate and practical co-operation between anarchists and libertarians that we sign the declaration of the international libertarian conference, held at Ruesta in August 1995.

Sinn Féin and the 'Peace Process'

ARRIVING AT THE END OF THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

Since the ending of the 'Cold War', many national liberation struggles throughout the world have been 'settled'. In places as far apart as South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Palestine these national liberation struggles were led by groupings which were often seen as having left leanings. However in all of these cases the 'settlement' was far from socialist. The current 'Irish peace process' is following exactly the same lines and has nothing to offer the Irish working class North or South

The announcement of the Provisional IRA cease-fire on August 31st 1994 was almost universally welcomed. In a statement, the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) stated:

"We welcome the IRA cease-fire. Over the last 25 years over 3,000 people have been killed and 40,000 injured. Thousands have been through or are still in prison. The primary blame for these deaths and all the associated suffering belongs with the British state..." (1)

Our welcome for the cease-fire was based on our recognition of the fact that the armed struggle was a flawed tactic, one

"...incapable of achieving a solution as it is incapable of delivering a military victory and defeating the British army..." and one which "...relies on the actions of a few with the masses left in either a totally passive role, or one limited to providing intelligence and shelter to the few..." (2)

However, while welcoming the cease-fire, we drew a very clear distinction between this and the "peace process" - a process which we saw as being inherently flawed

"The 'peace process' as it is called, will not deliver a united socialist Ireland, or significant improvements apart from those associated with 'de-militarisation'. In addition it represents a hardening of traditional nationalism, and the goal of getting

an alliance of all the nationalists - Fianna Fail, SDLP, Sinn Fein and the Catholic Church." (3)

Sound of silence

Over twelve months later, the cease-fire holds firm, the people of the 6-Counties have enjoyed the 'sound of silence' of the guns for over a year and a semblance of normality has returned to the area after 25 years of war.

But, as the British government continues to drag its heels even on the simple concessions which normally follow the ending of conflict such as prisoner release and round-table inclusive talks, and as the Sinn Féin leadership appears to have totally capitulated on its ultimate objective of a 32-County Socialist Republic and subsumed itself into the Pan-Nationalist Alliance of SDLP/Dublin and 'Irish-America', many republican supporters are left floundering and asking themselves exactly what is going on.

Less than two short years ago Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness et al - as far as the media and mainstream politicians were concerned - were "godfathers of violence" for whom the English language did not contain sufficient condemnatory terms. Now they are feted by Bill Clinton in the White House, wined and dined at \$1,000-a-plate dinners and rub shoulders with

captains of industry. How has this come about? And, more importantly, how does it square with their professed aim of a Socialist Republic? How must those who believed in the republicans' 'left turn' in the 1980s feel now?

In order to answer these questions or even to begin to understand the logic of the current republican position, it is necessary to look back at the origins of the Provisional movement and to study the politics on which it was founded.

Following the disastrous border campaign of 1956 - 1962, the IRA was practically non-existent, retaining only a handful of members and being regarded by most working-class nationalists as a thing of the past. Meantime, the nationalist middle-class had given up waiting for a united Ireland and had instead begun to look for equality of opportunity within the 6-County State. It was from this layer that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in 1967 with a very moderate (in any state that even pretends to be democratic) list of demands - one man (sic), one vote; allocation of housing on a points system; redrawing of gerrymandered electoral boundaries; repeal of the Special Powers Act; abolition of the notorious B-Specials; laws against discrimination in local government. The issue of the border was not even raised.

However, because the Northern State had been founded on discrimination, even these moderate demands could not be acceded to. Nor could the bigots who controlled the State allow dissension in the form of public protest. When the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) attacked the second Civil Rights





Stormont, the Dail and Westminster, the dissidents walked out. They established a provisional army council of the IRA and a caretaker Sinn Féin executive.

Their first public statements strongly attacked the leftward trend in the organisation and were vehemently anti-communist. In its Easter statement of 1970 the Provisional IRA army council stated:

"Irish freedom will not be won by involvement with an international movement of extreme socialism." (4)

But it would be wrong to see the split as simply being along left-right lines. Many of the Officials (as the other wing became known) had become reformists and were in favour of a strategy of working through parliament to effect change - even being willing to take their seats in Stormont - the notorious symbol of oppression - if elected.

march on October 5th 1968 in Derry, the die was cast.

The Peoples Democracy (PD) organised march from Belfast to Derry in January 1969 was to be a key turning point. When the 100 marchers were attacked by about 350 loyalists throwing rocks and stones at Burntollet Bridge, the RUC stood by and watched.

The naked sectarianism and irreformability of the Orange State had been dramatically exposed. Just seven months later the British army were back on the streets when the RUC found themselves incapable of restoring order following what became known as the "Siege of Derry".

British Guns

Up to this stage the IRA were non-existent in terms of military activity. The gun had been re-introduced to Northern politics, not by a highly organised republican movement determined to wreak havoc, but by the forces of the British State. It is interesting to note that the first death, the first dead soldier, the first dead policeman, the first dead child and the first bombing were all at the hands of British or Loyalist forces. The lesson appeared clear - if even the modest demands of the Civil Rights Movement were met with such massive repression by the State, there was no alternative but to meet force with force. Unfortunately the left at the time failed to offer a coherent alternative and so 25 painful years of war and bloodshed had begun.

The Provisional movement was formed following a split in the Republican movement in January 1970. When the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis (Conference) of that month voted to end the traditional policy of abstentionism from

Because of the reformist nature of the Officials many of the younger militants - especially in the North - joined the Provisionals despite the fact that at the time they were controlled by right-wing traditional nationalists who wanted no truck with socialism.

Throughout the early 1970s, the Provos engaged the British in a hugely intensive war of attrition. Events such as Bloody Sunday in Derry (when 13 civilians were killed by the Parachute Regiment during a Civil Rights March on Sunday 30th January 1972) brought floods of recruits. When the British sent heavily-armed troops into IRA no-go areas in Belfast and Derry in July 1972, there were 95 deaths. In the previous four months there had been 5,500 shooting incidents and hundreds of car bombs had devastated the centres of many

Northern towns. (5)

Throughout this time, the IRA remained heavily dependant on the conservative American Noraid network for funding. Joe Cahill had on the IRA's behalf promised Noraid that they would deliver "...a republic without socialist or communist ideas..." (6). General Army Order No. 8 banned military activity in the 26-Counties and political work in the South was confined to support for the Northern IRA.

Following a brief cease-fire in 1972 during which six Provo leaders - including Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness - were flown to London for talks with British government ministers, the IRA campaign resumed. At this time too Loyalist paramilitary groups wreaked havoc with a particularly vicious sectarian campaign of terror aimed at the Catholic population.

Flawed Strategy

It was the Provisionals' cease-fire of 1974-1975 however which was to show up for the first time one of the flaws in a strategy which relied solely on a military campaign - especially one with a purely nationalist base. Speaking of this period 10 years later, in 1985, Gerry Adams was to say

"When the struggle was limited to armed struggle, the prolongation of the truce meant that there was no struggle at all. There was nothing but confusion, frustration and demoralisation, arising directly from what I call spectator politics" (7)

By the 1978, Sinn Fein Ard Fheis disaffection with the leadership's handling of the 1975 truce had begun to assert itself and Adams was elected to the position of Vice-President. A new leadership began to





emerge based around Adams, Tom Hartley, Joe Austin and Danny Morrison. There was much talk - especially among the prisoners - of socialism and of replacing the reactionary nationalist outlook of the past. A new type of community politics began to emerge with Republicans being encouraged to involve themselves in community groups, trade unions and cultural groups.

It was the beginning of the 'blanket protest' following the removal of the prisoners' 'special category status' in March 1976 which was to lead eventually to the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981 and the highpoint of support for the Republican cause throughout the 32-Counties. By 1980, with Margaret Thatcher in power, there were 380 prisoners taking part in the 'no wash' protest and preparations for a hunger strike were well under way.

When the prison protests began in 1976, Sinn Féin as an organisation seemed incapable of the sort of political agitation necessary to highlight the prisoners' plight. When a conference was held in Coalisland, Co. Tyrone in January 1978 to discuss the building of a broad anti-Unionist front which would campaign on the prisons issue, Sinn Féin criticised the naivety of the organisers and basically put forward the proposition that only those who offered uncritical support for the IRA's campaign were entitled to get involved. However by October 1979 when a further Conference was held in the Green Briar Hall in Andersonstown, the Sinn Féin line had changed dramatically and Gerry Adams proposed to the conference a list of 5 demands around which a "Smash H-Block" campaign could be built. These demands were:

- (1) To be exempt from wearing prison clothes.
- (2) To be exempt from prison work.
- (3) To have freedom of association with fellow political prisoners.
- (4) The right to organise educational and recreational facilities, to have one weekly visit, to receive and send out one letter per

week and to receive one parcel per week.
(5) Entitlement to full remission of sentence

These demands were agreed by the Conference and became the central plank of the National H-Block/Armagh Committee. While this Committee worked to raise public awareness and bring pressure on the British government on the issue, Sinn Féin was involved in secret negotiations with, among others, Cardinal Tomás O'Fiach - the head of the Irish Catholic Church - to try and persuade him to intervene with the British on the prisoners' behalf.

Meanwhile pressure from inside the prisons was growing and Sinn Féin began to come to the realisation that they had to organise politically - especially in the 26-Counties - if they were to make progress.

Hunger Strike

In October 1980, the prisoners in the H-Blocks decided that their only hope of pressing home the issue of prison status was to go on hunger strike. In a communication sent in to Bobby Sands, Gerry Adams stated that the leadership of the republican movement was "...tactically, strategically, physically and morally opposed to a hunger strike." (8)

The prisoners however, were determined to press ahead with their plans. The first hunger strike lasted for 53 days and involved nearly 40 prisoners in the H-Blocks and Armagh. There were pickets, marches and riots throughout the 6-Counties. In Dublin, 12,000 people marched in support of the prisoners in late October and a further 2,000 picketed a summit meeting between Thatcher and Taoiseach Charles Haughey on 8th December. Republican strategists began to realise that political agitation could be a strong weapon in their arsenal.

On 18th December - with one of the hunger strikers, Seán McKenna, fast approaching death - the British government indicated that if the fast was called off some of their demands would be met. The prisoners

decided to end the protest but discovered very quickly that the British fell far short of meeting their demands. Almost immediately, preparations began for another hunger strike.

Again the Sinn Féin leadership attempted to dissuade the prisoners from their proposed course of action

"...in terms of the political priorities of the moment, we did not want the hunger strike. We were just beginning our attempts to remedy the political underdevelopment of the movement, trying to develop the organisation, engaging in a gradual build-up of new forms of struggle and, in particular, we were working out our strategy in relation to elections. We were well aware that a hunger strike such as was proposed would demand exclusive attention, would, in effect, hijack the struggle, and this conflicted with our sense of the political priorities of the moment." (9)

Bobby Sands

But the prisoners were determined. They felt they had no alternative and plans went ahead. On 1st March 1981 Bobby Sands was the first to refuse food. Over the course of the next seven months, ten republican prisoners - members of both the IRA and the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) - were to die on hunger strike. The National H-Block/Armagh Committee - set up on a humanitarian/ pan-nationalist axis - was to organise protests, pickets,

the 100,000 people who attended Sands' funeral were told to go home and wait for the Republican movement to take its revenge.

marches, riots and even some strike action throughout the 32-Counties. It was a period of mass action but also one of missed opportunity. It was a period also which was to have long-term effects on the direction of Sinn Féin's developing political strategy:

"The hunger strike did away with spectator politics. When the only form of struggle being waged was armed struggle, it only needed a small number of people to engage in it. But, with the hunger strike, people could play an active role which could be as limited or as important as billposting, writing letters, or taking part in numerous forms of protest." (10)

The mass action was indeed impressive. In the week of Bobby Sands' funeral, for example, over 10,000 marched in Dublin, 5,000 in Limerick, 4,000 in Cork. There were big marches in Waterford, Tralee, Killarney, Wexford, Bray, Meath, Monaghan, Donegal and many other places. In Belfast over 100,000 people attended the funeral. There were work stoppages - some organised, some spontaneous - all over the country, including Dublin Corporation maintenance depots, Alcan's construction site in Limerick (2,500 workers), Arigna mines in Co. Leitrim, building sites in Dublin, factories and shops in Limerick, Cork, Cobh, Tralee, Wexford, Bray, Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan. Trades Councils in places such as Waterford, Dungarvan, Meath, Dundalk and Drogheda called successful stoppages. (11) There were daily pickets and protests in almost every town in Ireland.

While this was in many ways people power at its best, the necessity to maintain friendly relations with the 'broad nationalist family' which included Southern political parties, the Catholic Church and the GAA meant that it had to be controlled. Thus the 100,000 people who attended Sands' funeral were told to go home and wait for the Republican movement to take its revenge. Thus also the failure to make workplace and community struggle the spearhead of the campaign. Ultimately the period was to prove the acid test of Sinn Féin's 'socialism' - a test they were to fail miserably.

The real lesson that Sinn Féin took from the H-Block Campaign happened almost by chance. The sudden death of Frank Maguire, independent MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone raised the possibility of a prisoner candidate standing in the bye-election. Bobby Sands was duly nominated and elected with 30,492 votes. Sands' election literature sought to "borrow" the votes of the electorate. Voters were told that by lending their votes they could help save Sands' life. In the following election they could go back to supporting their usual candidates. Apparently it would have been expecting too much to hope that people would vote for an IRA man because they supported what the Republican Movement stood for.

When Charles Haughey called a general election in the 26-Counties for 11th June, Republican prisoners stood as candidates in 9 constituencies. Paddy Agnew (Louth) and Kieran Doherty (Cavan/Monaghan) were elected. Kevin Lynch missed a seat in Waterford by just 300 votes. The electoral successes were to have two effects. Firstly, the Dublin and London governments moved to marginalise the Republican Movement through a process of extended collaboration that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and the extradition legislation of 1987. For Sinn Féin, the message they took from the period was that "Our tentative moves towards adopting an electoral strategy were rapidly concluded with the

electoral success of that year. The centrality of mass popular struggle eventually found its place alongside the armed struggle." (12)

Buoyed by the prisoners' electoral successes many Republicans began to believe that not only should an electoral strategy become more central to the overall struggle but that it was only a matter of putting up candidates and winning seats. Thus the "armalite and ballot box" tactic was developed and indeed it appeared to meet with considerable success in the 6-County area. In the 1982 elections to the newly-established "Northern Assembly" Sinn Féin candidates got 64,191 first preference votes and Adams (West Belfast), Jim McAlister (Armagh), Martin McGuinness (Derry), Danny Morrison (Mid-Ulster) and Owen Carron (Fermanagh/South Tyrone) were all elected. In elections to Westminster in June 1983 the Sinn Féin vote increased to 13.4% and Gerry Adams was elected MP for West Belfast.

'Left Turn'?

The first cracks began to appear in the traditional policy of abstentionism at the 1983 Ard Fheis when a decision was taken to contest the upcoming elections to the European Parliament and to take seats if elected. But it was the decision of this Ard Fheis to replace the movement's commitment to "Christian principles" to "Irish Republican Socialist principles" which was to lead many to believe, over the subsequent decade, that Sinn Féin had taken a 'left turn'. Ruairi O'Brádaigh resigned as President and Adams was elected to the position.

When the Euro elections were held, the Sinn Féin vote in the 6-Counties was down slightly to 13.3%. In the South - where in the 1982 general election the SF vote in the key constituencies of Louth and Cavan/

Monaghan had halved since the hunger strike election - their total vote was only 2%. In the 1985 Northern local elections, the Sinn Féin vote slipped further, to under 12% but they had 59 Councillors elected.

In the South the electoral breakthrough never came. As one Sinn Féin activist put it:

"...we were not going to get votes in Ballymun because the Brits were battering down doors in Ballymurphy" (13)

The need to 'become relevant' to 26-County voters meant that Sinn Féin activists were encouraged to become involved in community and trade union activities. Much good work was done by SF activists on the drugs issue in Dublin, for example, over the next couple of years. However, there was a glaring dichotomy. The strategy being formulated by the leadership - that of developing a 'Pan-Nationalist Alliance', an "...Irish Ireland movement to offset, especially in the 26-Counties, the neo-colonial and anti-national mentality that exists there" (14), meant that direct conflict with the 26-County government had to be avoided. Instead of realising that the failure to make 'an electoral breakthrough' in the 26-Counties was directly attributable to the failure to offer a radical socialist alternative, the leadership decided instead that the problem was abstentionism. At the 1986 Ard-Fheis the decision was taken to enter Leinster House if elected and many of the "old guard" left to form Republican Sinn Féin.

Anarchists would of course argue that the decision to use the tactic of participation in elections in the first place would inevitably lead to reformism. The decision to drop abstentionism was just one more step in that process. True socialism cannot be achieved through the parliamentary process. Participation in elections has the dual





effect of maintaining illusions in the State apparatus and of taking away all possibility of self-activity among the working-class and replacing it with a reliance on voting for 'good representatives' every couple of years.

While Sinn Féin continued - and still continues - to call itself a socialist party, the central policy became one of creating the much talked about "Pan Nationalist Alliance". Much of the leadership's thinking on this issue was included in a document entitled "A Strategy For Peace" given by Sinn Féin to the SDLP during a series of meetings between the two parties in 1988. These meetings had come about as a result of an extensive series of contacts between Sinn Féin, representatives of the Catholic Church and indirect contact with Taoiseach Charles Haughey. In the document, Sinn Féin called for a date for British withdrawal, saying that, "Within the new situation created by these measures [withdrawal], it is then a matter of business-like negotiations between the representatives of all the Irish parties, and this includes those who represent today's loyalist voter, to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state.... the British government needs to be met with a firm united and unambiguous demand from all Irish Nationalist parties for an end to the Unionist veto and a declaration of a date for withdrawal...."

One of the aims of the SF/SDLP talks was, according to the document, "That Sinn Féin and the SDLP join forces to impress on the Dublin government the need to launch an international and diplomatic offensive to secure national self-determination."

It must be remembered that this proposal was made at a time of unprecedented co-operation between the Dublin and London governments in an attempt to marginalise and smash the Republican Movement. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which Gerry Adams himself describes as "...a coming together of the various British strat-

egies on an all-Ireland basis, with the Dublin government acting as the new guarantor of partition" (15) was already two years in place. Haughey was in the process of extraditing republicans and tightening up security co-operation with the British forces. And workers and the unemployed in the 26-Counties were facing a severe economic onslaught under the terms of the government-union-employer deal, the "Programme for National Recovery" (PNR).

Socialism?

So what of the 'left turn'? Adams still described himself as a socialist so he must have seen some role for socialists in the "Irish Ireland movement". And indeed he did:

"The true socialist will be an active supporter of the republican character of the national independence movement. She or he will realise that, unless this character is maintained and unless the most radical forces are in the leadership of the independence struggle, then inevitably it must fail or compromise. This classical view of the matter contrasts with the ultra-left view, which counterpoises republicanism and socialism and which breaks up the unity of the national independence movement by putting forward 'socialist' demands that have no possibility of being achieved until real independence is won." (16) [my emphasis].

In essence, it's the classic stages theory - national independence first, then we can think about socialism. A significant section of the 'nationalist' ruling class - so the theory goes - can be drawn into the fight for a united Ireland, if we don't frighten them off by screaming too loudly about poverty, unemployment or the ills of capitalism!

This 'tread very carefully' philosophy was seen clearly during the Anti-Extradition Campaign of the late 1980s. Appeal after appeal was made to the 'grassroots' of Fianna Fail (FF) and attempts were made, to quote from a motion from the National

Committee to one of its first conferences, "...to play on the inherent contradictions within the party [FF] between the old Dev'ites and the newer monetarists.."

At another Conference, a National Committee document stated "A primary means of pressurising Fianna Fail is through their own party structures."

Because this remained a key focus of the campaign, event after event was scaled down or cancelled entirely for fear of alienating the couple of backbench TDs who it was hoped would issue a statement against extradition. Thus when the January 1988 Conference of the Irish Anti-Extradition Committee (IAEC) took a decision to stage a large demonstration outside the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis, this decision was countermanded by Sinn Féin and only a small picket took place.

Indeed this situation reached farcical heights following the extradition of Robert Russell in August, 1988. At the first National Committee meeting of the IAEC following Russell's extradition, Norah Comiskey, Richard Greene and Jim Doyle (all FF members) with the support of SF were still talking about organising meetings of FF members against extradition and even seriously discussed holding a press conference to call for the removal of Haughey as leader of FF and his replacement by a "true republican".

The lessons of that period should have been clear. The complete failure of the anti-extradition campaign to make an impact should have taught Sinn Féin that any alliance with bosses - even if in this case the alliance was more illusory than real - is one dominated politically by bosses. Instead, however, the drive to create the



The pan-nationalist alliance in action, Eamonn O'Cuív, one of the main speakers at the August 26th 'Peace Talks Now' march. This Fianna Fail TD is a well known right wing bigot, infamous for his anti-abortion & anti-gay opinions.

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"Pan-Nationalist Alliance" was intensified.

By the early 1990s the "Irish Peace Process" (as Sinn Fein was labelling it) was well under way and Sinn Féin and the British government were in regular secret contact. Northern Secretary Peter Brooke had publicly acknowledged that he found it "...difficult to envisage a military defeat of the IRA." (17) On the other side of the coin, Republicans had realised that a military victory for the IRA was not a possibility.

The British were saying that they had no selfish interest in staying in the 6-Counties, and Brooke was involved in a series of 'talks about talks' with Unionist parties and the SDLP. At Sinn Fein's Wolfe Tone commemoration in June 1991, Adams stated

"While Dublin and the SDLP refuse to stand up to the British government it will continue to think it can do exactly what it wants in Ireland.....Dublin should seek a change in Britain's current policy of maintaining the union to one of ending it and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government, democratically elected and accountable to the Irish nation. Dublin should use the opportunity of these talks [Brooke talks] to persuade the unionists that their future lies in this context and to persuade the British to accept that they have a responsibility to influence the unionist position. To secure a national and international consensus on this the Dublin government needs a strategy for unity and independence. Such a strategy would involve winning international support for the

demand for Irish independence and would require the full use of Irish diplomatic skills and resources." (18)

Nobody ever explained how a government which was presiding over massive unemployment and poverty, which had - over the previous 5 years - imposed severe restrictions on the living standards of workers and the unemployed through "National Programmes" (government/employer/union deals) and which was quite efficiently fulfilling its role as a junior partner in the western capitalist system was likely to persuade the unionists that life in a 32-County State was going to be any better for them. The realpolitik of the Pan-Nationalist Alliance meant that the need to smash both states on the island and replace them with a Socialist Republic was quietly shelved. Instead it was more important to play footsie with Dublin and 'Irish-America'. Such a policy was never likely to win working-class Unionists over from the Orange bigots.

Persuaders for Unity!

Not alone did Sinn Féin now call on the Dublin government to take up the banner of "Irish Independence", but the call also went out to the British government to "...join the ranks of the persuaders in seeking to obtain the consent of all sections to the constitutional, political and financial arrangements needed to establish a united Ireland." (19)

With the publication of the Sinn Féin document "Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland" in 1992, the strategy was fully in place. The central thrust of the document was that Britain must "join the persuaders" and Dublin must "...persuade the British that partition has failed,...persuade the unionists of the benefits of Irish reunification, and....persuade the international community that it should support a real peace process in Ireland." (20)

The first steps were now being taken to establish the 'Irish American' arm of the

axis. "Americans for a New Irish Agenda" was set up by, among others, a former U.S. Congressman, Bruce Morrison. Adams and Hume went public on the results of their discussions in April 1993. In June - amidst great controversy - Mary Robinson, the 26-County President, visited Belfast and shook hands with Gerry Adams. It was to be the first of many famous handshakes and the first public acknowledgement of Adams the peace-maker.

The Warrington bombing of March 1993 in which two children were killed brought intense criticism of the armed campaign from both inside and outside the Republican Movement. The massive car bomb which was exploded in the City of London in April, causing millions of pounds worth of damage, reminded the British government that the IRA was still a force to be reckoned with.

Realising that the initiative could not be left in the hands of Sinn Féin, Dublin and London had meanwhile been involved in drawing up their own set of proposals. The Downing Street Declaration - launched in December - was a classic fudge. In the House of Commons Prime Minister John Major said that the Declaration did not contain "...any suggestion that the British government should join the ranks of the persuaders of the value or legitimacy of a united Ireland...". Meantime in the Dáil Taoiseach Albert Reynolds was saying that "...for the first time ever, the right to self-determination of the people of Ireland is acknowledged...".

Despite the fact that Downing St. contained nothing that had not been in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Sinn Féin felt that its strategy was in place and that it was in a stronger position than in 1985. Therefore, despite nearly eight months of procrastination, it was only going to be a matter of time until the IRA cease-fire was declared. The rapidity with which the Sinn Fein leadership was accepted into the arms of 'respectability' caught many by

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surprise. For Adams, McGuinness et al it was, however, simply the culmination of a strategy built up over many years.

Sinn Féin now declares as its priority:

"...to move the peace process forward...to build on the gains which have been made and to move speedily forward into all-party talks led by both the British and Irish governments...to bring about an inclusive and negotiated end to British jurisdiction in Ireland. We seek to replace it with an agreed Irish jurisdiction." (21)

If socialism had to wait throughout the seventies and eighties, the realpolitik of the nineties means that the word should not even be mentioned for fear of upsetting John Bruton, John Hume or Bill Clinton. Republicans might well be justified in asking if this is what Bobby Sands died for.

Multinationals

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin has no difficulty in attending Bill Clinton's "Investing in Ireland" Conference (Washington 24/5/95), attended by the chief executives of some of the biggest multinationals in the world all looking to see if Ireland can provide them with tax breaks and low wages to extract even more profits. Their Northern Chairperson Gearóid O'Hara calls on the anti-union multinational Seagate not to cease their exploitation of Irish workers but to offer training schemes to "...afford the youth of Derry the chance to become the direction and decision-makers of industry in their own country..." (22). In the course of a debate in the U.S., the same Mr. O'Hara can declare that Sinn Féin "...have no problem with capitalism." (23)

The only surprising thing is that anybody should be surprised. This is simply the logical consequence of the type of 'nation-state' politics pursued by Sinn Féin over the years. If "labour must wait" then

labour will always be left behind. This is not a uniquely Irish phenomenon. It has happened and is happening throughout the world, the most notable recent examples being the ANC in South Africa and the PLO in Palestine. Because the driving political force has been nationalist rather than socialist in nature, compromise with and the eventual acceptance of capitalism is inevitable even for those who continue to call themselves socialists.

This is not because - as some might claim - the SF leadership have "sold out" on their socialism. The entire direction of the 'Peace Process' shows instead the bankruptcy of nationalist politics and the fact that nationalist alliances have nothing of consequence to offer the working-class. 'Socialism' is useful to the Republicans at times as a slogan to show why they are different, to mark them out from other members of the "nationalist family". However the most important aim is to develop and maintain unity among that national-

ist family. In order to do this the socialist slogans must be left on the backburner, to be resurrected now and again, usually at election time, when they are useful. With time, the slogans become less and less useful and will eventually be disposed of entirely. Nationalists see their rightful role as being that of governing "their" States and will do deals with almost anybody to be allowed to fulfil that role.

The question which remains is to ask what future there is for Sinn Féin. In the absence of the military campaign (which is extremely unlikely to re-commence under the present leadership for a variety of reasons), is there any real space for Sinn Féin's politics? One thing is clear - Sinn Féin may describe itself as "socialist", it may have as its objective a 32-County Socialist Republic but it does not have the policies or the ability to deliver on that objective. Already one Sinn Féin activist has been quoted in a national Sunday newspaper as saying that Sinn Féin could well be part of the next government in the 26-Counties (if of course they manage to get anyone elected!). As a nationalist party, Sinn Féin has actually achieved one of its main objectives of the last decade - the Pan-Nationalist Alliance is firmly in place, even if the British government is hardly shaking in its shoes at the sight of it. With the demand for immediate unconditional British withdrawal having been replaced by a plea for "inclusive all-party talks", Sinn Féin look set to become yet another moderate 'party of the centre'. Without an armed campaign to support, their politics differ little from those of the other mainstream Irish political parties. Genuine socialists who are members of Sinn Féin should be asking themselves why.



Inside: Chomsky, Travellers, Unions & more