

Red & Black Revolution

A magazine of libertarian communism



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The Zapatista's New Strategy

Environmentalism and Class * Communism: What's In A Word?

Also: The Situationists, Review: Anarchy's Cossak by Alexandre Skirda

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About the Workers Solidarity Movement

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

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

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

In the years since our formation, we've been involved in a wide range of struggles - our members are involved in their trade unions; we've fought for abortion rights and against the presence of the British state in Northern Ireland, and against the growth of racism in southern Ireland; we've also been involved in campaigns in support of workers from countries as far apart as Nepal, Peru and South Africa. Alongside this, we have produced over 80 issues of our paper Workers Solidarity, and a wide range of pamphlets. Over the years we have brought many anarchists from abroad to speak in Ireland. These have included militants from Chile, the Czech Republic, Canada, the USA, Greece, Italy, and a veteran of the anarchist Iron Column in the Spanish Civil War.

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 has been 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.

A couple of years ago our paper Workers Solidarity became a free news-sheet, which appears every two months. With a print-run of 6,000, this means a huge increase in the number of people here in Ireland receiving information about anarchism and struggles for change. As more people join the WSM, we are able to do more to promote anarchism. If you like what we say and what we do, consider joining us. It's quite straight forward. If you want to know more about this just write or email us.

We have also increased and improved our presence on the Internet. This move has been prompted by the enormous success to date of our web site and resources. The site which includes the WSM pages (www.struggle.ws) now often gets over 250,000 hits per month. This means a vast number of people are now looking at and reading about our anarchist ideas. Furthermore, we have made our papers, magazines, posters and some pamphlets available on PDF format - allowing for material to be downloaded in pre-set format, to be sold or distributed free right across the world.



Interview: Looking back on the battle of the

BINS & Lessons Learnt

The campaign against the bin charges was one of the largest organised mass movements of resistance to the state in recent years. Local organising groups popped up across the city. It climaxed in the winter of 2003, with the jailings of numerous activists in quick succession. Here we talk to Dermot Sreenan, a member of the WSM who has been a prominent activist in the campaign from the off.

What are the bin charges?

The bin charges are a charge for the collection and disposal of domestic rubbish. This service was, and still is provided by the local council. Funding which is supposed to be supplied from central government, from our taxes, to the council for such services has been drying up. The city manager, a glorified accountant, introduced a charge for the collection of rubbish. It is a classic tactic, take a public service, impose a charge, make it profitable, and then add the final part of the jigsaw, privatise of the service.

Why would anarchists be arguing for lower taxes?

The bin-charges are frequently referred to as a double-tax, or a stealth tax, which I prefer. You pay the same for your bin regardless of your personal wealth. It costs over 180 euros to get your bin collected if you earn 12,000 euros, if you earn 22,000 euros, if you earn 122,000 euros. No matter what you earn, you pay the same charge. In summary, it's unfair, and this bin-tax is another attack on our class and we fought against it for that reason. At the same time as this tax was being imposed, millions were being found in off-shore accounts set up for the ruling class to avoid paying any tax at all. The rich avoid paying

taxes, and the rest of us have it deducted at source.

How did the campaign start off?

The campaign started off in a room in a club, with a wide selection of various people from different left wing groups. The Socialist Party and the WSM had the experience of being in the campaign that had defeated the water tax, and we knew that this tax was coming because it had been predicted in the estimates. (The 'estimates' is name given to the budget that the city manager put forward as the costs of running the city for the year. In this year he had put in a new cost for collection of rubbish.). There were representatives from other groups there, the Socialist Workers Party, the Workers Party, and Sinn Fein. I recollect that there was about twenty or so people in the room, and it was decided to contest

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Cabra residents blockade bin trucks in an estate.

“The council waged a very heavy and direct propaganda war against the campaign. Very expensive council advertisements were aired on prime time television telling people that a tsunami of waste was coming their way if we didn’t recycle.”

this issue with a mass based non-payment campaign. A steering committee was set up, and we started building the resistance to this new tax.

What was the involvement of anarchists in the campaign?

We were involved from the very start of the campaign. I was on the steering committee for four years, being campaign secretary for the first two. However it’s one thing to have someone sitting on a committee but far more important to us was to build real local groups so that when the fight really came we could have every street organised for that battle. I and a number of comrades were involved in getting the first meetings off the ground in the area where we were living, the Liberties. We started to ask people to not pay and not to apply for waivers (an exemption from paying granted to those on low incomes). We started to get a local group off the ground. We worked closely with some people from the Socialist Party in this task. In other areas of the city members of the WSM were taking the same initial steps in getting the campaign and local groups going. For us it is a very important step to get people involved in the struggle, to get them to saying no to this new tax, to show them that resistance is not futile. That was the only way that a real mass non-payment campaign could be built. Many local meetings attracted hundreds of our neighbours

Was there any involvement of globalisation/anti-capitalist activists in the campaign?

No, not really. I think that there was a perception that the campaign wasn’t for them. Of course this is not true, but many of these activists live in rented accommodation and it was unclear as to whether the landlord would deal with the charge or the tenants. So perhaps they didn’t see it as affecting them. Most of the people involved in the campaign were older, people who were settled, with children and grandchildren, while the anti-capitalist activists tended to be much younger. The anti-bin tax campaign was also more of a local / community campaign. So perhaps the anti-capitalists didn’t feel that there was a place for them

or that there was an easy way for them to get involved. Also, the campaign was probably seen as being dominated by the old trotskysist left, and many of the anti-capitalists have a poor view of these groups, having had experience with one or other of their various front organisations.

How did the campaign develop?

Initially we held local meetings. We would invite the city councilors to come and meet their electorate and explain their position on the bin-charges. Most declined to show up, so we would line up chairs with missing councillors’ names on them. Then the meeting would discuss how to organise the area to drive up membership of the campaign, and how to increase non-payment. Certain areas got local groups off the ground very quickly, and these then continued to meet, organising stalls and getting leaflets into all the streets in the area. Some areas only ever had one meeting and never seemed to meet again.

What strategies were used?

The primary strategy was to ensure non-payment. This meant taking on the arguments of the local loyal Labor Party people who tried to rubbish our campaign, and who promised that some leader or other would get rid of the bin-charges. Labour would look after the people, that would’ve been a first!

The main strategy in the early stages was to get recognised as a campaign, to let people know that this tax was being fought against, and to spread it far and wide and to drive up non-payment and in turn increase the membership of the our campaign. In the later stages when they stopped collecting rubbish we blockaded the bin trucks, either in our estates or at the depots, arguing that they collected all the bins or none of the bins.

What were the organisational structures of the campaign?

A major conference was held, the campaign was launched, and the steering committee was elected and recognised. The anarchists

tried to ensure it was as democratic as possible, and we had motions passed at conference that all major decisions should be taken at All-Dublin Activists’ meetings which would meet regularly and the job of the steering committee would be to keep the campaign functioning, and in the media, in the meantime.

On paper, the organisational structure was good, but decisions aren’t made on paper, they are made in rooms full (or not so full) of people. In reality, the organisation of the campaign was poor.

Properly functioning local groups weren’t set up in every area, and the All-Dublin Activists’ meetings were often poorly attended (and at times its decisions were ignored by the steering committee).

As anarchists we wanted local groups to function properly and organise their area for themselves. What I mean by that is that the local people are in charge of the local group, that they are calling the shots, they are electing their delegates to the All-Dublin activists’ meetings. For people to seize control of their own lives and to take the fight to the authorities, the local group had to work in a very clear and openly democratic way, with those involved taking the decisions and acting on them. This way people could learn things like speaking in public, drafting leaflets and convincing their neighbours to join the campaign.

In other areas, and because of the nature of politics of their parties, once a leafletting network was established and membership was being collected, members of the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party were happy to represent the views of the area, without going to the trouble of holding that many meetings

Instead of a campaign based on strong local groups, whole swathes of the city were carved up along political party lines. Local meetings would be organised, and depending on which party, the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party, was stronger on the ground, that area was then run by that party. Over a period of time, the campaign evolved where each party took charge of particular areas of the city, and local groups were dependant on their contact on the steering committee for leaflets and information. In some cases local groups only existed on paper, or only existed in the sense that someone from the steering committee would drop off leaflets

to a group of people in the area, who would then distribute them.

To make matters worse, co-operation amongst members from both parties was poor. Meetings would happen and people from the other party wouldn't be informed about them. So while there was a level of co-operation between the two major trotskyite parties, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party, but there was also a deep level of distrust. The Socialist Workers Party felt that they had ignored the anti-water charge campaign (which successfully resisted a similar tax a few years previously) and in this way they had lost an opportunity. They did not want this to happen again and so were involved from the very start. The Socialist Party had worked in the previous campaign, but this time had to work with the other Trotskyist party. The steering committee was split, having members from both parties represented

Did all local groups function like this?

In areas where we lived we tried to encourage our local groups to meet regularly and to be in charge of their local campaign group, but unfortunately there weren't very many of us so we could only be active in a couple of local areas. Some of the other smaller political groups that were involved, such as the Irish Socialist Network in Finglas and Action in Cabra and East Wall, also tried to build local

groups that were run by local people. Later on, these were among the most active parts of the city campaign. Unfortunately though, the groups decided to run candidates in the local elections. So ultimately, this led to the most active groups still being asked to elect someone to sort out the problem for them, instead of sorting it out for themselves.

What did the campaign publish?

The campaign published a news bulletin that was aimed at householders, letting them know the non-payment figures, what moves the council had been up to, and most importantly encouraging people not to pay. It reacted to the council's threat that they were going to pursue people for money owed. Letters threatening court action went out with alarming regularity, followed by some court summonses. We produced the news bulletin with the constant message of "Don't Panic – Don't Pay".

The council waged a very heavy and direct propaganda war against the campaign. Very expensive council advertisements were aired on prime time television telling people that a tsunami of waste was coming their way if we didn't recycle. The truth was the council didn't care about recycling, they just wanted money out of the householders (for instance, initially they

levied a flat charge and didn't take into consideration how often or how full people's bins actually were).

How much of a mass mobilisation was there when non-collection of rubbish started in parts of the city?

Eventually, when non-collection started in the city, it started in areas where the campaign was not strong. This made perfect sense from the Council's point of view. They had all the facts and knew the places where there was high payment (and no active campaign), and which places were defiant (where the campaign was strong and well supported). The sad truth was that although the campaign had grown, it hadn't grown strong enough, and when non-collection started it meant that there were a lot of political activists going out to areas to try and ensure that collection of the bins took place. We blockaded the trucks in our estates to force the trucks to take the rubbish. A lot of people were nervous as they were being intimidated with talk of 'breaking the law' etc. and all too quickly injunctions preventing the blockades were granted and arrests were made.



What was the campaign's reaction to the arrest and jailing of activists?

The campaign ended up with a lot of people arrested in a very short space of time. This was the time when the council, ably assisted by the state, went all out to smash the campaign. Joe Higgins and Clare Daly (Socialist Party) got arrested out in Fingal, and they were followed by 12 more arrests from the city campaign. I think people were shocked at the lengths the council were prepared to go to get in their precious tax, but road to profit has to be paved. Nearly four thousand people marched to Mounjoy prison. The unions pledged their support, and to stay strong. Over a 1,000 people marched from Cabra (a very strong part of the campaign) to the gates of Mountjoy prison again in a tremendous show of solidarity from one area.

After this initial stand-off the Council got smarter and started doing non-collection only from certain depots in the city. We knew that non-collection was going to be implemented in the city area. The campaign took a decision to attempt to blockade, to stop all the trucks from going out on their routes, when we knew that they were doing non-collection from a specific depot.

This meant getting to the bin depots very early in the morning, at around 7.00 am. The campaign stated that all bins would be lifted up or none of them would be picked up. This was the idea behind the tactic of blockading the depots.

The campaign didn't really have the numbers to blockade all the depots successfully, and once again the union leaders, who spoke of support outside the prison walls, couldn't be counted on for tangible support when this started. In short, I would say that the effect of the arrests was to intimidate people and I think it worked.

Why and how did the escalation end?

After two days of blockades on all depots where non-collection was happening, I got a phone call from someone on the steering committee saying they were calling it off for the third day. I think people were tired, but it's interesting to see how bad the decision making process was in reality. No meetings, no real discussion. Just a phone call saying that there wasn't going to be any pickets for the third successive day.

Later, the Campaign took a decision to start blockading commercial refuse collections that were run from certain depots in the evening. This meant it was easier for people to get to them after work, and we had some successful blockades. Injunctions, threatening jail if we didn't leave, were read out to us and we ignored them when there were enough of us.

After a good protest outside City Hall, I remember attending an activist meeting. I was still on the steering committee and I remember the reluctance of the committee to go downstairs and talk to the activists assembled, because they hadn't a line worked out

for the tactics to be employed at this stage. I wanted the activists meeting to decide what we should do next, that was the closest thing we had to getting a democratic decision. There were many elements of farce, but this was the height of it. Eventually that meeting decided to concentrate our forces on one depot, early in the morning and to see if we could at least block that one for the day. The decision was passed by most of the people in the room, a clear majority.

The following day as I cycled down in the rain to the depot, I got a phone call from someone in the Socialist Party who fought on this issue in Cork, and had nothing to do with the Dublin campaign, informing me that someone else had called for another depot to be blockaded instead. We were left with about 8 people to blockade that depot in the lashing rain. There appears to be a scant regard for democracy in certain parties.

The escalation ended because we couldn't sustain it, there weren't the numbers. There weren't the numbers because when the campaign was being built. Certain parties were happier to establish leaflet droppers than real functioning local groups. Weak local groups meant few people active on the ground, which meant no numbers for the blockades.

What kind of support the campaign get from the trade unions?

I don't think there were many problems getting motions passed in favor of the campaign. This happened in many of the trade unions, but what did this mean in real terms? It was more difficult to get money from them to support the campaign, so all the money that was used in the campaign had to come from donations or memberships.

The campaign knew that the Unions would have a very important role to play in this fight but as usual when it really came down to the crunch, the leadership and the officials ran away from the fight, and into the arms of the bosses. In South Dublin we heard of union members being ordered back into their bin depot by officials. When we were blockading the bin depot at Grangegorman a member of the Mandate trade union (who was also a supervisor) read out the injunction to the campaign and warned us that we were breaking the law.

In effect, if you were in the union, and you wanted to make an issue of this, it didn't appear to me that you were going to get



any backing from the officials. In fact those bin workers who were deeply sympathetic to the campaign and didn't pay the double tax themselves, were so paranoid that they would only meet secretly with the campaign. I think that is testimony to truth behind the Trade Union motions in favor of the campaign. The members were in support; the Union leadership was most definitely not going to make this a battleground. The leadership of the Unions did what they often do; they calmed members down and de-escalated at every opportunity.

Did the campaign approach the bin-workers ?

Yes, we did this officially though SIPTU and also unofficially by talking to many of the men who were living in neighborhoods where the campaign was strong. Like I mentioned before, there were many bin workers who were sympathetic, but they knew in their hearts that the Union, despite having motions in favor of the campaign, was not going to support them. The bin-workers, when they were caught up in a blockade, were often quite cheerful and never displayed any animosity to the activists. They would just go back into their cabs and call their supervisor.

How did Electoral Politics influence the campaign ?

This is a good question because I think that this had an overwhelming influence on the way the campaign worked, and developed. The illusion was sown early on that it was the election of Joe Higgins to the Dail that truly defeated the "Water-Tax" seven years ago. The anti-bin tax campaign never even reached the same strength as the water-tax campaign and I think it's because people believed the myth. Thousands of people were involved in the campaign against the bin-tax, but in the end all they were asked to do was to vote for one protest candidate or the other.

Many of the local groups were organised with an eye to the election. The major organisers from the political groups saw themselves as potential candidates. They were happy to often be the sole point of contact between local groups and the steering committee and the campaign. They didn't believe the myth, but they certainly propagated it. They knew that if the campaign developed in this way, that no other 'independent' candidates would emerge. Also, that if they were the ones who brought the news of the campaign, it stands to reason that they would most likely

"The illusion was sown early on that it was the election of Joe Higgins to the Dail that truly defeated the "Water-Tax" seven years ago. The anti-bin tax campaign never even reached the same strength as the water-tax campaign and I think it's because people believed the myth."

be the ones to stand up for the people and represent them when the elections come

So many local areas didn't meet too often, and when they did it was only to listen to news of how the campaign was faring. Batches of leaflets were given to people to distribute, but they were usually just the main campaign newsletters. In effect, local groups didn't develop an autonomy that they required in order to give people a sense of ownership of it. People needed to be drawing up local leaflets, instead they were being handed ones from the steering group to hand out. There were lulls in activity, but I think over a period of time people didn't feel like they owned the campaign, even in their own areas.

What lessons can we draw?

I think that the founding principals of the campaign were fine, a mass campaign of non-payment, but it's in the structure and application that this campaign failed and failed badly. Local groups have to come together, function in a democratic way, and bring others into them, and then those groups have to be federated upwards. The way this campaign started was with 22 people in a room. The next campaign should start with 22 people in your estate, talking about how you are going to not pay the new tax for water, or whatever it might be.

It should not be left up to far left political parties to divide up areas and organise them. Sure they can have a meeting about the issue, initiate something, but you cannot leave it to them because in a few years they are just going to ask you to vote for them. When we needed the numbers in this campaign we didn't have them and I firmly believe that's for a few reasons. Real functioning local groups were not built in enough areas, and the campaign did not spread into enough areas of the city, and there was no real support for the workers when they needed it from the Unions.

When an issue like this comes around again, local meetings have to happen quickly in our communities. We cannot wait for word from the central steering committee, we cannot wait for a central campaign to

get off the ground, what each of us can do is organise a meeting in our areas and get people prepared for the next fight.

Working class people must seize the opportunity; they must own the campaign from the start and view it as an opportunity to bloody the Councils noses and put a halt to their gallop towards privatised services.

It seems that the anarchist arguments weren't that influential in terms of the campaign structure. Why do you think that was ?

The anarchist argument was won in terms of having a structure where the All-Dublin Activists' meeting was the supreme decisions making body of the campaign. If that All-Dublin meeting was comprised of delegates from real functioning local groups, then I think it would've worked. But, that was on paper, and campaigns are not won on paper. The anarchists were weak, there wasn't enough of us. We only had sustained activity in one area, and some activity in a few other areas. In some places we only had one individual living locally, so we weren't in a strong position in terms of influencing the campaign across the city. So the structure was ignored, and so too were decisions from the all Dublin meetings. The real place where anarchists lost the argument was in the one over elections, and we lost that because we couldn't argue it in all the areas where people stood for elections. We couldn't hold back the stampede for power....

What next?

Well, it will only be a short time before we get to take them on again. Fresh from this victory, I would only say it will be no time at all before they dust down their plan to start charging us for the water. It may sound ridiculous that they could attempt to charge us for a resource we appear to be deluged in everyday, but our chance to take them on will be at hand, and if we can learn from this, it will be our chance to put this privatisation monster back in the box.

Communism: What's In A Word?

William Thompson

One of the first people to critically engage with political economy and attempt to turn it around to defend the improvement of the condition of the working class and rural poor was the scion of an Anglo-Irish landowning family from West Cork by the name of William Thompson. Born in 1775 in Cork, the young Thompson had been an enthusiastic supporter of the enlightenment, republicanism and the French Revolution. He later became a leading figure in the Co-operative movement, in radical opposition to Robert Owen.

In the 1820s, outraged by the use of political economy by a local "eminent speaker" to argue the supposed necessity and benefit of the absolute poverty of the "lower orders" Thompson set about an investigation into political economy which resulted in his "An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness" of 1824. As the lengthy title indicates his attention was, like the political economists, also focused on the effects of the distribution of wealth. However his yardstick for the outcome was the utilitarian "greatest good for the greatest number" rather than the overall abstraction of the "wealth of the nation". He addressed (Political Economist) Bentham's three principles governing distribution - the right to security, the right to the produce of labour and the right to subsistence. The right to subsistence was the principle of distribution by need which, in Bentham's reasoning, had to be subordinate to the

The terms socialism and communism appear in England around the 1820s as terms adopted by members of the cooperative movement who were sick of hearing their politics referred to as "Owenism". Originally the two terms were undifferentiated but by the 1840s communism was used by revolutionaries to differentiate themselves from reformists such as J.S.Mill who had adopted socialism to cover an indigestible mess of reformisms.

by Paul Bowman

Beginnings

As long as society has been divided into the privileged and the exploited there has been resistance and that resistance has found voice and expression in the language of the oppressed seeking to define the road to their freedom.

Communism, however is the product of the rise of capitalist society and the new conditions of oppression and new possibilities for freedom it brought. The introduction of capitalism involved the struggle for power of a new class excluded from the governance of pre-capitalist agrarian based society and the voice they found to express and direct that struggle was political economy. Communism then begins as the other new class, the proletariat or working class, seeks to find its voice and finding itself in contest with the emerging capitalist class is forced to take on, confront and subvert the voice of their opponent. Thus communism as a discourse begins as a response to political economy.

By the 1870s the terms had moved from differentiating means to distinguishing ends. The Oxford English Dictionary notes in its sources:

"Forster Diary 11 May in T. W. Reid Life (1888) ... I learn that the great distinction between communism and socialism is that the latter believes in payment according to work done and the former does not".

It is this meaning of communism as opposed to socialism that evolved in the late nineteenth century that this article discusses. Of course its not that important to get hung up on a name; for many people the concise definition of communism being something to do with Marx and the USSR is the one they know. For us the name of the post-capitalist society we aim to help construct is a detail, what matters is the content of the ideas. Nonetheless for the purposes of this article we need to choose a name so we stick with the historical one.



GAMA workers rest on May Day 2005.

This is an extract from an article discussing the historic development of the idea of communism, it can be found at <http://struggle.ws/wsm/rbr/extra/communism.html>

right to the produce of labour which recognised the priority of the producers' claim to the product of his or her own labour. Bentham over-ranked both with the right to security i.e. that the individual's right to his or her existing property had to be defended from arbitrary abstraction by society or all medium to long term incentives to economic activity would be nullified by the possibility of having any gains taken away in the future.

Thompson's first point of attack was to recognise that under the guise of the right to security Bentham and the utilitarians were in fact defending the existing property status quo without any interest into the legitimacy of how this division of ownership had come about. In Thompson's native West Cork it was easy to recognise that the monopoly of land by the Anglo-Irish protestant ascendancy had been brought about not through thrift, hard work and parsimonious virtue but by military force. Further Thompson exposed that exchanges between the dispossessed and property-monopolising classes could not be seen as free or equal in any way as the propertyless had to accept unfair wages for the sale of their labour under duress of starvation as the alternative. Thompson went on to analyse the process of exploitation of the wage labourer by their employers and how the lion's share of the product was appropriated by the latter as surplus value in an account later adopted by Marx.

From here Thompson moved to posit a system of "free exchange" where equal access to land and the means of production was guaranteed to all, but distribution was governed by the right to the produce of labour taking precedence over the right to subsistence. As the anarchist historian Max Nettlau noted "[Thompson's] book, however, discloses his own evolution; having started with a demand for the full product of labour as well as the regulation of distribution, he ended up with his own conversion to communism, that is to unlimited distribution". That is, having proposed a system based on the right to the full product of labour he re-examined it compared to a system of equal distribution by the same utilitarian yardstick that he had used to dismiss the status quo and found, to his initial surprise that the system of "free exchange" was inferior to that of unlimited equal distribution. In examining the hypothetical system of "free exchange" he discovered its competitive nature - the term "competitive" in fact was first applied to describe capitalist exchange by him. The evils Thompson ascribed to the competitive system were not simply ethical or moral - that the system made each look upon his or her peers as rivals and means to an end - but also in terms of efficiency -

"It is time to stop the narrative of the historical emergences, eclipses and re-emergences of libertarian communism to examine, in the abstract, what it is. A libertarian communist society is not a pre- but a post-capitalist society."

that competition would encourage people to hide their innovations and discoveries and that market intelligence would also be kept secret thus causing waste and inefficiency.

What is Libertarian Communism?

It is time to stop the narrative of the historical emergences, eclipses and re-emergences of libertarian communism to examine, in the abstract, what it is. A libertarian communist society is not a pre- but a post-capitalist society. That is, it is a society that is economically dominated by social or cooperative production - i.e. there is an advanced division of labour with only a small minority of labour being engaged in basic food production and most labour is engaged in producing goods or services that are mostly consumed by others. As a corollary there is a high level of communication and general scientific and technological development. What distinguishes libertarian communism from capitalism is that the delivery or transmission of goods and services to their consumers is done to satisfy their needs and desires and not linked or restricted in any way to the consumers contribution to the production process. There is no money or wages and products are not exchanged either for money or for other products judged to be of equal value - whether that value be measured in labour time necessary for its production or some other hitherto undreamt of measure.

Stated baldly like that to those used to the workings and logics of capitalist society - and that is all of us these days - it seems at first sight an absurdity or at the very least an unworkable pipe-dream. To explain the existence of libertarian communists then, it is necessary to add the following proviso: Libertarian communists believe that private property (in the means of production), class society, money and the wage relation are all interrelated aspects of capitalist society and the attempt to change society by abolishing some of those aspects while retaining others - e.g. abolishing class society and private property while retaining money and the wage as socialism proposes - will only result in an unstable and violently contradictory mess that can only end in collapsing back into the relative stability of the capitalist dynamic unless it is taken forward to

full communism. In other words libertarian communists believe that attempts to make a post-capitalist society by halves, such as socialism proposes, are doomed to end up being transitional stages not to communism but to capitalism - as in fact the historical experience of the 20th century has born out, at least as far as the project of Marxian state socialism is concerned. The libertarian communist critique of Leninism and all its unpalatable 57 different varieties is not just that it is not libertarian, but that it is not communist.

On that point we must emphasise that by using the term libertarian or anarchist communism we are signalling our opposition to the abuse of the word communism by the state socialists, not that we have chosen an alternative to authoritarian or state socialism because these latter phrases are contradictions in terms. The state relies on the wage relation to exercise any authority, indeed to even exist. Without paid enforcers the state cannot exercise power as the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic discovered when he stopped paying the wages of the riot police who were supposed to be repressing the demonstrations of other unpaid public sector workers on the streets of Belgrade.

In this sense communism is always libertarian or anarchist, as the abolition of the wage brings about the abolition of the relation of command which structures the organs of state power such as the police, army and bureaucracy.

Though the failings of state socialism have been amply exposed by recent history, we do need to re-examine the case of proposed libertarian socialism - a society where land and the means of production have been taken into common ownership but the products of labour are owned by their producers and exchanged for the products of others on the basis of equal value measured by labour time embodied in them. It is the contention of libertarian communists that such a system would make all producers into competitors with each other. The system of exchange valued by labour time introduces the "productivity paradox" - the longer you take to produce a given output the more of another's output you can exchange it for. Conversely the more efficient you are in

“In short the free software movement is the product of thousands of software writers or hackers working collaboratively without pay to create whole systems of software that are owned not by the producers but the common property of all.”

producing your output, the less you get in exchange for it. The productivity paradox is that labour value incentivises inefficiency and disincentivises efficiency. This is why capitalism necessitates that the promotion of efficiency is specialised off as a management function over and against the interests of the productive workforce. The roots of class conflict in production are to be found in the productivity paradox arising directly out of exchange by labour time value itself.

The system of competition of individual interests also produces the negative effects of people seeing each other as potential rivals rather than as allies and promoting their narrow sectional interests rather than the general good. Thus we have doctors who are paid to treat disease and unsurprisingly they spend little time on disease prevention.

But by far the greatest evil resulting from the system of individual competition - *bellum omni contra omnes*, the war of all against all - is the outcome that our most important social product, the society we live in, becomes an alien impersonal “other” that none of us control yet we are all controlled by. By competing all against all to maximise our little individual share of the social product to own, we lose the ownership of the society we live in. Libertarian communists believe that trading in the measly shares of the social product we own under capitalist relations and in return gaining the ownership and control over the direction of the whole society we make will result in a net gain for all both materially and in terms of freedom.

Fine words indeed, but it logically follows that if the trading in of individual ownership rights over the product of one’s own labour in return for the common ownership of a post-capitalist society were to result in a net loss for all or most of humanity then libertarian communists would be shown to be mistaken and those who preach the capitalist gospel that the end of history has come and that the capitalist world is truly the best of all possible worlds would be proved right.

Up until recently this was seen by all sides as a question that could not be settled this side of a revolution - without making the experiment. However in the last few years new developments taking place even within current capitalist society have thrown this pre-conception into doubt.

Beyond the commune, de-centred anarchy

Before we re-engage with a historical narrative to examine these recent developments we need to examine some other aspects of the productive process, both as it has developed under capitalism and how it can be expected to further develop under post-capitalist relations.

The first tendency is the increasing de-territorialisation of production. By that we mean the increase of the number of fields of production that are not tied to a specific place. Food production via agriculture is territorial or tied to a specific place. The bit of land from which you harvest must also be the same bit of land you previously prepared and sowed. Consequently for those people and those periods of history where agricultural subsistence was the dominant mode of production, settled living in or by the territory of production was the norm for the greatest number. Those settled agricultural communities unified the spheres of production, consumption, reproduction and nearly all social interaction within a single space. This largely self-sufficient and potentially self-governing community is a social form that has existed for centuries throughout nearly all human cultures around the globe up until the last century or two of capitalist upheaval. As such it still had a powerful hold over the political imaginations of anarchists no less than the rest of the different progressive tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Russian “Mir” influenced Kropotkin’s vision of libertarian communism just as the Spanish, particularly Andalusian, “pueblo” influenced the vision of the CNT’s Isaac Puentes.

But as the productivity levels and related division of labour increase a larger and larger percentage of the working population are pushed out of agriculture, out of the rural setting and into urban spaces. In the beginning some of these non-agricultural settlements were themselves based around territorially-specific sites of production - whether mines, fishing harbours or river crossing points. This last case points us towards an important feature - non-agricultural settlements necessarily imply the existence of flows of goods and people, if only in bringing to the urban spaces the food they cannot produce. In fact even prior to the

development of urban spaces, agricultural settlements required interaction with marginal but indispensable itinerant populations to bring them goods impossible to produce locally and be the medium of communication of news and culture from afar. Despite the often deep divides of incomprehension and mutual suspicion between settled and itinerant communities and the tendency of the numerically superior former to discount or “forget” the latter from inclusion in the notion of “productive society”, the two bodies are both mutually interdependent elements of the social whole despite the de-territorialised nature of the itinerant minorities contribution.

As industrialisation proceeded, the creation of large centralised mass workspaces with large immovable plant continued the appearance of territorially-specific production. At this stage the workforces of large mills or factories lived in their shadow and the workforce walked to work. Industrial disputes were neighbourhood affairs.

However as the continuing specialisation, sub-division and proliferation of the different strands of social production has progressed it has become more and more evident that an increasing amount of production is not territorially specific. That is, many workplaces can be moved more or less arbitrarily from one place to another. This de-territorialisation of production is particularly pronounced for those engaged in non-material production - i.e. the production of information and communicative work, an increasingly significant sector of social production. Communication is a necessary part of any social production process and as long as face-to-face communication was unrivalled, in terms of cost and effectiveness, the workplace had the irreplaceable role of the physical assembly point for that communication. Recently, with advances in telecommunications we have seen the emergence of the ultimately de-territorialised social production process - one that no longer has any “work-place” at all where the participants need to assemble.

One social sphere remains territorially specific for the majority settled population however - the domestic sphere, i.e. where we live. What has changed is that this domestic and reproductive sphere no longer maps directly onto a productive sphere. In a given urban neighbourhood the residents will typically be engaged in many diverse productive roles, attending many different workplaces or no static workplace at all. Similarly in the static workplaces the workers will be from many different neighbourhoods. Unlike the rural commune there is no longer a single unifying point of assembly where all matters affecting production,

consumption and reproduction can be made directly by those directly affected by them. For people to take part in making the decisions that they are affected by they must enter into a number of different communicative assemblies, each with different sets of associates. This element of de-centring finally bids goodbye to the ideal of the "commune" as the basic social form with which to reconstruct society. The old federalist vision of an ordered tree-like structure of decision-making from the local to the global - albeit governed democratically from the bottom up, rather than autocratically from the top down - must now be replaced with a multiplicity of interconnected but distinct networks with no dominant centre. The commune is dead, long live the commune!

Free Software and Intellectual Property

We should now move away from the abstract back to the real-world historical developments that we mentioned earlier that have overturned assumptions about the possibility of making any practical tests of the effectiveness of production free of capitalist constraints this side of a revolution. In fact such a practical experience has already been underway for some years, not at the instigation of any pre-meditated anti-capitalist or revolutionary movement, but as a reaction to the actions of capitalist businesses in the field of software development. The rise of the free software and open source movements is a story in itself and one that is still very much in the process of being written. Indeed a number of books have already been turned out by media and academic commentators struggling to explain the phenomena and particularly to get to grips with the aspects of it that have most perplexed and disturbed the received truths of capitalist economics.

In short the free software movement is the product of thousands of software writers or hackers working collaboratively without pay to create whole systems of software that are owned not by the producers but the common property of all. In the space of little more than 10 years an entirely voluntary and unwaged network of producer consumers have collectively produced an operating system - GNU/Linux - that is not only comparable to, but in many aspects, superior to the flagship commercial product of global capitalism's most successful hi-tech company - Microsoft. Given the short

space of the time the free software movement has taken for this achievement compared to the decades Microsoft has invested in its product and the fact that the unwaged hackers have done this work in their spare time, the case for the relative efficiency of unwaged, property-claim free production has already made a strong opening argument.

As you might expect the explanation for these novel results are related to specific characteristics of the object of production, i.e. computer software. To see what is different let's take a counter-example say a motor car. Conceptually we can divide the production of a car, into two different production processes. The first is the production of a design for the car the second is the production of a car from that design. In the world of mass production such as that of car production, the physical product - the actual car - dominates the design for that model of car. That is the cost of manufacturing the physical parts for each individual car is far more significant than the cost of the whole of the designer's wages. To the extent that it makes economic sense for a car company to hire an engineer to work for two years on shaving 5 pence off the production cost of a plastic moulding for a car sidelight (genuine example).

In complete contrast, with computer software the cost of creating an individual copy of a software product and distributing it to the user is so negligible in relation to the

effort to produce the original design that we can say that the design or prototype is the product. This is important because it means the labour cost of producing software is basically unchanged whether the end product is distributed to 10, 1000 or 1,000,000 users. This has an important implication - it is impossible to exchange software for product of equal labour value. Consider a single hacker spends 30 days producing a given software utility, he then distributes it to 30 end users for the equivalent of an average days wage apiece. This has the appearance of exchange but consider what happens when the hacker then distributes the same software to another 30 users for the same terms, and then another 300, then to a further 300,000?

There is a further difference between the car and the piece of software. If a fault is found on a car and it is fixed all the other existing cars of that model would need to be fixed individually. With a piece of software however, any user who detects and or fixes a fault in their copy of that software can then share that fix or improvement with the entire community of users and developers of that software at virtually no cost. It is this multiplier effect that helps make the collaborative process of free software so productive. Every additional user is a potential adder of value (in the sense of utility) to the product and the communicative feedback between developers and users is an important part of the productive process.



“The role of libertarian communists is in many ways unchanged - to participate in the present dynamic of class struggles while advocating a future beyond capitalist relations.”

There is a second barrier to incorporating software production into a scheme of labour valuation. That is the uncommodifiability of original or creative labour. By commodifiability we mean the ability to reduce a given buyable item to a level of interchangeability where a given volume is equal to any other given volume of the same thing. Potatoes are commodifiable, roughly speaking one five kilo bag of spuds can be swapped for another without any appreciable change in the outcome. The logic of much capitalist production is to reduce labour to commodifiability where the output of a given number of workers is comparable to that of the same number of another group of workers. However this process breaks down when the output relies centrally on individual original creativity. It is recognised that the productivity of the most gifted hackers is enough orders of magnitude beyond that of that of mediocre or averagely competent hackers that one gifted hacker can achieve in a few weeks what a large team of merely average coders would be unable to produce in months.

It is this possibility of excelling which forms part of the motivation for the core productive participants of the free software movement to participate. No less than climbing mountains or running marathons the achievement of doing something well is a motivation in itself, particularly in a society where

our waged-work conditions often force us to do things in ways well below what we are capable of. There is a saying within the free software community that “people will do the jobs they are interested in”. But by the same token the jobs people find interesting are often the ones that mobilise their individual strengths. Freed from the constraints of exchange, people are free to seek out the particularly lines of activity in which they can out-perform the “average socially necessary labour time” to the extent that such an estimate can even be made. Naturally if enough participants in a collective labour process manage to do this successfully, the whole process will be significantly more performant than any waged process.

If all the above features emerging from the relatively new field of software production and the even more recent phenomena of the free software movement were limited to that sphere alone then they would be an intriguing case but little more. However many of the special features of software - i.e. the relation between the single design or pattern and potentially unlimited replication and distribution at little or no cost - also apply to many other “intellectual” products such as cultural artifacts like books, music and films and the results of scientific and academic research now that computers and the internet have liberated them from the material media of paper, vinyl and celluloid.

Indeed the whole area of products covered by so-called “Intellectual Property Rights” is equally difficult to reduce to a “just” exchange value. Further the proportion of overall economic activity involved in the production of these non-material products is ever growing to the extent of becoming the majority sector in the metropolitan hubs of the capitalist world.

This tendency will of course not automatically bring in its wake radical social change, but its counter-tendencies - the growth of exchange-free productive networks and the increasingly direct appropriation of consumer intellectual products like music, films, software and texts through free online sharing networks - will continue to make the struggle to defend capitalist Intellectual Property (IP) rights a contested battleground. In the struggle to extend and defend IP rights, both legally and practically, the champions of capitalism will be undermining the core justificatory ideology of exchange - that of labour value.

The role of libertarian communists is in many ways unchanged - to participate in the present dynamic of class struggles while advocating a future beyond capitalist relations. Today however, we have the advantage that post-capitalism exchange-free collaborative production processes are no longer hypotheses but reality. In contrast it is the theories of the orthodox “a-political” economist defenders of capitalist that people will never produce socially useful goods without the incentive of money that is shown to be an empty hypothesis - a false god.

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Environmentalism

Class and Community

The economic boom in Ireland and the construction boom that has come alongside it has led to a growth in the importance of environmental campaigns. There has frequently been a large gap between the environmentalists involved in such campaigns and the left - including anarchists. Sean, one of the 'Carrickminders' and now a member of the WSM gives his view on what can be learnt from the recent struggles.

by Sean Mallory

Capitalism in Ireland is certainly booming. The country in profit based terms has seen unprecedented growth. This growth is illustrated on the great barometer of Capitalism- GDP (Gross domestic product) which has increased each year since 1991.

With this capitalist driven development of the economy, an improved infrastructure was desperately needed. As the economy developed the state decided

to upgrade the infrastructure of the country as well as facilitating construction of buildings. This meant several changes to Ireland. Roads and new housing had to be built. This could have been a chance to improve the country instead it is leading to environmental problems. Poor and often corrupt planning (as proven in the Flood/Mahon tribunals) has lead many communities to take on the state.

Environmental issues are becoming crucial issues for those seeking to change society in Ireland. We are a generation, which is witnessing the result of this abuse of the environment by the Irish State and Corporations. On a local scale we see the effects of this planning directly. Alongside the construction boom we have also witnessed a growth in waste. This has lead to a crisis of how we should deal with it (Irish Times 03/06/2005). Local communities are continually trying to stop incinerators and

dumps. The State has found its usual solution to these problems - the poor will bear the brunt.

Despite these problems and social tensions, capitalism in Ireland is pushing relentlessly forward. The infrastructure being created is showing this drive. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 (which "involves an investment of over EUR 52 billion of Public, Private and EU funds" is the state's plan to push its development of the country forward. The plan "involves significant investment in health services, social housing, education, roads, public transport, rural development, industry, water and waste services, childcare and local development." As part of the NDP Ireland is to

get a greatly expanded road network. This is not necessarily a bad



“Both Carrickmines and the Glen of the Downs reached varying degrees of success but ultimately failed. The Carrickmines campaign almost collapsed internally due to effect the personality politics could have on a small group of people.”

thing but from the outset there were reasons to be worried.

It seems sensible to most that the government would first finish the National Spatial Plan - which is “aiming to achieve a balanced, sustainable form of development for the future of the State” - to understand where the roads were going to be built. Included with the NSP is the requirement that “Local Authorities will designate land” for housing - and one would expect that the new roads would serve the areas designated for housing.

Not that our enlightened ones were thinking along these lines, they designed the NDP and then two years later got the report on what the roads were being built for. This may seem like being “typical Irish”, but it wasn’t. It was typical capitalism. The politicians knew for whom the roads were being built to serve, they knew where their friends businesses and lands were and that their friends in the engineering firms and construction companies were building the roads. Most importantly they didn’t care where the public was. Then, when as usual the plan ran over budget, the Minister for Transport at the time turned to his cronies in the private sector to fill the two billion euro deficit through Public - Private Partnership schemes.. They say motorways such as the M3 (see below) are built to alleviate congestion that they are so desperately needed that life as we know it can’t continue without them but yet they place it in the hands of private corporations to make a profit. This just highlighted again the public’s role in the NDP 2000–2006 - there wasn’t one. That we will be fitted in around their agenda is illustrated by the way we are being crammed into

housing estates around the roads rather than vice versa. The environment, in short, is fast becoming one of the battlegrounds where communities are coming into conflict with capitalism.

The last few years have seen several campaigns in Ireland revolving around the environment. Three campaigns, where to one degree or another, activists and communities overtly tried to take on the State, stand out. (In this I mean in all three cases the government placed political capital on defeating the campaign). These were the Dublin Bin Tax, the Carrickmines/m50 and the Glen of the Downs. These three are different from most others because the overt nature of their demands led to a face-off against the state. At the Glen of the Downs and Carrickmines the issue revolved around transport and sensible (or perhaps unsensible) planning whilst the bin tax was an issue that revolved around waste management and taxation.

Analysis of these three campaigns is very useful for our inevitable further involvement in environmental struggles. They took place in a similar political climate, where to one degree or another the economy was in a capitalistic sense “prospering” and Ireland had a right wing coalition government. The campaigns however were fought very differently and it is from this activists can learn.

The Dublin bin tax campaign

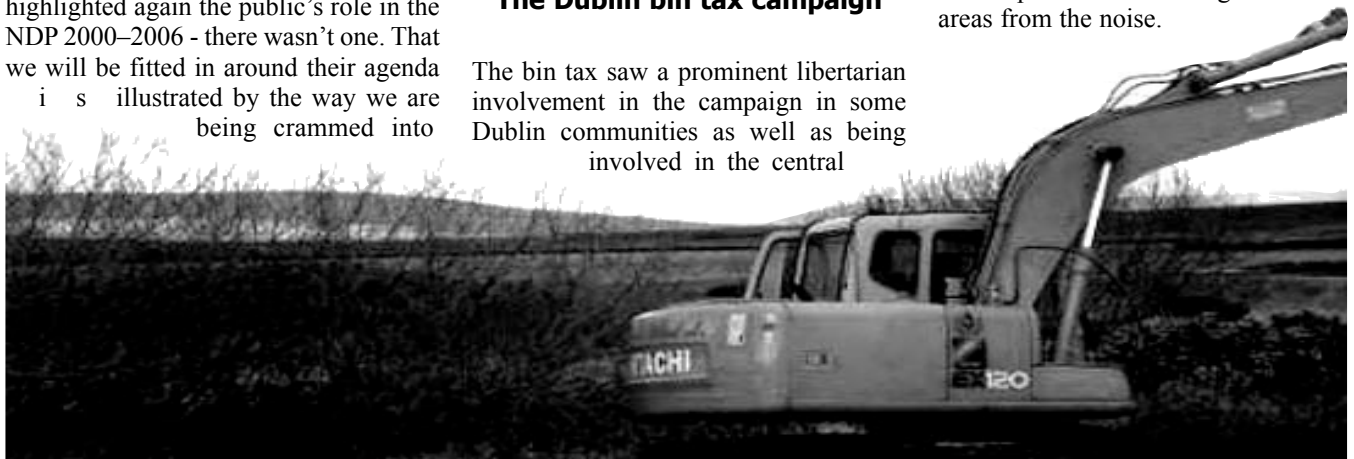
The bin tax saw a prominent libertarian involvement in the campaign in some Dublin communities as well as being involved in the central

campaign. The class analysis in the Bin Tax (which was by no means only argued by libertarians) gave the campaign a very different edge. Traditionally, an issue such as waste management may have been raised by environmental groups in a manner not questioning the taxation issue in itself.

Waste management is a crucial issue and would have to be part of the focus of any campaign. It is not a great rallying point as it inevitably ends up in an academic arguments between specialists. The class analysis of questioning taxation rather than solely the issue of disposal was far more inclusive. The campaign had many genuinely local groups across Dublin and seriously challenged the state by fighting implementation of the tax through mass non-payment and blockades of waste depots. The campaign ultimately seems to have lost momentum but crucially it could have won. In an interesting comparison to the Bin tax, another environmental campaign, reached its critical point simultaneously this was Carrickmines/M50

Carrickmines/M50 Motorway

This was a campaign that proposed rerouting the final leg of the M50 ring road around Dublin. The opposition was based on the discovery of the ruins of a medieval castle, which would be destroyed by the motorway. The campaign revolved around an occupation of the medieval castle site and later around several legal challenges. It challenged the right of the state to build a road on the ruins of a medieval castle. Little attention was paid to the impact of the road on the people and local community where clear class discrimination in the soundproofing of the motorways was obvious. Huge banks of earth protected rich areas whereas only thin cinderblock walls protected working class areas from the noise.



The castle occupation fell in numbers as it failed to attract widespread interest. This allowed infighting and personality politics to destroy the campaign. The campaign also over-concentrated on the legal challenges whilst failing to engage people. Although we often talked about leafletting the local area - this was never done. The over-concentration on the legal case meant a further alienation of those who were not of a legal mind or willing to be litigants. The dangers of such an approach is obvious and activists learned the hard way when they won a legal challenge and the government subsequently changed the law to suit their ends.

The Glen of the Downs

The Glen of the Downs was a campaign which opposed the widening of the N11 motorway in Wicklow. This widening was having a detrimental impact on a nature reserve. Activists occupied the site in 1997 and began what became a three-year battle. The campaign again fought the authorities through court action. Their focus was largely based on an ecological analysis and in many ways it was influenced by "deep ecology". The campaign at times engaged the population but mainly as a media driven spectacle. The campaign, after three years, was isolated enough for the state to move and forcibly remove protestors.

Both Carrickmines and the Glen of the Downs reached varying degrees of success but ultimately failed. The Carrickmines campaign almost collapsed internally due to effect the personality politics could have on a small group of people. The campaign relied on the support of history and archaeological enthusiasts and gave the local community little material interest in the campaign.

The Glen of the Downs was far more successful but when the major cull of trees happened the campaign had failed to interest enough people to

the point of direct action. The activists courageously did face down the forces of the state to the point that 13 people went to prison - some only being released after two months and a hunger strike. However, largely alienated from society at large, similarly to Carrickmines they lost. The N11 is completed (problematically as activists predicted). The M50 at Carrickmines is about to be opened shortly.

These campaign also raised issues which are very much expert based. The Carrickmines campaign in particular was debated in very technical language between academics and engineers, thereby isolating itself from a majority of the population. This obviously alienated people as they felt they could not aid in any practical way.

Though the Dublin Bin Tax campaign has effectively collapsed it was a very different campaign, with some local communities having direct participation. This was because the issues were presented to people in the context that they had a direct material interest in the campaign winning. The argument was simple and presented in common language; you didn't need to be an expert in commerce to participate.

The Future

Libertarian activists can no longer approach the issue of the environment as something we lament as an unfortunate victim of capitalism. The destruction of the environment is intrinsically linked to the development of capitalism and the oppression of the poor. This destruction is also having huge ramifications on local communities.

Environmental campaigns, which present the issue of the environment as something removed from communities, can no longer suffice. A strategy such as that applied during the Bin Tax i s

necessary. We must question the social consequences of environmental destruction. The approach of many campaigns, regardless of intention, where single issues, such as archaeology, are put forward as primary are too similar to the government's agenda. They sideline local people in favour of individuals personal interests.

The Bin Tax illustrated the power of a social analysis on environmental struggles. It gave more people an interest in the issue. This is not to say that issues such as waste management or nature should be sidelined. These issues are complementary to a social analysis but the most important issue is the impact on the lives of ordinary people, as issue too often sidelined by campaigns.

The success of this strategy is now being seen at the Corrib Gas Campaign. In Mayo, Shell is trying to build a potentially highly dangerous pipeline. The local campaign with the support of activists from elsewhere has concentrated on the issue of safety and then brought other issues into the struggle such as water pollution, death of wildlife and visible beauty. This campaign, which has seen five local people imprisoned, has by no means won but it has currently forced Shell to withdraw for several months. The campaign as a local lead campaign has raised local safety issues unlike the campaigns which concentrate on archaeology history or nature.

A crucial issue to raise is why environmental campaigns which focus on individual interests are like this. They are often criticised from the sidelines because they do not incorporate class politics. However, if archaeologists initiate the campaign it will inevitably be based around an archaeological analysis. We should not disregard their campaign but rather work in tandem with them where possible.

This said, it is also important that in certain cases we must realise our differences, for example, I think



it's impossible for class struggle libertarian communists to work with primitivists on issues like road or development because our points of view are so far apart. Our working together will only heighten tension and weaken campaigns.

Activists in Ireland still lack involvement in what are seen as more directly environmental issues, such as road projects. There is certainly a trend within anarchism influenced by 'deep ecology' that opposes all roads and development. We do not oppose all road development but we should certainly take issue with many of the current proposals where profit is all and community is nothing. Instead we should support sustainable development such as the plans suggested for the M1, M2 and M3 to be replaced by a single motorway with link roads to the major towns. These also incorporated reopening a disused railway that runs almost exactly down the route of these motorways.

The case of the M3 illustrates classically how our analysis could succeed. The M3 is a motorway to nowhere, serving little purpose and will partially destroy one of Ireland's and indeed north-western Europe's most important prehistoric sites – Tara. The motorway is supposedly being built to alleviate traffic for commuters to Dublin from the major towns on the route – Dunshaughlin, Clonee, Kells. The support for the motorway in some of the local towns is naturally quite high. People in the area have been told continuously that this road will solve all the congestion problems. The motorway will however only feed the commuters to a huge traffic jam where this motorway will meet the ring motorway around Dublin, the M50.

At the moment the campaign is being fought over the historically and archaeologically rich valley of Tara-Skryne. That the campaign against the current route has focused on the archaeological significance of the sites to be destroyed in many ways shows equal disregard for the people of Kells, Dunshaughlin and Clonee (the towns most effected by the traffic congestion). It's only when the campaign spokespeople are accused of holding up progress that they challenge the need and practicality of the motorway.

This approach along with an over-concentration on legal cases alienates the most crucial people whose support is

“The approach to the Bin Tax was very positive in many respects. People are perhaps in a strong position to fight issues like the attempt to implement a water tax in Dublin. We have seen mistakes but more importantly we have also seen a working example of how people taking real direct action can really threaten the power of the State.”

needed to win these cases - the local communities.

The arguments being made by the campaign are largely academic and risk alienating those without the time and money to buy and read archaeology texts. The government are prepared to change the law, as illustrated at Carrickmines, should they lose any legal challenges.

There is a danger that once the campaign reaches that stage it will have alienated a majority of the local support needed to mount a serious challenge to the motorway. This campaign may well lose in a similar fashion to the way Carrickmines and the Glen of the Downs lost where a relatively small group of activists try to face down the State and the courts through direct action.

However if the campaign were to follow the example of the Mayo pipeline campaign and concentrate on local people rather than the special interest of a minority (which, although I hate to admit it, archaeology is) the campaign could succeed.

Many people of Dunshaughlin and Clonee are now turning to the only people who are claiming to have their interests at heart - the National Roads Authority (N.R.A.) and the government. They have not been told the reality of the motorway, which is that it is really only a faster way to get people to a super traffic-jam.

Undoubtedly there are going to be more environmental struggles in Ireland in the next few years. The approach to the Bin Tax was very positive in many respects. People are perhaps in a strong position to fight issues like the attempt to implement a water tax in Dublin. We have seen mistakes but more importantly we have also seen a working example of how people taking real direct action can really threaten the power of the State.

They have been parts of a working model of how communities can take on the power of the state. Crucially these are past examples of how we can engage the issues around environmentalism. Activists must, however, broaden our horizons and tackle issues like the National Development Plan, whilst working with special interest campaigns where possible.

This article is not an attempt to be a pejorative statement from a class struggle point of view; there is a lot to be learnt on our part from these campaigns. Primarily the heritage based activists who took on the authorities at Carrickmines and the ecologists at the Glen of the Downs were doing something we failed at - taking on the issue of the environment. The campaign at Carrickmines, which I was directly involved in, felt resentment at the time due to the lack of participation and even interest from organised political left-wing groups.

Individuals at the Glen of the Downs felt a similar resentment at the fact that left-wing political parties used them at the time when the campaign became high profile. Without help from other groups they concentrated on what they knew best - at Carrickmines it was archaeology. In this they were undoubtedly right - they fought the campaign on their ground. The point I am making is that archaeologists will do what they do best, as will ecologists. If class struggle activists feel we have a better approach and analysis then we must act on it.

The issues of the environment should not be dismissed, but the preservation of trees or heritage is unlikely to be the main priority of people who spend up to four hours getting to and from work. But both sets of issues are crucial to us and should not be mutually exclusive with sustainable development.

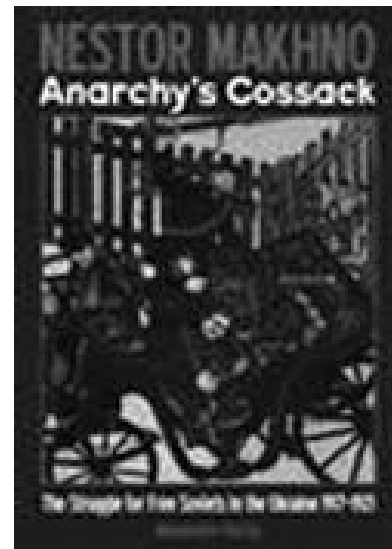
Book Review

Anarchy's Cossak

Nestor Makhno

By Alexandre Skirda, Published by AK Press €13.00

Reviewed by José Antonio Gutiérrez



This was a much awaited book. Published originally in French back in 1982, its English version was advertised for a couple of years by AK Press, until it finally saw the light of day, and the wait was well worth it. This fine edition includes the interesting photographs of the original edition, plus a new appendix to discuss the state of the research around the Makhnovist movement after the date of its first edition. It constitutes an invaluable document in anarchist history, and provides a vivid glimpse of the anarchist principles in action and of a number of good lessons to be drawn for tomorrow's revolutions. Needless to say, we're very glad to have such a book available in English.

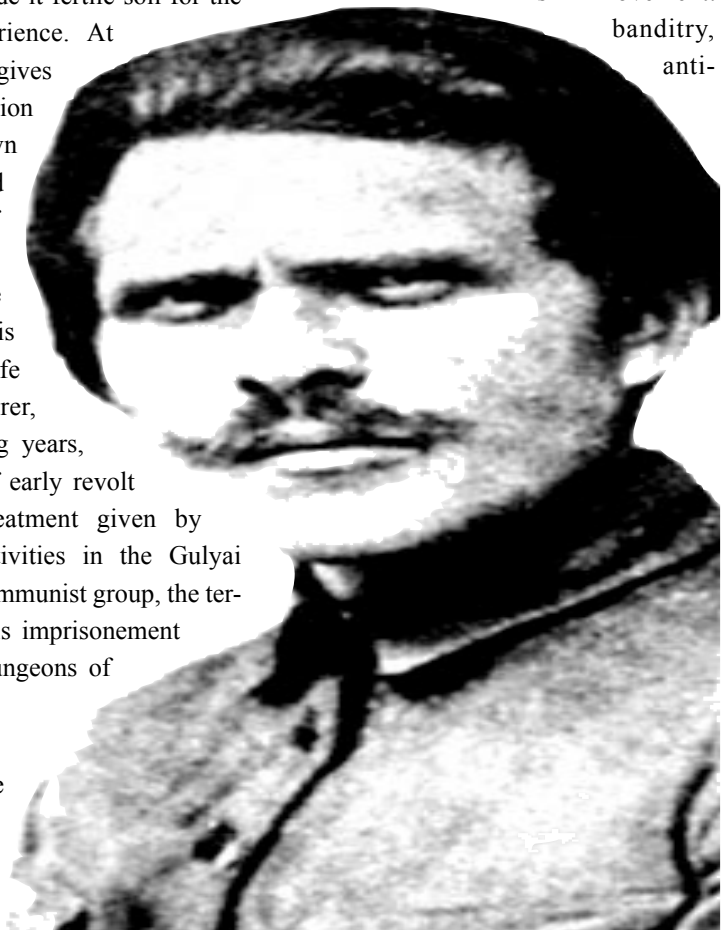
For those who are not familiar with the subject, the Makhnovists were a libertarian movement, deeply rooted in the traditions of anarchist-communism, that developed an experience of revolutionary changes in the economic and political structures of the backwarded Ukrainian society – its name coming from Nestor Makhno, a remarkable militant who remained the main figure of the movement. To defend the gains of the Social Revolution, they launched a guerrilla warfare in Ukraine against a number of enemies: foreign troops, Nationalists, Whites, different warlords and Bolsheviks. Finally defeated treacherously by the Bolsheviks, the book tells the story of the movement from its very origin, contradicting the traditional view of it as appearing literally

from nowhere.

The movement sprung from the rebellious history of the peasant and cossack revolts of the region, and the ground for anarchist ideas was well prepared for more than 10 years before the 1917 revolution by the agitational activities of the Gulyai Polye anarchist-communist group, founded by the Semenyuta brothers and V. Antoni. Thus, anarchism had a local tradition among the local population and it was this advantage that made it fertile soil for the Makhnovist experience. At the same time, it gives a very fine description of Makhno's own life. To understand the radicality of its revolutionary convictions: the serf origins of his family, his hard life as a child labourer, his brief schooling years, his experiences of early revolt against unfair treatment given by landlords, his activities in the Gulyai Polye anarchist-communist group, the terrorist years and his imprisonment in the different dungeons of the Czar.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to the revolutionary period between 1917,

when Makhno gained his freedom with the February revolution, to 1921, when the Bolsheviks won complete control over Ukraine. It depicts, with first hand information and using a wide range of sources, the Makhnovist campaigns, the difficulties of revolutionary warfare and the political struggle for the triumph of the "free soviets". Well informed, it brings together valuable accounts that discredit most of the usual charges of the Bolshevik historical mythomania against him and his movement: banditry, anti-



semitism, his alleged alcoholism and their self-indulgence in orgies (!). All these are systematically exposed as utter lies, with no factual evidence, but the intention of discrediting the movement. It is important to take into account that even the sacrosanct “official anarchist historian” of the Russian Revolution, Volin, echoes these false accusations – presumably, as part of a personal vendetta against Makhno, with whom they clashed over a number of issues, mainly when in exile in Paris. Thus, by way of repeating a lie again and again, many ended up accepting it as truth. This book is a healthy way of putting the record straight on the movement.

The other merit of the book, is showing the absurdity of the claim that the exile in Paris was a period of complete decadence for Makhno in terms of his activity as an anarchist militant. Quite the opposite: it’s this time that proved to be the richest in terms of his literary and theoretical contributions to the anarchist movement, mainly through the paper *Dyelo Trouda*, despite all of the difficulties of life in exile. It was here that he started writing his memoirs, that he had time to draw the conclusions from his own experiences in the Revolution and that he takes part in drafting the famous “Platform”. Thus, his active participation into the debates of the time on organisation and what way to follow for the anarchist movement, that shaped in one way or another the international anarchist movement for decades to come, have still a resounding

importance, and give enough material for thought and practice even in our times.

Only people that were hostile to the thesis of the Platform, their organisational approach and their revolutionary class-struggle anarchism, could have depicted his exile as unproductive, in order not to deal with this most important legacy to the movement and try to silence it. It is easier to accept the figure of Makhno only as part of the anarchist “folklore” of somewhere far away, on the Ukrainian steppes, than to let him expose the historical failures of our movement. All in all, self-criticism has never been a strong feature of anarchists.

We can’t leave unnoticed, though, certain aspects of the book that seriously undermine its value, specially to the eyes of the non-anarchist reader: first of all, we have Skirda’s style that is full of adjectives and too obviously takes sides. We all know that absolute objectivity in history is nothing but a myth, but a historical book (in opposition to a political diatribe, or a historical-political polemic) shouldn’t go as far as Skirda does in terms of using nicknames for the side that doesn’t happen to be in the author’s grace: there’s no need to say things like “blotting paper revolutionaries”, “supreme guide” (referring to Lenin) or to resort to ridicule everytime one is to mention the Bolsheviks, no matter how justified the indignation of Skirda against them might be. In that point of view, it reminds me of an inverse sort of “Bolshevik” history, where anarchists were usually depicted as “bandits”,

“dreamers”, “individualists”, “petty-bourgeois” and so on. Immediately, one has a ground to doubt the “objectivity” of the author – understood as a respect for historical and factual accuracy. And when one suspects that the bias is too much, the natural reaction is to leave the book aside and entertain yourself with some other book. Instead of writing history, sometimes it appears he’s just bitching.

His tendency, as well, to blame the Bolsheviks for absolutely every evil in the Civil War, makes his genuine complaints about them appear less credible to the non-anarchist reader. For example, blaming the Bolsheviks for the emergence of the Whites, as Skirda insinuates in some parts of his book, is inaccurate and naïve: “(Shkuro) had begun to fight the Bolsheviks (...), having tasted their summary methods of justice” (p144) or “(The Kuban Cossacks), at first neutral, (...) they had quickly been persuaded of the danger inherent in the Bolsheviks who abruptly abolished their traditional rights and, moreover, brutally commandeered their foodstuffs and belongings” (p70). He seems somehow to be justifying not the revolt against the Bolsheviks, but white revolt against the Bolsheviks – Makhno, who wasn’t a pro-Bolshevik at all, agreed that the worst catastrophe for Russia would be the triumph of the whites. It is naïve to explain the side taken by reactionary militaries, indoctrinated in their distrust for the riff raff, in terms of the “excesses” of Lenin’s govern-



ment, as we can explain many of the workers' and peasants' revolts of the time – rather, they can be explained by their fear to lose the privileges they enjoyed in the former regime. Every revolution faces opposition from reactionary quarters, that are not particularly motivated by the “excesses” of the revolutionaries, as the very excesses of all these counter-revolutionaries show. This undermines claims, that have a factual ground – like the military mistakes and actual sabotage of the southern front by the Bolsheviks as the main reason for Denikin's successful offensive in mid 1919.

The same could be said about the support of the Allies to the Whites: “Discovering its perilous consequences (of the Soviet regime and its truce with the Central Empires, ed.) in the shape of German offensives on the French front, Paris, London and Washington were forced to make a stand” (p73). Skirda seems to forget the fact that this was a time of violent proletarian upheavals in most of Europe and the example set by the Russian Revolution was sparking flames everywhere! This was the main reason why the reactionaries in the West wanted to see the revolution smashed, not for secondary military tactical matters; in fact, after the end of the WWI, they kept supporting the whites –so “forced” they were to take a stand!

His anti-Bolshevism as well, can lead sometimes to ambiguous positions like his defense of the Constituent Assembly (pp. 43-44, 72). He forgets that the defense of the Constituent Assembly was the defense of the bourgeois concept of representative and parliamentary democracy, of the “liberal” State, in opposition to the direct democracy and the organic workers' and peasants' society being formed from below through the Soviets and Factory Committees, and the whole network of rank and file organisation that flourished in Russia during 1917. It's true that Bolshevik opposition to the Assembly was not progressive at all: they attacked the liberal State (where

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they were a minority) for the sake of the dictatorship of their sole party, but they were not alone in their criticisms and many quarters, with different arguments, did criticise it; indeed, he doesn't mention the fact that he surely knows, in the face of his deep knowledge of Russian anarchism, that the Assembly was dissolved actually by the detachment of the anarchist Anatoli Zhelesniakov! But again, he'd still blame the Bolsheviks.

I think it is time to move beyond the history of “goodies” and “baddies”, of “marxists” versus “anarchists” and try to see the underlying forces operating in society as a whole. Skirda's anarchist point about the State as a reactionary institution to be abolished is seriously undermined by his moralistic and simplistic approach to the Bolshevik strategy of seizure of power: “(Lenin) had merely played upon these (popular) aspirations for the sole purpose of ensconcing himself in power; once at the controls, he was to devote himself primarily to consolidation of his tenuous authority” (p43).

Thus, it could be understood the treason of the revolution due to the Bolshevik's greediness for power, instead of the unavoidable logic of the bourgeois division of powers in the form of Statist institutions. No matter how genuine Lenin or other Bolsheviks were as revolutionaries (and certainly many weren't) the results couldn't have been any different, and that is the main strength of anarchism as a revolutionary alternative: it's not about who's in power, is about how we control the power from below.

Finally, Paul Sharkey's translation, also, is a bit difficult to the reader, full of twists and turns, literal translations and words in French, that give a certain elegance to the edition, but seriously make the reading quite difficult at points, even to the extent of making the reader unsure of the real meaning behind some paragraphs. This is noted in others of Sharkey's translations as well (like *Facing the Enemy*, for instance).

These flaws that are commented upon don't invalidate the work at all; but they make it more directed to an anarchist public, than to a non-anarchist one; and unfortunately, the information provided here is quite strong and well researched, and would be very valuable to discuss with a broader leftist audience, but the language make it a bit difficult, as it sounds sectarian. We are still waiting for a further history on the Makhnovist movement that is done in such a fashion that allows us to start that discussion around the methods of the revolution under the light of this historical experience.

We want to finish the review thanking the people of AK Press for the fantastic work they've done in providing us with so many interesting books and documents, certainly filling many gaps in anarchist history and theory in English speaking countries. In particular, to thank them for providing us with this jewel of anarchist history that is Skirda's work on the Makhnovist movement, a book that definitely will make any libertarian militant vibrate.

Situationists

on the Construction of Situations”(1957), “The error that is at the root of surrealism is the idea of the infinite wealth of the unconscious imagination”. As Debord and the Situationists saw it, surrealism’s great failure was that it “wanted to realise art without suppressing it” – thus surrealism eventually became a gallery-bound art movement far removed from its original ideal of transforming everyday life through art.

The Lettrist International

The Lettrist International, and later, the Situationists themselves, wished to destroy Art as a separate, special activity but only so it could be re-constituted as an integral, and indeed the driving force of life itself.

Anarchism and the Situationists

One the major differences between Anarchism and the Situationist project was the exclusiveness of the project itself. There were only 10 members at most at any time, and many were expelled by Debord very quickly, over what seem to be the utmost trivialities. For example, Constant, the utopian architect from Amsterdam, was expelled because a guy who worked with him built a church, this apparently was too disastrous an influence for him to continue to be associated with the project!

The Situationists were a lot more concerned with developing a strong theory and critique than building a network of people willing to work with them. It was more important to Debord

The Situationists are mostly known to anarchists as a group that had something to do with the May 1968 Paris Uprising. However, the Situationists played a relatively peripheral role in the disturbances. Although much of the graffiti that appeared around the city (some famous ones included : “Never Work” and “All Power to the Imagination”) were taken from Situationist works, the group did not play a major role in initiating the revolt themselves.

by Cian Lynch

The Situationist International formed in 1957 from two avant-garde groups, COBRA, (a group that sought to to renew art, architecture, and the action of art of life), and the Lettrist International, a tiny, postwar neo-dada anti-art movement. The Situationists were an avant-garde group that took artistic and cultural revolution just as seriously as political revolution. Although the Situationists could be described as an “anti-art” movement, this needs qualifiers to properly clarify their position. The Situationist family tree begins with Dada, the anti-art movement formed in Zurich at the legendary Cabaret Voltaire.

Dada

Dada as a movement was wholly negative, rejecting entirely all the values of bourgeois society. Though Guy Debord saw that it was

Dada’s wholly negative definition that precipitated its almost immediate breakup, he did not seem to apply the lessons of Dada’s decline to the case of the Situationist’s own decline.

Surrealism

Surrealism, the art-form which followed on from Dada, sought to give expression to the unconscious, which, through techniques like automatic writing, would give the artist access to a previously untapped and what Andre Breton and fellow artists of the time believed to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

Unfortunately as Debord saw in his “Report



and those in his close inner circle (Raoul Vanageim and Michele Bernstein) that they possessed this unassailable unity of theory and action, than if they were “corrupted” by members who did not fully understand the nature of the project. It has to be said that this uncompromising stance seemed often to amount to not a lot more than agreeing with all of Debord’s ideas. Practical, real-world actions were risky for SI members since there seemed to be such a high likelihood they might be seen as “reformist” or not revolutionary enough, which would result in expulsion.

It possible to view the Situationist project as one that attempted to initiate a new revolutionary project which greatly emphasised the importance of cultural revolution. In practice however, the Situationists functioned mainly as a group that, although they claimed to have moved beyond Dada’s nihilism, engaged themselves primarily in a total critique of existing society and culture.

The idea of “The Spectacle” is central to the Situationist critique i.e – “All that was once lived directly has become mere representation”. In our 21st Century culture of Reality TV Shows, Soap Operas and Concerts like “Live 8” watched simultaneously by billions worldwide, it might well be argued that we have entered a new era of the Spectacle, where its domination is more far-reaching and omnipresent than ever before.

The Situationists believed that the primary effect (indeed, the goal) of this “immense accumulation of spectacles” was to create the maximum level of alienation in workers’ everyday lives. The Spectacle’s overwhelming (indeed inescapable) predominance would also require “the downgrading

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of *being* into *having*”. To bring this up-to-date one need take only a quick look at MTV programming – “Cribs”, “Pimp My Ride” or magazines like “Stuff”.

The legacy of Situationism can also be seen in the “Culture Space Jamming” movement, popularised by Adbusters, who have unfortunately reformulated their approach and now seek to create a new “grassroots capitalism” – seen most clearly in their production of the “guaranteed produced by union-labor” “Black Spot” Sneaker.

The Situationist project remains of great relevance today to the Anarchist movement, since they remind us that if we are to have a political revolution, it should necessarily also be a cultural revolution, in which we eliminate the division between actor/musician and spectator, to enable a wholly non-alienated society to emerge.

A New Direction For The Zapatistas

continued from back cover

obviously, it’s likely that once you’ve achieved that, the children will have already grown up and then, once again”

I think the logic here is quite recognisable to anarchists and needs no further explanation. The August 2004 communiques also explored the limitations of what had been achieved - notably the failure to involve women as equals in the decision making structures at the base of the organisation and the tendency of the military side of the organisation to try and make decisions for the communities.

The new turn of 2005

The new turn of the Zapatistas makes no significant difference to the basics of the self-management structure sketched above. The communiques which announced it did add more details to what had been happening and the steps taken to address some of the problems identified.

But fundamentally they recognised that “we have reached a point where we cannot go any further, and, in addition, it is possible that we could lose everything we have if we remain as we are and do nothing more in order to move forward. The hour has come to take a risk once again and to take a step which is dangerous but which is worthwhile.”

The 6th Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle is interesting because it also sees the Zapatistas publically put forward an explicit and general anti-capitalist line for the first time. Previously there was an anti-capitalist logic underlying their opposition to neo-liberalism but here for the first time they distinguish between neoliberalism simply being a bad phase of capitalism and capitalism in itself being bad.

The section ‘How we see the world’ includes a long section on how capitalism works “capitalism means that there are a



few who have great wealth, but they did not win a prize, or find a treasure, or inherit from a parent. They obtained that wealth, rather, by exploiting the work of the many. So capitalism is based on the exploitation of the workers, which means they exploit the workers and take out all the profits they can. This is done unjustly, because they do not pay the worker what his work is worth. Instead they give him a salary that barely allows him to eat a little and to rest for a bit, and the next day he goes back to work in exploitation, whether in the countryside or in the cities”.

Alliance with the left

This sets the basis for an unacknowledged change in who the EZLN are seeking an alliance with. In the past this was all progressive forces (‘civil society’), now it is “with persons and organisations just of the left”. Previously outside of Chiapas the EZLN appeared to advocate that the first step was a democratic (but capitalist) state and that the struggle for this included ‘progressive’ sections of Mexican business in the fight for democratic reform.

Now the declaration says “we are going to go about building, ... a national program of struggle, but a program which will be clearly of the left, or anti-capitalist, or anti-neoliberal, or for justice, democracy and liberty for the Mexican people”. In concrete form “the EZLN will establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements which define themselves, in theory and practice, as being of the left, in accordance with the following conditions:

Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organise outrage.

Not to raise movements

which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond the election calendar. Not to try to resolve from above the problems of our nation, but to build FROM BELOW AND FOR BELOW an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico.

“Yes to reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of organisations, for their methods of struggle, for their ways of organising, for their internal decision making processes, for their legitimate representations. And yes to a clear commitment for joint and coordinated defense of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatisation attempts of electricity, oil, water and natural resources.”

The declaration also makes it clear that the EZLN is not talking about a return to armed struggle but “a struggle in order to demand that we make a new Constitution, new laws which take into account the demands of the Mexican people, which are: housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace. A new Constitution which recognises the rights and liberties of the people, and which defends the weak in the face of the powerful.”

In all this the 6th declaration does not represent a return to the strategy of the 1994-2001 period - a strategy which limited itself to democratic demands and the opening up of a political space. This strategy meant that while the practical

organisation of the Zapatistas was a useful model for anarchists of self-management in practice, their actual declared goals always seemed quite naive - a demand for a nicer capitalism in an age when neoliberalism ensured any such experiments would be isolated and impoverished.

So it can be seen that the 6th declaration represents quite a step forward in the political program advocated by the Zapatistas. But why or how did these changes occur. Is this merely the old core leadership of leftists that went into the mountains in the 1980’s shifting a step along the path they always intended to follow. Or does it reflect a genuine development of analysis at the base of the movement. Or more realistically a transformation at the base driven by the old leftists?

Learning from struggle

This question is addressed in another long communique released in the weeks after the 6th declaration called ‘A Penguin in the Selva Lacandona’. Much of this is taken up with the story about the Penguin and dealing with criticisms from Mexican social democrats but a long section also asked the reader to imagine the influence of the rebellion, and everything that went with it, on the children who have grown up during it. “What happens with that girl-then-adolescent-then-young-woman after having seen and heard “the civil societies” for 12 years, bringing not only projects, but also histories and experiences from diverse parts of Mexico and the World?”

“We told you in the Sixth Declaration that new generations have entered into the struggle. And they are not only

new, they also have other



“On the global level the significance of the rebellion in Chiapas has been the inspiration and organisational model it provided for new generations of anti-capitalist activists. Because of this the change in direction will have repercussions that stretch far beyond Mexico.”

experiences, other histories. We did not tell you in the Sixth, but I'm telling you now: they are better than us, the ones who started the EZLN and began the uprising. They see further, their step is more firm, they are more open, they are better prepared, they are more intelligent, more determined, more aware.

What the Sixth presents is not an “imported” product, written by a group of wise men in a sterile laboratory and then introduced into a social group. The Sixth comes out of what we are now and of where we are.”

The suggestion clearly is that the process of rebellion and solidarity shown with the rebellion has been a political education for all those growing up during it. And that this is why the Zapatistas have moved towards a more explicit anti-capitalist position. Only time can reveal the accuracy of this claim but there is no reason for dismissing it out of hand.

At the time of writing the work to build the ‘National Campaign with Another Politics’ is well underway with the first of a series of meetings, the one for

‘Political Organisations of the Left’ having just taken place. The Mexican anarchist groups, including ‘Alianza de los Comunistas Libertarios’, were taking part in this. The ACL had circulated a detailed discussion of the 6th declaration that questioned the aim of writing a new constitution. They pointed out not only that the fine words found in constitutions are frequently meaningless in reality but more importantly a constitution implied the existence of a government to implement it. In other words the state would continue to exist and the state is the negation of the social revolution.

Contradictions remain

So if the 6th declaration represents a very significant shift in Zapatista politics to anti-capitalism it also still contains many of the contradictions between their local organisational methods which are based on self-management and what they appear to advocate at the national level. The opposition to electoral politics has significantly hardened with the 6th declaration but still appears as a critique of all the existing electoral parties rather than of electoralism as a strategy in itself. The confusion between an anti-imperialist opposition to US domination and support for nationalism whether in Cuba, Mexico or Venezuela also remains.

How meaningful is it to talk of “our leaders are destroying our nation” because “they are only concerned with the well being of capitalists” when this is the natural order of capitalism, not just in Mexico now but throughout the world and throughout the history of the capitalist period. There have always been those on the left - including James Connolly in Ireland - who tried to redefine the nation so as to exclude the capitalist class. But are such semantic word games not simply building on sand - and facilitating the creation of a future ‘history’ where radical movements can be drained of their meaning by draping them in the national flag?

None of these criticisms are new but they will provide the excuse needed for those council communists and others who have sat on their hands for the last 12 years waiting for the Zapatista rebellion to turn authoritarian to sit on their hands for the next dozen. The challenge of the Zapatista movement for anarchists has been how to have real solidarity with a movement that contains such ambiguities. And how to learn what there is to learn - and tell others - without becoming unthinking cheer leaders.

The global anti-capitalist movement

On the global level the significance of the rebellion in Chiapas has been the inspiration and organisational model it provided for new generations of anti-capitalist activists. Because of this the change in direction will have repercussions that stretch far beyond Mexico. The Zapatistas are also aware of this which is why the 6th declaration starts off by talking of forging a new relationship of respect and support with those struggling against neo-liberalism around the globe. This is to include sending aid - even to those in struggle Europe - although the communique makes clear that they are well aware that the relative poverty means this can only be symbolic.

But importantly it also announces the intention to organise a 3rd intercontinental encuentro at the end of this year or the start of the next. The previous two, held in Chiapas in 1996 and the Spanish state in 1997 played an important role in the emergence of the summit protest movement by bringing activists from around the globe into contact with each other. Those of us who met in Chiapas or Madrid would later meet on the streets of Seattle, Prague and Genoa. This encounter could help us take the next step.



Zapatistas: A New Strategy

Over the summer the Zapatistas surprised their supporters by suddenly declaring a Red Alert out of the blue. After a couple of days of near panic it emerged that this was just because they were undergoing a consulta (a discussion and referendum) which would decide on a new path for the movement. This new path is to once more turn outwards and to aim to build a new alliance across Mexico and beyond.

by Andrew Flood



At the time I was drafting an article for Red and Black Revolution which looked at how the Zapatistas had been in a long inward looking phase which required many local compromises with the Mexican state. I was interested in the self-management structures they had built in this period but also the nature of the compromises and in particular the question of dual power. That is the question of how long a situation could exist where you had Zapatista structures of self-management on the one hand and the Mexico state on the other as opposed mechanisms that both tried to decide what life in Chiapas could be like.

The traditional leftist understanding is that situations of dual power cannot be indefinite - yet it appeared that the Zapatistas were attempting to do just this. Then the Red Alert and the communiques which followed made all my speculations irrelevant as they clearly brought this period to an end.

The years 2001-2004

The process by which the Zapatistas have spent most of the period from 2001 to mid 2005 building up self-management started when the Zapatistas realised they faced an all party coalition determined not to allow through the new indigenous laws contained in the San Andres peace accords. They date this to April 2001 when "the politicians from the PRI, PAN and PRD approved a law that was no good, they killed dialogue once and for all, and they clearly stated that it did not matter what they had agreed to and signed, because they did not keep their word".

After the usual long period of silence

which indicates a lot of internal discussion the Zapatistas announced that the Auguscalantes where the big external meetings were once held were becoming Caracols or the centres of Zapatista internal organization as well as contact points with the Zapatistas for the outside world. These were to be the centres of the Juntas of Good Government (although in English junta is often assumed to mean dictatorship in fact it means something like council).

What exactly this meant was not all that clear until on the 15th of August 2004 the EZLN released a set of 8 communiques, most of which fleshed out in a huge amount of detail just what the Zapatistas were up to in this period. In many ways these are among the most important documents of the rebellion and it is worth taking the time to read them in detail".

Self-management in Chiapas

From these documents we learn that the "good government juntas" follow the libertarian structures established by the other layers of Zapatista self-management. By far the most provoking aspect is that the actual people who make up each junta are rotated in an incredibly rapid fashion. According to Marcos these rotations are from every "eight to 15 days (according to the region)". The delegates are themselves drawn from the members of the Autonomous Council (AC) and because these are rotated in turn (over a longer period which seems to be a year) this means that by the time everyone on an AC has been on the junta a new AC is created and so all these

new people must in turn learn the ropes.

As might be imagined this is driving those who work with the Zapatistas nuts because it means every time you go to a 'good government junta' you are dealing with different people. This is by design and it is worth quoting Marcos at length as to why this is so

"If this is analysed in depth, it will be seen that it is a process where entire villages are learning to govern.

"The advantages? Fine, one of them is that it's more difficult for an authority to go too far and, by arguing how "complicated" the task of governing is, to not keep the communities informed about the use of resources or decision making. The more people who know what it's all about, the more difficult it will be to deceive and to lie. And the governed will exercise more vigilance over those who govern.

"It also makes corruption more difficult. If you manage to corrupt one member of the JBG, you will have to corrupt all the autonomous authorities, or all the rotations, because doing a "deal" with just one of them won't guarantee anything (corruption also requires "continuity"). Just when you have corrupted all the councils, you'll have to start over again, because by then there will have been a change in the authorities, and the one you "arranged" won't work any longer. And so you'll have to corrupt virtually all the adult residents of the Zapatista communities. Although,

continued overleaf...