

*Water Revolt in Ireland: Where to next?*

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*The Rojava  
Revolution*

*Water Wars  
in Bolivia*

*Island of  
No Consent*

# Editorial:

# Welcome to the Irish Anarchist Review # 11

The eleventh issue of the Irish Anarchist Review goes to press in the middle of the biggest battle in the war against austerity in Ireland to date. Tens of thousands of people have taken part in mass demonstrations against the water charges, up and down the country thousands have taken part in acts of physical resistance against water meter installation and hundreds of thousands, at the very least, are getting ready to participate in a mass boycott of the charge. Furthermore, the level of political consciousness of the population has risen considerably over the last year, with a distinct anti-establishment atmosphere, and in some cases an anti-state atmosphere, developing.

Methods of organising have more or less followed community syndicalist lines that are highly compatible with anarchist practice, with local committees using direct democracy and the tactics of direct action. At the moment there is no unified national campaign, but a number of different umbrella groups representing different outlooks and tactics. Somewhat counterintuitively, this has been one of the strengths of the campaign so far, with sections retaining the ability to use the tactics of their choice and a movement that is not beset by infighting, as was the case in the latter days of the Campaign against Home and Water Taxes. At the same time, anarchists should argue against attempts to divert the movement into the cul de sac of electoralism, as is the wish of both unashamed reformists and self described revolutionaries alike.

Across Europe the dilemma is the same. Seven years of resistance to austerity has seemingly produced limited success. In Spain, the arrests of anarchists and Basque activists this year, along with the gag law threatens to stifle dissent. Some will look to

the electoral sphere, through Podemos, to get out of jail, in a manner of speaking, but with anarchists and migrants still incarcerated under Greece's left wing SYRIZA government, is this really a solution? It certainly seems that SYRIZA's progressive programme has hit a brick wall and that they are beginning to withdraw some of their more radical policies.

While the turn to electoralism could make some of us despair, it doesn't necessarily have to be that way. There's a theory in evolutionary biology known as 'punctuated equilibrium' which claims that most species show little evolutionary change over the course of their collective life span. Instead, they remain in an extended state known as stasis until, over a short space of time, geologically speaking, rapid evolutionary change occurs. There is a case for saying that the fight back against austerity in Ireland has unfolded in punctuated equilibria, over three phases, beginning with the public sector strike in 2009 and the left and trade union led marches of 2010, rekindling in 2011 with the occupy movement and the campaign against home taxes, and finally, evolving into the spontaneous revolt that has unfolded against the water charge with periods of stasis in between. Each stage has been more developed and right now, it is not set in stone that the electoralists will be able to co-opt the campaign.

As Andrew Flood writes in his article on Rojava, "Revolutions are seldom made in favourable circumstances", and we can take inspiration from those, like the people of Western Kurdistan and in Chiapas, Mexico, who are conducting revolutions in circumstances far less favourable than ours. Their revolutions may lack the ideological purity that many anarchists would desire, but they exist in the real world and not in the dusty pages of the manual for

revolution. Political engagement with movements that are actively engaged in revolutionary transformation can only enrich our tradition and in turn, our ideas could help influence those revolutions. But before we can influence anyone, it is important that we have a unity of ideas and a method of articulating those ideas in a coherent fashion. Too often in recent years, anarchism has suffered from being all things to all individuals, a smorgasbord of ideas you could pick and choose from. Maybe it's time for anarchism to grow up; And by that we don't mean we think it should dispense of its utopian yearnings and make peace with "pragmatic solutions", rather that it should "come of age", and articulate a vision for a new society that begins with the conditions of the early 21st century, not the 20th.

To achieve this goal, we reiterate the necessity for anarchist organisation. Most of our competitors who articulate an alternative to the current society, and indeed, all of those who are trying to convince us that this one is just fine, are highly organised and have the means to set the political agenda of the coming years. But while those organisations can have the appearances of monoliths with one voice, ours should be a diverse movement of many voices that can nonetheless act with effective unity. We hope that you find the articles in this publication stimulating and that the ideas expressed will encourage you respond with ideas of your own, and maybe you will join us in the pursuit of radically transforming society. It is long overdue.

## ABOUT THE WSM

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

Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. But, just as importantly, we see this struggle against capitalism as also being a struggle for freedom.

We believe that socialism and freedom must go together, that we cannot have one without the other. 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.

## IAR team:

### Editorial Committee:

Mark Hoskins, Brian Fagan, and Ferdia O'Brien.

### Authors:

Tom Murray, Andrew Flood, Eoin O'Connor, Eoin O'Ceallaigh, Sinead Redmond, Gregor Kerr, Mark Hoskins, Ferdia O'Brien and Cormac Caulfield.

Layout: Brian Fagan.

Special thanks to Paul Bowman and Liam Hough for feedback and editing.

## CONTACT US:

PO Box 1528, Dublin 1.  
Facebook: Workers Solidarity Movement  
Facebook: Irish Anarchist Review  
Facebook: Solidarity Times  
Twitter: @WSMIreland

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WORDS: TOM MURRAY

# Creating the Commons: on the meaning of Bolivia's water wars.

'In the history of humankind every act of destruction meets its response, sooner or later, in an act of creation' - Eduardo Galeano

In Bolivia, there have been remarkable experiences in urban peripheries, notably in Cochabamba, that reveal the capacity of grassroots associations to construct a free society based on solidarity and mutual aid. The background to the country's Water War of April 2000 must be understood against preceding waves of struggle, particularly the huge marches for sovereignty and livelihoods of coca growers, Amazonian groups, and others that emerged with the implementation of the neoliberal model in 1985 [1]. Subsequent mine closures and rural migration occasioned huge increases in Bolivia's urban centres, particularly in Cochabamba, the country's third largest city.

The state water company, Semapa, served only half of the city's population. In the neglected southern peripheries, neighbourhood groups organised associations to bring water to their homes. Cooperatives, formed without state assistance, dug wells, built water mains, and even created drainage and sewers. In cases where wells could not be dug, the committees bought their own water tankers and organised daily deliveries. By 1990, some 140 urban water committees had formed in the south of Cochabamba, with between 300 and 1000 families in each one [1].

"In cases where wells could not be dug, the committees bought their own water tankers and organised daily deliveries."

Urban water committees played a key role in the Water War that erupted following the state's decision to hand control of Semapa to a multinational company, which raised water rates and threatened to expropriate the water obtained by residents through their own labour. The Cochabamba Water Coordination, a coalition of community groups, organised mass demonstrations involving tens of thousands of people. One civilian was killed and almost 200 injured in clashes with the police. The struggle opened a cycle of protests that undermined the neoliberal model and led to the election of Evo Morales of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS). The expulsion of

the multinational allowed people to elect their own representatives to control the state-owned water company.

Installing water services in the urban peripheries now became a priority. In August 2004, the urban water committees created the Association of Community Water Systems in the South in order to ensure the provision of quality water. The large number of wells drilled had damaged the water table around the valley and centralised water provision was deemed necessary. However, the residents had spent a decade fighting for autonomy and were not prepared to surrender it. As the Association stated: 'Will we become individual and anonymous users for the municipal company? Or can we keep our organisations, our decision-making capacity, and the self-managed forms that we used for years?' [1]. They decided to allow Semapa to provide water 'wholesale' to the committees, who would retain control of distribution and continue to deliver water to residents.

## Conquest and Community

How can we understand these events? Perhaps the most important context is Latin America's colonial history, the 500 hundred year old process of exploitation by and resistance to European and later North American powers [2]. Latin America's colonial history not only divided countries from one another, it also left a sharp internal division within the countries



“Latin America’s new governments must be understood not just as a result of these popular struggles but also as an attempt to destroy them”

between a very wealthy small elite (often white, European, westernized) and a huge mass of impoverished people (indigenous, Indian, black, intermingled or mestizo) [3]. From the 1960s onwards, the imposition of the Washington consensus, or neoliberal programmes, ultimately prompted large social mobilisations, greater co-operation among increasingly left-populist Latin American states and, in particular, a broad politicisation of indigenous peoples. In Bolivia, as far back as 1973, the Tiahuanaco Manifesto, issued by members of the Aymara and Qhechwa peasantry, linked their oppression to economic exploitation, invoked the memory of Indigenous rebels such as Túpac Katari, Bartolina Sisa, Willka Zárate, and claimed that ‘the starting point of the revolution should be our people’ [4].

The Indigenous way of doing things, based on co-operative practices rooted in ancestral memory, community and ecology, inspired resistance to expropriation in the countryside and the re-claiming of political space by those displaced to the cities [1] [5]. Co-operative practices resonated with non-Indians, especially in peripheral urban neighbourhoods [1]. Internationally, the ideas of Indigenous populations resonated with environmental movements who pointed to Bolivia’s attempts to defend in its constitution the ‘rights of Mother Earth’ not just to exist but to regenerate [6]. Nevertheless, ‘the indigenous-Latin American movements’, Raúl Zibechi argues, ‘are very different to social movements rising in other parts of the world because they are, firstly, combative movements based around the defence of territory. The struggle for territorial autonomy is very important here. Secondly, they are composed of people who have been dehumanised by their societies: black, indigenous, mestizos. These are movements not only of the poor but of the subaltern, those who have been made to feel inferior’ [7].

#### State Power versus the Social Fabric

Latin America’s new governments must be understood not just as a result of these popular struggles but also as an attempt to destroy them [1]. Defenders of the progressive governments sincerely argue that they are tied by international markets and the United States, that they are better than right-wing governments, and that they offer movements opportunities to consolidate gains. This argument is valid but it is also short-termist and a view from above. Oscar Olivera, a leader within the Cochabamba Water Coordination, criticised year one of the Morales government: ‘The state is expropriating capacities that we recovered at great cost: the capacity to rebel, to mobilise, to organise, and advance proposals. They give institutional positions to movement spokespeople, embassies to social leaders, and dismiss and stigmatise those of us who do not want to enter the state institutions but rather want to break with them, alleging that we are funded by the Rightwing’ [1]. This process of co-option and repression has continued to the present day, with predictable

results. Most recently, the MAS-Morales government has allowed Bolivia’s booming mining sector to use huge quantities of water, placing mines, many foreign-owned, in direct competition for water resources with local communities [8]. Notwithstanding what Bolivia’s Constitution says, this is occurring without the consent of Indigenous populations, even as climate change is provoking drought conditions across large parts of the country [6]. At the same time, oil and gas revenues have provided an economic stability of sorts, a bulwark to MAS’s electoral support.

In March 2015, Olivera expressed his sense of betrayal: ‘The government is not interested in the water struggle now because there is no money behind it; it is interested in extractive industry. And the worst of this government is not that it established an extractive economic model, the worst is that it has dismantled the autonomous social organizations, to turn them into spaces of party political propaganda for the government. Organizations such as the Cochabamba Water Coordination, that were the social basis for Morales to become president, have been destroyed, with social activists tempted by the government into public officialdom’ [9]. There exists a deep distrust among those activists who remained in the grassroots. Meanwhile, the majority of people have returned, as before, to disorganisation and to everyday distress. ‘For us’, Olivera says, ‘the fight in 2000 was not to raise our level of consumption, but so people could, from below, collectively make decisions and set their own course, so they could give content to their lives and decide how to do it. Today, once again, the State has expropriated our politics, our democracy, our voice, our ability to decide and to build’ [9].

In sum, the real significance of the Cochabamba water committees then is not their role in bringing a left-populist government to power but rather their providing a striking example of alternative, co-operative ways of managing the commons [See also 5]. The communities of Cochabamba rejected the concepts of ‘individual private ownership’ and of ‘state public ownership’ in favour of what they described as ‘communal public ownership’ [1]. This type of ownership does not depend on the state but on the people directly, nor does it belong to one individual, but to the entire community. According to Anibal Quijano, this form of anti-capitalist ownership,

operating on reciprocity, equality and solidarity, has widespread and deep roots in Latin America. Community organisations are ‘not islands in the sea of the urban world dominated by capital. They are part of the sea that, in turn, modulates and controls the logic of capital’ [10]. It is this social fabric that now requires re-weaving in Bolivia, even as economic and state forces seek to unravel it. As Olivera put it when asked about his hopes for the future of Bolivia: ‘We know how to kick a government, military or civilian dictatorship. We know and we can. And we are going to do so, certainly, when the time allows it and the people are determined. The trouble is to remake and to remake the social fabric: that requires years, efforts, sacrifices, and blood’ [9].

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## *Rojava - Revolution between a rock and a hard place.*

Revolutions are seldom made in favourable circumstances. Russia 1917 emerged from the mass slaughter of WWI and the disintegration of an economy under the pressure of the supply demands of that war. Spain 1936 emerged from a well planned and executed fascist coup amongst a powerful military backed and armed by international fascism. Schemas for revolution that depend on quiet times and plenty may well be doomed from the start.

That said its hard to imagine more impossible conditions for revolution than that of Rojava. A brutal civil war, 3 small areas of territory that were kept in a state of low development by the previous regime and are not even linked to each other. A fanatic army of barbaric religious extremists armed with captured looted US heavy weaponry attacking from one side, a hostile state quietly backing that army and closing its borders to the good guys on another and waiting in the wings the old regime and its long history of brutal counter insurgency. And above all this the tactical and strategic intervention of an imperialist power whose manipulations have devastated the land to the South East over a period of almost three decades.

In addition the main ideological force behind the revolution, the PKK, which got on comparatively well with the Assad regime on both a traditional 'enemy of my enemy is my friend' basis but more relevant

**“Revolutions are seldom made in favourable circumstances”**

to this discussion because the geographic isolation of the Kurdish population in the three cantons of a very much larger Syria meant they might be better off moving to Northern Kurdistan. In 'The Kurdish Awakening' Ofra Bengio even credits Ocalan in that period with saying that the Kurds had originated in Kurdistan and needed to return there. ( Footnote Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland p207 ) Yet it was here one night in 2012 at a small town on the route of the old Berlin to Baghdad railway that a revolution of sorts began. In the words of Mako Qoçgirî "It's the night of July 18-19. People in the city of Kobanê are stealing into a mosque to participate in a people's assembly there. They reach a decision: the revolution must proceed!

Their armed defense committees, take control of the main access roads to and from Kobanê, while civilians, in an organized action, lay siege to regime institutions and the Assad army's military strongpoints. A short negotiation is enough to convince those in

charge of the barracks that they have nothing left but to lay down their arms." ( Footnote <http://www.biehlonbookchin.com/revolutionary-days-july-2012/> )

The revolution quickly spread to the 3 cantons of Northern Syria / Western Kurdistan that have a majority Kurdish population. All three are landlocked, separated from each other and pushed up against the hostile border maintained by the Turkish state. From west to East they are Afrin, Kobane and Jazira and in 2014 perhaps 4.5 million people populated the cantons which lie west of the Tigris and east of the Mediterranean. Not all the people are Kurds, in fact ethnically there are Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, and Turkmen and there are also the religious groups of Muslim, Christian, and Yazidi.

This was a divided population whose divisions were exploited & deepened by the Ba'athist regime through programs that repressed and displaced Kurds and a settlement program that moved additional Arabs from the Syrian interior to create an 'Arab belt' on what had often been Kurdish land. The Assad regime also sought to keep the region economically undeveloped, banning the construction of large buildings like factories, its said that at the time of the revolution Rojava was without industrial grain mills. It's major product was wheat, for transport & refining elsewhere in Syria.

## “The gender liberation struggle fundamentally underlies the struggle for class politics in Rojava”

Rojava does however have the mixed blessing of containing 60% of Syrian oil extraction, a valuable resource for sure but one that attracts the armed intervention of both hostile states and mercenary armies. And Rojava without refineries and surrounded by hostile borders with no sea access can receive only limited income from the oil wealth through smuggling operations.

Understanding this context is an essential start to understanding what we can expect from the Rojava revolution. For ideological reasons some sections of the left are very hostile to even the idea a revolution is underway and often express this by putting forward demands for a full communist economy that are beyond the possibilities of ‘socialism in one country’ never mind ‘communism in 3 disconnected cantons.’

Here too we need to recognise the limitations in developing an anarchist approach to the revolution, it is certainly not made at a time and in a place of our choosing but in the most impossible of circumstances. So as with the Zapatistas in 1994 the questions are limited to: Is what is happening worth defending? What are the contradictions within the revolution? And what can we learn from it?

### Is what is happening worth defending?

On one level this is a very easy question to answer Yes to. After all Rojava came to most of our attention in the first place when ISIS (using captured US heavy weaponry and armour) suddenly overran most of Kobane canton except for the north western

half of Kobane city itself. A hundred day plus mini Stalingrad was fought out at considerable cost to the YPG/J defenders before ISIS were driven back. The regime ISIS would seek to impose and the methods they would use would mean almost anything would be worth defending as an alternative.

But the revolution on the ground in Rojava is of a sort that would be worth defending anywhere. In what are the worst of circumstances the defenders are claiming to be pushing through a profound social revolution that aims at the development of a democratic, ecological and gender liberated society. If there are any reasonable grounds for believing this is really the intention then there should be no question about defending the revolution itself.

### Democracy

At the base of the Rojava revolution is a system of direct grassroots democracy based in the community. As it has been described each neighbourhood has an assembly which anyone living there can attend. These send delegates to district meetings and in turn those district meetings send delegates to a city meeting. For instance the city of Qamişlo has 6 districts and each of these districts has 18 neighbourhood communes of 300 households. Qamişlo is the largest city in the Cizîre canton which has 12 cities in total, a council of delegates from all the 12 cities form a canton wide council. (<http://kurdishquestion.com/index.php/kurdistan/west-kurdistan/rojava-s-c...>)

### Gender Liberation

A lot of the imagery coming out of Rojava has focused on the too common wall poster fetish of the western left, conventionally beautiful women with guns. In a piece for Al Jazeera Dilar Dirik, a Kurdish activist and PhD student researching the Kurdish women’s movement, described how media coverage tends to “sensationalise the ways in which these women defy preconceived notions of eastern women as oppressed victims, these mainstream characterizations erroneously present Kurdish women fighters as a novel phenomenon. They cheapen a legitimate struggle by projecting their bizarre orientalist fantasies on it - and oversimplify the reasons motivating Kurdish women to join the fight. Nowadays, it seems to be appealing to portray women as sympathetic

“Some have reacted to these contradictions by refusing to defend the revolution at all and accusing anyone who does as some sort of sell out.”

enemies of ISIL without raising questions about their ideologies and political aims.”

The reality is that from the start the Rojava revolution has a strong active aim of gender liberation. The delegate councils described above are required to have at least a 40% representation of women. A co-chair system is in place where there has to be a male & female representative in every position. Women’s houses were opened in every city and a Ministry of Women staffed only by women set up which the Cizîre Canton Minister of Women Hiva Erabu says “started projects in areas of interest to women: economy, politics, child-rearing, development, violence against women, culture, law.”

In their report on this work Rojda Serhat-Şevin Şervan-Cahide Harputlu say “The Ministry gathered a range of previously unavailable statistics on women through research in Cizîre Canton. In addition to the total population of women, the statistics also recorded numbers of women who have experienced violence, polygyny, child marriage; who are in economic distress; who have divorced; and who are disabled. According to the research, there were 2,250 instances of violence against women in 2004 alone.” Minister Hiva Erabu says “as a result we started solidarity projects and women’s shelters. Women in danger of death live here. We also have projects to help solve the economic problems of women living in shelters.” There has also been the “development of a law that takes measures against a range of forms of violence against women, from child marriage, polygyny, disinheritance of women and bride exchange to domestic violence.”

(Footnote <http://kurdishquestion.com/index.php/kurdistan/west-kurdistan/rewriting-...>)

This is the context the armed women’s militia of the YPG should be understood in. Meryem Kobanê a YPJ commander at Kobane says “Women are pushed into prostitution as if they have no other option. Women are being stoned when they themselves are victims of rape. We are saying there is another way to live. And the solution isn’t just weapons”

The gender liberation struggle fundamentally underlies the struggle for class politics in Rojava as the oppression of women is essential to the maintenance of the tribal-feudal structures of traditional Kurdish society which obstruct class interests by dividing people along tribal loyalties. Unlike in Western Europe where tribalism was mostly suppressed by the feudal class system long before the transition to capitalism, in Kurdistan tribalism also needs to be defeated as it remains fundamental to the reproduction of exploitation.

### What are the contradictions

The sort of revolutionary changes described above didn’t fall from the moon but have clearly been driven by the influence of thought and experimentation





across the border in Turkey. The revolution in Rojava is being pushed by a separate organisation, the PYD but its very clear that it is at least deeply influenced by its strong connections with the PKK. The successful defence of Kobane was greatly bolstered by PKK fighters crossing the border, perhaps more dependant on that then it was on US airpower or weapon drops.

The PKK is the Kurdistan Workers' Party which fought an often brutal armed struggle against the Turkish state from 1984 to 2013. It's political origins in the late 1970s fused Kurdish nationalism with the Marxist Leninism of the New Left coming out of the 1960s in the fight for an independent Kurdish state. It's armed struggle which included many bombings and armed conflict with other Kurdish forces as well as the Turkish state inevitably has left many of the Turkish left in particular deeply suspicious of it.

As recently as 2012 541 people died in the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state, the current peace process across the border in Turkey is fragile. Prolonged military conflicts brutalise even the most political of activists and unchecked tend to see 'hard men' rise to positions of control. Those who strongly dislike Rojava because of the PKK influence have proven hard to debate as for the most part all they do is cite the history of bad things that were done in order to insist both that change is impossible and that any change reported has to therefore be a trick.

From an anarchist perspective the additional fact that the PKK has been led since its inception by Abdullah Öcalan and that a personality cult surrounds him raises problems. Anarchists have not been immune to the tendency to raise particular fighters to cult status, the Spanish anarchist Durruti being one example. But Öcalan whose face dominates most mobilisations is still alive and presented as directing at least the ideological development that influences Rojava from his prison cell in Turkey.

However the mindset that sees Öcalan as an all

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powerful puppet master should be challenged. Like other movements the PKK contains other voices and like other movements existing in conditions of intense conflict sometimes this isn't so visible to outsiders due to the need both organisational loyalist and the need to maintain discipline in the face of an enemy eager to exploit weaknesses. But it's an open enough secret that a push for change also came from the base, and in particular from women demanding a distinct womens military command,

It's significant that the first women's organisation had to be founded in exile in Germany in 1987. The official history of the women's movement is perhaps required to give credit to Öcalan but even it suggests a struggle from below in talking of how "the impact of feudal society created difficulties in women's organization due to lack of self-confidence.

However, the faith in freedom, their own strength and self-organization that Kurdish women gained by their practical experiences in the freedom struggle contributed to a quick progress of their ideological, military, political and social organization. Women gained their self-confidence thanks to their successful march into many areas of struggle which traditionally were regarded as "belonging to men". Hereby

women have changed the mentality and structures of male domination and thus the mentality of the Kurdish society, life, social organization, liberation and democracy as part of the qualitative change in revolution. This also led to a serious change in the traditional, ruling perception and mentality of men towards women. (Footnote <http://www.kjk-online.org/hakkimizda/?lang=en> )

The importance of the question of top down military discipline becomes clearer when you consider the nature of power in Rojava. The council system as described owes much to the work of PYD cadre operating as TEV-DEM. But as well as being essential to the construction of grassroots democracy the PYD also form a more conventional government structure.

The left talks about situations of dual power when you have in existence at the same time the top down government of the state and a bottom up self government of the people. Each of those structures can make very different decisions and this brings them into conflict. The historical development of such conflicts is that the conventional state government comes to control the armed forces and as serious disagreements develops deploys them against the grassroots democracy to 'defend the revolution'. The Russian revolution was destroyed when the Bolsheviks used such state power to suppress the workers councils and soviets. The Spanish revolution was defeated by fascism in 1939 but in 1937 the republican government took significant steps to crush the power of the sort of assemblies and co-ops that are developing in Rojava.

Of course this history is also known to the PYD / TEV-DEM cadre and to an extent they address this contradiction as them deliberately holding both sides of the dual power equation to protect the grassroots democratic structures. The councils are constructed so that the state holds a minority of positions and can be easily outvoted by the delegates from below. But the real test of that will only develop if and when





the grassroots democracy decides on a different approach to that of the PYD leadership.

The second major contradiction is the military one. In their fight against ISIS the YPG/J were dependent on US air support to destroy the armour and heavy weaponry ISIS had captured off the US supplied Iraqi army. Of course you could suggest that was simply the US cancelling out the effects of its own intervention, an intervention that had also created the conditions from which ISIS arose. But clearly any continued military support would be conditional on the US thinking the Rojava revolution was going to not represent a significant threat to its considerable interests in the region.

As soon as the US have ISIS contained it's likely that not only will support be cut off, but the US will be encouraging Turkey & Barzani in Iraq to destabilise and overthrow the PYD and wipe out TEV-DEM. The PYD have to be aware of that so it's a considerable additional pressure to prevent the grassroots democracy going too far within Rojava or encouraging the spread of its methods into Syria or Iraq. Perhaps the PYD leadership might reason if it stays localised and low key the US might overlook the threat it represents, the threat of a good example.

As I updated the final draft of this article what may be a key event in answering these questions took place. The YPG recaptured the massive La Farge cement plant. This is important not simply because cement is essential for reconstruction but because it was built by a French owned company only 7 years ago and was the second biggest foreign capital investment in Syria. How will Tev-Dem deal with that, seize control of the plant, seek a partnership deal or

hand it back. How will that decision be made and much more importantly how and by who? (footnote - thanks to Flint for pointing this out)

Some have reacted to these contradictions by refusing to defend the revolution at all and accusing anyone who does as some sort of sell out. This approach is 'safe' if the purpose of your organisation is to seldom take a risk or support movements that turn out to be less than they promised. But such a perspective is a useless one if you want to see a revolutionary transformation of society as that will always involve taking risks and working with real world movements that will always be less perfect that a small ideological group might desire. What can we learn?

Many of the people on the ground in Rojava would not care much about what some anarchist group in Ireland thinks of them. A moments curiosity perhaps that some group so far away had produced a commentary. And we are not particularly interested in presenting ourselves as some sort of panel of judges of whether other movements around the work are revolutionary enough. What we are interested is what lessons can we learn from the difficult experience in Rojava.

1. The first lesson is the unexpected nature of such a profound attempt in such difficult circumstances. Particularly for those of us in the West it's a strong reminder not to fall into the sort of lazy orientalist thinking that assumes new revolutionary ideas can only emerge from the global cities where the academic left has its strongest roots. As with the Zapatistas, ordinary people in what are viewed by outsiders as isolated backwaters can suddenly leap

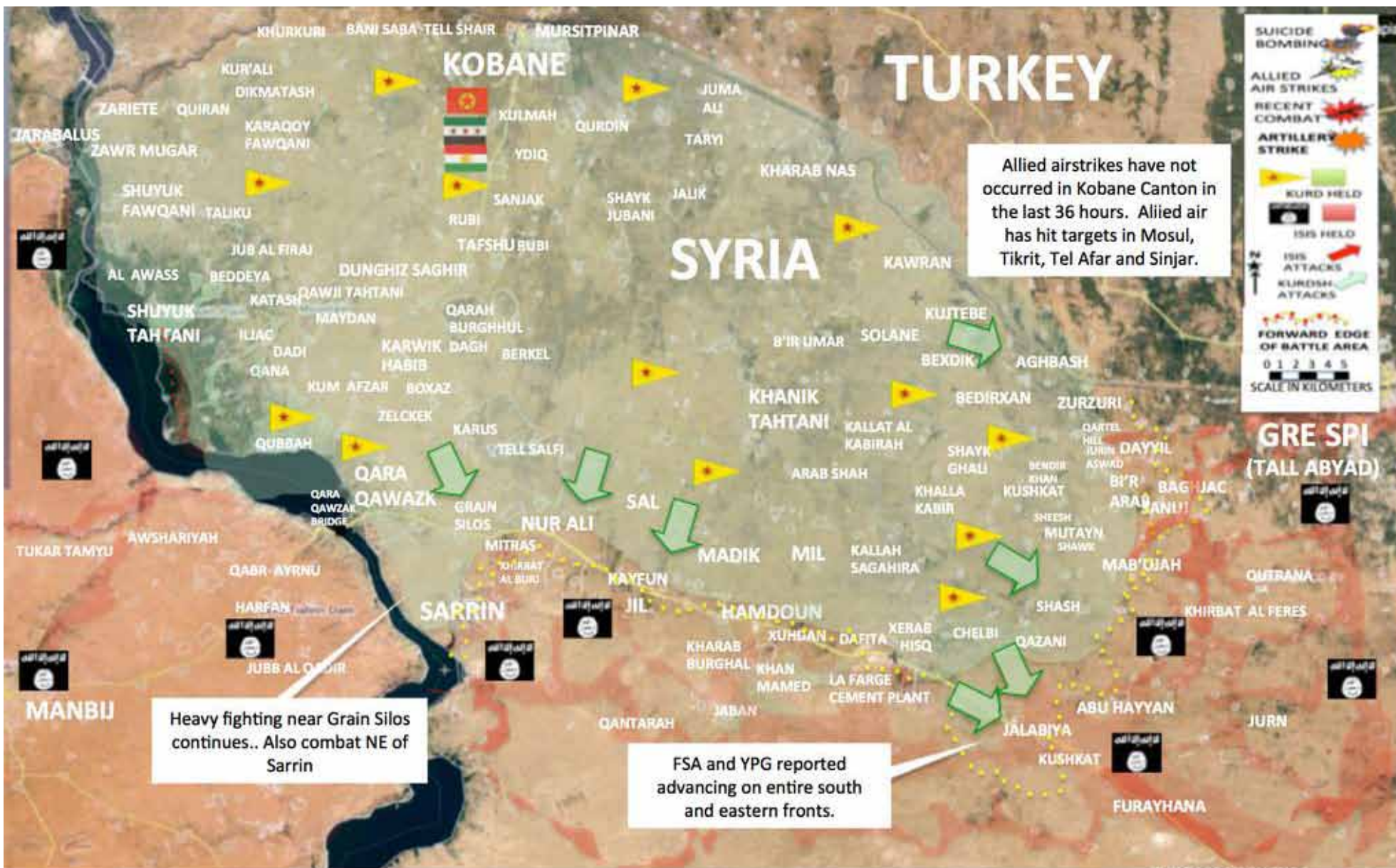
far ahead not only in theory but also in practise.

2. Solidarity that is limited to a movement identical to your own desires is not real solidarity at all. Real solidarity means recognising and respecting difference, that doesn't require the suspension of critique but it does require an attempt at positive engagement with new ideas and new methods. That is both difficult and risky whereas intellectual denunciation is both easy and safe.

3. The fight for the progressive nation state is over. Here this is visible by the explicit declarations of the PKK that this is no longer their goal but really this is just a particular clear instance (the EZLN being another) of a direction to history imposed perhaps by the rise of globalisation and the end of the USSR but reflecting a deeper reality that developed across the 20th century.

4. Gender liberation is not an add on to the revolutionary process but a central part of creating it in the first place. Movements that reproduce patriarchal divisions of power in their ranks, because they say to oppose the 'natural' influence of outside society would be too difficult or divisive, are movements that are going nowhere in the long term.

For all its contradictions the Rojava revolution is a bright beacon that demands we consider again what our picture of revolution is and how we think such a process might play out. It is a very fragile moment in a very hostile sea, surrounded by the most ruthless enemies. It may not survive, it may degenerate but it demonstrates once more the ability of ordinary men and women to seize the world and try to remake it even in the most difficult of circumstances.





# MURRAY BOOKCHIN: THE NEXT REVOLUTION (REVIEW)

Despite being a pathbreaking figure from the 1960s onward in anarchist, green, and directly democratic political circles having predicted early on the significance of ecological issues and technology to leftwing social struggles Murray Bookchin today remains unknown to many on the left, and to those who do know of him he remains controversial.

Disliked by class struggle anarchists and Marxists for his advocacy of community organising over workplace organising, and by anarchists involved in single issue activism for their lack of organisation and supposed concern with personal rebellion over social change, he made quite a few enemies in his last days for fiery polemics directed at his intellectual opponents. While his supporters in organisations like New Compass defend him for his consistency, others argue that he ended up alienating potential allies by refusing to ever waver on his specific revolutionary vision: focused on creating a municipal confederation of ecological communities practicing direct democracy, founded on a philosophy of science, reason, and humanism.

This new collection of essays from the last few years of his life may provide a useful entry point of his philosophical and political project called social ecology and generate further debate for the future of libertarian socialist organising in an age of increasing militarism and climate crisis.

## New wine or new bottle?

The first essay, The Communalist Project, has been published before and is by far the weakest. Written after Bookchin had distanced himself from anarchism, it is replete with historical distortions and errors about anarchist theory and practice which Bookchin himself attacked Marxists for making in the 1960s. It comes across as a disingenuous rewriting of his former philosophy, knocking down straw-man after straw-man in an attempt to boost his own new political project called Communalism.

One could argue that Bookchin in fact never really left the social anarchist tradition, merely felt the need to distance himself from a label he saw as being irredeemable due to its increasing associations with primitivists, postmodernists, and lifestylists. From his own descriptions, Communalism could be viewed as a revamped version of anarcho-communism in that it seeks a community directed economy instead of the worker directed economy desired by most anarcho-syndicalists.

## Ecology and the future of the left

Most of the other essays cover familiar topics of interest, from the importance of ecology and the urban environment to political organising (years before Autonomist Marxists like Hardt and Negri), the crucial

“This new collection of essays from the last few years of his life may provide a useful entry point of his philosophical and political project”

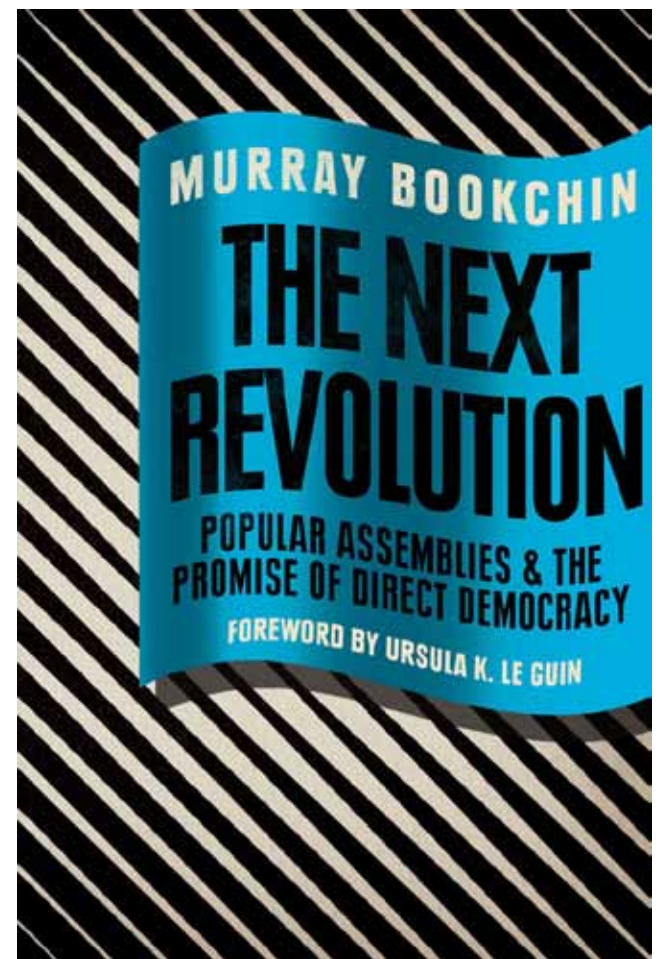
need to root one’s ideas in Enlightenment humanism over what he saw as the irrationality of postmodernism, critiques of nationalism, and the potential of popular assemblies as organs of a new participatory democracy.

The final essay, The Future of the Left, is from a contemporary perspective the most interesting. Bookchin gives a broad overview of revolutionary left traditions of the past, offering critical commentary of what went right and wrong with anarchism, Marxism, and other revolutionary doctrines. He stresses the importance of reason, Enlightenment humanism, direct democracy, and the ecological worldview, while attacking the traditional left’s excessive focus on class and economic issues, pointing out the need to appeal to people simply as “the people”, instead of “workers”, which he finds reduces them to their economic function and discounts the significance of trans-class power hierarchies that cannot be reduced economics.

## A matter of emphasis

It’s difficult to say what he would have made of the recent Occupy and Squares movements that kicked off in 2011. His comments about the flaws of the alter-globalisation protests indicate he would have criticised their focus on consensus decision making over majority voting and their lack of a coherent program and systematic body of ideas. Though he would likely have praised the attempts to get people involved in grassroots democracy, unify class and trans-class forms of social struggle, and bring environmental issues to the forefront of political discussion.

Looking at the collection as a whole, Bookchin perhaps under emphasised the role of class and workplace organising in social struggle, but no more so than Marxists and class struggle anarchists have overemphasised it, often relegating issues like race,



gender, sexuality, and ecology to secondary importance; issues that can be sorted out “after the revolution”. Whether traditional class struggle against capital and the state is indeed inferior to Bookchin’s form of community struggle against all forms of hierarchy and domination is an open question, and one that deserves consideration.

Given the impact social ecology has had on the recent Rojava Revolution, this collection can act as a compelling gateway to a thinker whose ideas could provide valuable lessons for future anti-authoritarian theory and practice.

WORDS: EGIN O’CONNOR

From his own descriptions, Communalism could be viewed as a revamped version of anarcho-communism in that it seeks a community directed economy instead of the worker directed economy desired by most anarcho-syndicalists.

# BRIGADISTAS IN PARADISE.

## THE GREEN BRIGADE AND LEFT WING FOOTBALL FAN CULTURE

WORDS: EGIN O'CEALLAIGH



The following is an abridged summary of a qualitative study undertaken as part of the Masters in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism at the National University of Ireland Maynooth. The thesis drew upon theories of culture, subculture, social movements, radical pedagogy, ethnographies and studies of ultras, gender and football research, as well as studies of the Irish immigrant experience in Scotland, and specifically the role of Celtic FC as an expression of Irish identity.

The Green Brigade of Glasgow Celtic Football Club were founded in 2006 as an explicitly anti-sectarian, anti-racist and anti-fascist group of ultras, who would celebrate Irish Republicanism, oppose the commercialisation of football, and act as an alternative to apolitical fans groups who were perceived as being too close to the management of the club. Football has long provided a space for dissident politics to be expressed, and the link between football and radical politics is well established (Kuhn, 2011). In Scotland, football is an important forum where issues of ethnic, religious and political identity are played out, with Celtic being an important conduit for expressions of Irish immigrant identities, particularly support for Irish Republicanism, anti-imperialist struggles, and broadly left-wing politics. As ultras, the Green Brigade support their team in a passionate, colourful, loud and coordinated way, making use of banners, pyrotechnics, songs and

chants, and other expressions of die-hard support. The term 'ultra', for many, has become synonymous with right-wing football groups, particularly in Italy, where fascist ultra groups are extremely prevalent. While it is true that right-wing, fascist ultra groups are extremely prominent throughout Europe, ultra is a subcultural scene which has been adopted by both right and left-wing football fans and activists. Comparable examples of subcultures being spaces of direct contestation between fascist and anti-fascist activists would be the skinhead and punk scenes, where the venues and identities of the scenes are often literal battlegrounds between ideologically opposed sides who recognise the political importance of predominantly youth subcultures (Vysotsky, 2013).

In recent insurrections in Egypt and Turkey, ultras groups have played extremely prominent roles, experienced as they are in resisting the police, bringing large, organised groups of people onto the streets, and drawing upon a culture of open hostility and opposition to the state. In Turkey, ultras from Istanbul clubs Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe and Galatasaray, usually bitter rivals, united in clashes against police, bringing to the barricades their invaluable experience of street fighting with the police, and a willingness to engage in direct and violent clashes with the state (Istanbul Uprising, 2014). While such insurrectionary moments are rare in Scotland, it is valuable to explore how the Green Brigade maintain, and recre-

ate, a sense of 'rebel' politics within the particular community of Celtic Football Club and the immigrant Irish in Scotland.

Though there are members from other parts of Scotland and Ireland, and several women members, the majority of members are young men from the west of Scotland, in particular Glasgow. Members are predominantly of Irish descent, but there are also members from Arab, African and Muslim backgrounds. Aside from the 'core' of around 70 members, the group draws several hundred to section 111, their home in Celtic Park. Alongside face to face meetings, either on match days or other events, much of the discussion and decision making occurs on the group's online forum, [greenbrigade.proboards.com](http://greenbrigade.proboards.com). Alongside practical organising, the forum provides a space for the discussion of football, politics, books and culture. While decisions are generally taken by consensus, votes are sometimes taken. Although there is no formal hierarchy within the group, like other ultras groups there is a core of people who are more influential, usually due to being founding members, particularly active, or more politically involved than others.

### Visible activities

The most visible aspects of the Green Brigade's activities occur within or immediately around the football match. The group have become famous for their



“Many members have spoken of the way in which involvement with the Green Brigade deepened and expanded their political education”

spectacular, highly coordinated tifos, displays of banners, ticker tape, flares etc. The most contentious of these have been displays which have addressed anti-Irish racism in Scotland, British imperialism, solidarity with Palestine, and Scottish Government legislation which has criminalised expressions of a politicised Irish immigrant

Outside of the football stadia, the group organise around a number of issues within their communities, most noticeably in the historically Irish, and impoverished, east end of Glasgow. The highlight of the Green Brigade's calendar is a free anti-discrimination football tournament, which has featured teams from the Basque, Nigerian, Cameroonian, Pakistani, Irish, refugee and asylum seeker, and LGBTQ communities, as well as teams from Celtic Supporters Clubs (CSCs), and even the odd Rangers supporters side. As one member explains, the task of challenging discrimination is not taken lightly, though there has been an overwhelmingly positive response from participants, in a city where ethnic and religious groups do not often mix socially.

[...] this is our sixth year now doing the tournament, if you're only hitting one person a year, it's still changing someone in Glasgow, and the East End of Glasgow isn't somewhere you're going to change a lot of people's opinions.

Aside from football, the group regularly organises food drives for food banks in Glasgow as a response to the effects of austerity, collecting essential food items at games and social events and fundraisers. The most recent food drive, conducted with other Celtic supporters groups, raised close to £9,000 and over 7.5 tons of food, which is claimed as the largest single collection of food for a food bank in the UK.

### The political culture of the Green Brigade

The political culture of the Green Brigade is too complicated to sum up succinctly, though I will attempt to give a taste of how political activism and discussion are approached. There is no set ideological or political manifesto of the group, but instead a broad umbrella of principles, namely support for Celtic, a love of the ultra way of life, and a general 'soundness' of left-wing, progressive politics. Irish Republican politics have been a formative part of the politicisation of most members, with the influence of Republican politics being seen as an important foundation for the discussion of other political struggles and ideas, amongst group members but also in terms of outreach. Members spoke of varying influences in their own processes of politicisation, in particular the invasion and occupation of Iraq, experiences of loyalist violence, immigrant family histories, the South African anti-apartheid movement, the Palestinian struggle, and exposure to anarchism, amongst other movements.

In terms of shades of green, red and black, individual members' politics can vary greatly, from supporters of Sinn Féin, éirígí, republican socialists, members of the Scottish Socialist Party, communists, trade unionists, anarchists, to members who prioritise support for Celtic above politics. Debate is lively, on and offline, with the forum providing a glimpse of the breadth and tone of discussion. Individual activities and initiatives, such as support for a particular campaign, are often 'pushed' by individual members based on their own personal interests and politics. The groups increasingly active support and solidarity with the Palestinian struggle is a clear example of the evolution not only of members' politics, but of the collective focus and politics of the group. It is now unthinkable that Celtic could ever play an Israeli

team in Glasgow without significant pro-Palestinian and pro-BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) action from the Green Brigade and other Celtic fans. Support for the Palestinian struggle has even extended to a blog being written by a group member while they were volunteering in Palestine.

There are international links and friendships with other anti-fascist ultras groups throughout Europe, such as Toulon, Marseilles, Standard Liege, Athletic Bilbao, Livorno, and the red and black Bohemians (Bohs) of Dublin's Northside. A central feature of the Green Brigade, like other ultras groups, is the importance of friendship, with members considering the group as a family which provides emotional support and care.

Many members have spoken of the way in which involvement with the Green Brigade deepened and expanded their political education, taking an often superficial awareness of 'rebel' politics, and in particular Irish Republicanism, and drawing links and comparisons with anti-fascism, anti-homophobia and anti-sexism, and struggles in the Basque Country, Chiapas and Palestine to name but a few. The scope of themes discussed, in person and online, is impressive, as the online forum indicates. The Politics page of the forum alone contains more than 200 pages, over 8,000 separate threads. Examples of themes covered are racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-fascism, Palestine, Irish Republicanism, asylum seeker and refugee solidarity; music; films; Policing; Austerity; and literally thousands of others. There is also a 12 page thread with reading suggestions covering similar topics, as well as fiction. It is considered a 'working document', and there is a lengthy discussion and suggestions of books which members and forum users have found influential.

Perhaps the most formalised way that learning functions within the group is through political education nights, covering a wide range of topics including anti-fascism, women in the Irish struggle, miscarriages of justice, legal rights, Irish Republican prisoners, refugee and asylum seeker rights, and Palestine. Members who organised political education nights spoke of the importance of making politics accessible, of not having people 'dwarfed by big words', and of creating 'a laid back environment to discuss politics'.



“The Green Brigade were founded in 2006 as an explicitly anti-sectarian, anti-racist and anti-fascist group of ultras”



Repression and resistance

In 2012 the Scottish Government introduced the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communication Act, ostensibly to tackle 'sectarianism' in Scotland in the wake of the attempted posting of a bomb and bullets, to then Celtic manager Neil Lennon, a Catholic from Lurgan in County Armagh, as well as several physical attacks and death threats. However, rather than addressing the pervasiveness of anti-Irish racism in Scotland, the legislation has primarily targeted politicised expressions of Irish identity in Scotland, and in particular any banners, songs, chants or other expressions of opposition to British imperialism in Ireland. The Green Brigade have borne the brunt of the legislation, with regular harassment and repression which would be considered scandalous by polite society, were it not meted out to working class football fans, and proudly anti-establishment ones at that.

Examples of police attempts to disrupt the group's activities have included: constant and overt surveillance of the group at, and travelling to and from football matches; stop and searches; dawn raids on members' homes for controversial banners; police blocking of taxi applications; attempts by Special Branch to recruit informers; covert surveillance of members, in Scotland and abroad, down to detailing specific meals eaten; use of Anti-Terrorism legislation to detain and question members travelling between Scotland and the north of Ireland; dozens of arrests; imprisonment on remand; the completely ironic deployment of police horses, riot vans and baton charges on members protesting police harassment; and a dedicated unit tasked with monitoring the group.

Such repression has taken its toll on the Green Brigade, with members citing it as the single biggest difficulty faced by the group. As well as the psychological, financial and social cost of arrests, intimidation and harassment, the state's tactics have also forced the group into a more defensive role. Activities both inside the stadium and outside in the community have to varying degrees suffered or been forced to adapt to counter the effects of police repression. Banners that otherwise would celebrate Celtic and radical struggles have often focussed on highlighting repressive government legislation and police actions; education nights which could discuss radical history have had to adapt by discussing the legal rights of young fans who are stopped and searched by police, whether on match days or not.

This isn't the vanguard you're looking for

While there is much to celebrate in the vibrancy of the Green Brigade, and the very real successes they have had in creating and developing spaces to celebrate and act out progressive, radical politics, all members I spoke with were insistent on the need to view the group in a down to earth and unglamorous way, to the point of at times downplaying the more political nature of the group. Without Celtic, the Green Brigade would have no reason to exist, so support of Celtic is the focus of the group. However, Celtic has provided a space for left-wing and Irish Republican politics from the moment the Fenian Michael Davitt laid the first sod of turf (imported from Donegal) at Celtic Park in 1892, and so it is not a surprise that an ultra group within Celtic has an explicitly left-wing identity.

"I think it's always important to understand the context of where the group's coming ... what the group is, you know. It's not a political revolutionary front, you know what I mean. We're not the vanguard of the working class. I've had good, activist pals of mine who did talk about how 'the Green Brigade are going to be the vanguard of the revolution', be at the forefront of the storming of



"Aside from football, the group regularly organises food drives for food banks in Glasgow as a response to the effects of austerity"





the Scottish Parliament, and yer like that, 'mate, shut the fuck up." (Participant 1: 28)

Such reference to 'the vanguard of the working class' is a thinly veiled dig at elements of the Scottish left. There is a perception among many in the Green Brigade of sections of the Scottish left as patronising, middle class, out of touch with the realities of the lives of many members, and also deeply uncomfortable with notions of Irishness which celebrate armed struggle against Britain. Members of the group have at times been mistaken for fascists by 'black bloc' anti-fascists, with the suggestion once being made that they should swap their Adidas trainers for Converse, and that they should not dress in smart casual clothing. Relations with non-member activists is often done on the basis of friendships and informal relations, and most large organisations are viewed with suspicion at best. Alongside this wariness of the 'middle class' left,

There are obvious contradictions and tensions within the group, but much of this is the nature of a group which has no formal policies, which has a broad membership, and which is located within the overwhelmingly masculine environment of Scottish football. The most obvious tension is the fact that, although explicitly committed to challenging all forms of discrimination, the group is still overwhelmingly male, and attempts to more proactively challenge sexism and hegemonic masculinity did not seem central to the members I spoke with. Although members were conscious of the need address issues of gender, some spoke of a fear of appearing 'tokenistic', of issues of

gender and anti-sexism being put on the back burner due to police repression and its challenges, and also the difficulty of challenging ingrained patriarchal attitudes within the wider Celtic support.

In deindustrialised societies football stadia are one of the few places where large groups of people regularly gather and socialise, and many football clubs are far more than just sporting organisations. Celtic in particular provides a way for the Irish immigrant community in Scotland to express a contested, marginalised and often silenced sense of identity which celebrates struggles against colonialism and imperialism and the fight for a better world. Overwhelmingly working class, young and male, and most contentiously in a Scotland where anti-Irish racism is deeply ingrained, the Green Brigade are clearly viewed by the establishment as a threat to the status quo and a challenge to a notion of Scotland as being a progressive country. To paraphrase a friend, there is a big green elephant in the room, and it is doing shit on the tartan carpet.

This has been far too brief a glimpse into the Green Brigade, their activities, politics and the context they are situated in, but I hope it has gone some way to demystifying an often demonised group, and has highlighted the importance that football can have as a space for the expression of contentious identities. The success of the Green Brigade is in large part due to their position within an already politicised parent culture of Celtic and left-wing elements of the Irish community in Scotland, and it is not for the left to try to 'colonise' or co-opt such spaces in an attempt to

grow organisations.

The experiences of left-wing ultras groups, whether in Cairo, Istanbul, Livorno or Glasgow, offer important lessons on the importance of sport, and in particular football, to the maintenance and development of wider cultures of resistance, which not only resist neoliberalism within football stadia, but seek to challenge other forms of oppression in communities.

*Eoin is an activist, writer and support worker currently based in Scotland, though has lived and worked in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Mexico and Ireland.*





# Island of No Consent – Maternity Care and Bodily Autonomy in Ireland



WORDS: SINEAD REDMOND

On the last day of August 2014, in a ruling the country and the media barely noticed, Mr Justice Ryan in the High Court in Kerry found against Ciara Hamilton and for the HSE in an utterly terrifying moment for every person becoming pregnant or giving birth in Ireland from here on out. Ciara Hamilton had taken a case against the Health Service Executive after the birth of her second child, during which a midwife had, without obtaining consent, broken her waters, leading to an umbilical cord prolapse and an emergency caesarean section.

The breaking of waters during labour, in medical terms, amniotomy or Artificial Rupture of Membranes (ARM), is not recommended best practice precisely because it can lead to a cord prolapse, which is a serious emergency when giving birth as it cuts off the blood flow and air supply to the baby. If the person giving birth is a Strep B carrier, as Ciara Hamilton was, it can also carry an increased risk of Strep B transferring to the newborn and causing serious damage to the baby, as happened to Ciara Hamilton's child. It is listed as a Do Not Do under NICE recommendations. Despite this, and despite ARM being known to carry dangers and risks to both birthing woman and baby, it is still a widely carried out procedure in many Irish maternity hospitals. In the case of Ciara Hamilton's birth, it was a procedure carried out by a midwife without seeking consent to do so.

## Denial of autonomy is not an anomaly

This, too, despite being obviously grossly unethical and a fundamental violation of both human rights and bodily autonomy, is something which routinely occurs in Irish maternity hospitals. In the spring of 2014, AIMS Ireland carried out a survey of those who had given birth in Ireland between 2010 and 2014. The survey was available to be filled out online, and was spread through various social media channels, as well as through media coverage. The pool of respondents was a self-selecting one, and numbered

**“Despite this, and despite ARM being known to carry dangers and risks to both birthing woman and baby, it is still a widely carried out procedure in many Irish maternity hospitals.”**

2,836. It found that only half of all those giving birth - 50.2% of respondents - were given an opportunity to refuse tests, procedures or treatments being carried out on them. This is a truly frightening figure. What is, however, more frightening, was the wording of Mr Justice Ryan's finding against Ciara Hamilton.

“Mrs Hamilton would have seen the hook and would have known what was going to happen because of the sheet that was put under her in bed. Since, on the evidence, this was a routine procedure that Ms Kelliher was carrying out for the purpose of diagnosis to see if her fear of foetal distress was justified or not, it does seem strange that she would not have mentioned to the patient what she was going to do and have obtained her consent. The very fact that it was so routine suggests that the midwife would have done so. I am satisfied that the probability is

that Midwife Kelliher obtained the plaintiff's consent and informed her about the ARM that she was going to perform.”

What the judge has here concluded is that the midwife obtained consent because she should have done so - and that a woman giving birth who had consented only to a vaginal examination, NOT an ARM, should have known that ARM would have happened because of the presence of an amnihook and a sheet. This is a truly bizarre conclusion. Why would a person giving birth be assumed to be able to identify an amnihook - a specialised piece of medical equipment - and further be assumed to know that it would mean an ARM would be carried out on them without having been consulted or informed about the risks and benefits of the procedure? Again, this judge with no evidence to prove this assumption - and indeed the more recently published evidence from AIMS shows that not giving women a chance to refuse procedures is a large part of normal practice - asserts that a health care provider would have obtained consent because they should have done so, with no onus on the healthcare provider to prove evidence of informed consent being obtained. The fact that Ciara Hamilton testified to the fact that she was not given an opportunity to consent to an amniotomy is not even mentioned by the judge in this decision. Even more disturbingly, he went on to say:

“The patient's co-operation was needed in terms of re-positioning on the bed, the procedure might take some time and the implement was quite long, so it is not something that a person would or could do without the knowledge of the patient. The plaintiff got into position, was cooperative and consented to the vaginal examination. Ms Kelliher used a hook and gel and of course surgical gloves. She put a sheet under the plaintiff and got her to move down in the bed and discussed with the plaintiff what she was going to do. Midwife Kelliher said that she “would



have discussed”, but in my view that was a matter of usage and she clarified that she actually meant, not that she would have in the sense of describing a practice in a conditional sense, but that she did with Mrs Hamilton.”

### A muffled voice in the Republic of Gilead

Mr Justice Ryan is here saying that Ciara Hamilton positioned herself in such a way as to consent to an ARM. She consented to the vaginal examination and moved down the bed. Is this really so different from the “short skirt” argument put before courts in trials of other forms of violation of women’s bodies? Yet again, with no proof, he asserts that an ARM could not be carried out without the knowledge of the person giving birth, despite the evidence of a woman who had undergone it that indeed it had been. AIMS Ireland has heard from many more women around the country who have had non consensual amniotomies - and indeed many other procedures - performed without their knowledge. This is a far from rare occurrence; yet the voice of the woman upon whose body this was perpetrated is once again, in the arena she sought redress for her exclusion from the decisions being made about her body and her birth, being spoken over, ignored, and deemed uninformed, inconsequential, and irrelevant.

But by far the most frightening aspect of all in this case is that, despite clearly stating in his ruling that Ciara Hamilton had “underwent a frightening and disturbing experience that would leave long term troubling recollections”, Mr Justice Ryan punitively awarded the full costs of the HSE’s defence against her and her family. This was unarguably a move designed to discourage other women and people who have experienced violations of their consent during pregnancy and birth from pursuing legal action against those responsible. A move meant to punish a woman and her family who did dare to speak up against the unacceptable, indefensible treatment AIMS Ireland hear of in Irish maternity wards all too often, and whose experiences, as before during their birth, were once again ignored by the State and its enforcers, quite literally judged to be meaningless. The truth of what happened to Ciara Hamilton and her recounting of it and its consequences for her and her son was callously dismissed by a judge who simply refused to believe it because he thought it shouldn’t happen.

### No say and no support

What this ruling means is that it is now legally not a requirement for any Irish maternity ward or healthcare provider to prove either that a procedure is necessary for the person giving birth or the baby they’re giving birth to, or that they obtained informed consent from the person giving birth to carry out that procedure. In a country in which pregnant women are specifically excluded from the HSE’s National Consent Policy as being the final arbiter of what happens to their own bodies, with the High Court cited instead as the appropriate decision maker for these cases, this ruling is a further reminder to anyone with a uterus that if they are, or if they should become pregnant, they are no longer in control of their own body. They are lesser; they do not own themselves. Instead the State owns them.

This, of course, is in part a consequence of the 8th amendment; but it’s also in part a consequence of a larger prevailing attitude in maternity care in Ireland, that women in general and specifically women who are pregnant and giving birth are not trustworthy decision makers and cannot be allowed to make choices around their pregnancies and births as they cannot be trusted to be concerned with a safe outcome for their baby. This is bizarrely at odds with the State and HSE attitude to those who have given birth; they become at once the only possible caretaker for that child, not in need of any support or

care in so doing, left entirely alone to do so with no formalised system of support around them even when they look for the assistance of one.

Again, Ciara Hamilton and her family are an example of this; a family who need specialised supports for their son, damaged due to the poor management of his birth, they live in a state that will do its utmost to avoid shouldering the cost of it and avoid recognising Ciara Hamilton’s son as a valued member of our society who should be provided with all that he needs in order to allow him to participate in that society in a just and equal way. Now both they and he have been further punished for their attempt to right that balance and address the wrong done to him and his mother during their birth. For a family to be faced with the crippling financial burden that is the HSE’s extravagant legal costs of defending a birth claim will further deepen the gap between what their child needs and what they can afford to give him. Their situation is a haunting and horrific one that should never have been allowed to happen, and in many other jurisdictions never would have.



### There’s no consent like informed consent

Contrasting the judgement in the Hamilton vs HSE case with a recent UK Supreme Court judgement, Montgomery v Lanarkshire Health Board, is an exercise designed to induce both heartbreak for the Hamiltons and rage on behalf of all pregnant women in Ireland. In this ruling, the Supreme Court held there exists for those giving birth an explicit right to information about ‘any material risk’ in order for them to make fully informed decisions on the process; without this information being provided, informed consent cannot be said to have been given. In this instance, Nadine Montgomery was pregnant, diabetic, carrying a large foetus and was not informed by her doctor of her increased risk of shoulder dystocia, which is, in the words of an expert witness of the case, “a major obstetric emergency associated with a short and long term neonatal and maternal morbidity [and] an associated neonatal mortality”. She did indeed experience a shoulder dystocia during birth, which was a horrendously traumatic experience for her and caused severe long term brain damage to her son.

Despite the fact that Nadine Montgomery had repeatedly expressed concerns about giving birth vaginally, her doctor said that she as a matter of course chose not to explain the risk of shoulder dystocia to diabetic women because the risk of serious injury to the baby was very small and that if she did, “then everyone would ask for a caesarean section”. The doctor makes no mention of the risk to women’s health and wellbeing of shoulder dystocia in her decision making.

A key and obvious difference here between the Montgomery case and the Hamilton case already is that

the very concept of explaining risk of interventions, or of not performing interventions, to women is discussed at all in the Montgomery case. It does not appear at all in the Hamilton vs. HSE judgement. Given Mr Justice Ryan’s discussion of how Ciara Hamilton was treated it is probably safe to assume that informed consent is completely outside his frame of reference - again, a terrible but unsurprising indictment of the Irish maternity system as well as the Irish court system. The idea of informed consent literally does not make any showing here. Extensive discussion of the idea of informing women and how that should best be performed by healthcare providers takes place in the Montgomery case and yet the Hamilton judgement does not mention this concept even once.

In stark contrast, not only was the concept of informed consent discussed at length during the hearing of the Montgomery case itself, but it is also given a strong legal definition and set of requirements in the ruling itself.

“An adult person of sound mind is entitled to decide which, if any, of the available forms of treatment to undergo, and her consent must be obtained before treatment interfering with her bodily integrity is undertaken. The doctor is therefore under a duty to take reasonable care to ensure that the patient is aware of any material risks involved in any recommended treatment, and of any reasonable alternative or variant treatments. The test of materiality is whether, in the circumstances of the particular case, a reasonable person in the patient’s position would be likely to attach significance to the risk, or the doctor is or should reasonably be aware that the particular patient would be likely to attach significance to it.”

### An appalling gap in the treatment of women

The final and deepest cut of bitter envy from the Montgomery judgement to those of us in Ireland forced into the maternity system here, comes from Lady Hale’s part of the judgement, thus making it case law in the UK from the highest court in the land. It is as follows:

“In this day and age, we are not only concerned about risks to the baby. We are equally, if not more, concerned about risks to the mother. And those include the risks associated with giving birth, as well as any aftereffects. One of the problems in this case was that for too long the focus was on the risks to the baby, without also taking into account what the mother might face in the process of giving birth.”

Could any paragraph and context more succinctly highlight the appalling gap between the treatment of pregnant women in Ireland and the expected sheer basics of human rights of pregnant women elsewhere in the world?

**Sinead Redmond is a Maternity Rights activist and secretary of AIMS Ireland**















# The twisted road to Partnership: Can the trade union movement be saved from the bureaucracy?

Can the trade union movement be saved from the bureaucracy?

As the trade union leadership does its best to drag us back into a new round of social partnership, Gregor Kerr – an activist in the Irish National Teachers Organisation – compares the best and worst of recent developments in the trade unions and poses a challenge: can we save the movement by ridding it of the stultifying bureaucracy that seems set to strangle the life out of it?

For over 22 years – from 1987 until it was ended by the economic crisis in 2009 – the Irish trade union movement was tied into a succession of corporatist agreements with government and employers. Known as ‘social partnership’, these agreements saw the unions accepting pay restraint in return for ‘promises’ in relation to social improvements that were rarely delivered on. They turned the trade union movement as a whole into a toothless tiger, tied into the general thrust of successive governments’ neo-liberal economic policies, and blunted its potential as a fighting force. With a supposed economic upturn being talked up by government and economic commentators, the trade union leadership who tied their fortunes to the concept of social partnership seem to believe that things can just take up where they left off. But things just aren’t that simple...

**“If we can find the secret to making politicians do what they say they will, we’ll share it”**

The past number of months has witnessed the best and the worst of the trade union movement and its leadership. On the one hand, the presence of 5 trade unions – Unite, Mandate, CPSU, CWU and OPATSI – in the leadership of the Right2Water Campaign has certainly contributed to its being able to mobilise some of the biggest street mobilisations in the history of the state. But on the other hand, the paucity of ambition – and their perspective on how change in society is brought about – sees those unions and their leaderships doing their best to drag what has been largely a community-led campaign down the well-trodden electoral path.

Instead of recognising that the only way in which the successful abolition of water charges can be guaranteed is through a mass refusal to pay, the R2W leadership is pinning its ambitions on putting together a

“coalition of candidates” who will be asked to sign up to a list of “alternative” national policies. This document or manifesto will be agreed at a closed meeting in early May and “a public statement will be made asking any candidate or sitting TD from any party who opposes water charges to agree to fight for the policies if they win a Dáil seat”.

Even in the bid to pin the campaign’s hopes on electoral gain, however, the naivety of depending on electoral gains to bring about change is acknowledged by its own camp, with Brendan Ogle, Unite official and R2W spokesperson, agreeing that the campaign will have no way of ensuring politicians will implement the policies after an election. “If we can find the secret to making politicians do what they say they will, we’ll share it”, he is quoted as saying.

### **Collective muscle**

But of course there is really nothing secret or mysterious about making politicians do what they say they will. It’s called using our collective muscle. It’s called standing together and imposing our will on those who would govern us. It’s about using the very basis on which the trade union movement was founded – strength in unity and mutual solidarity.

It’s not that surprising that the union officials at the helm of R2W don’t appear to realise where our strength lies. For an decades, these basic principles



“Many organisers are doing sterling work, and see a return to grassroots organising as being the key to re-vitalising our movement”

of trade unionism have been forgotten or have fallen into disrepair. Instead of a movement based on the strength of the picketline, the trade union movement in Ireland has effectively become a policeman for the state. Decades of so-called ‘partnership’ have left us with a layer of trade union leaders many of whom see their role as being to compromise, to find common ground, to negotiate between workers and their bosses. The idea that they as leaders of a movement are actually supposed to represent their members and are supposed to use the full might of our movement and our muscle to impose the will of our members on government or on employers has been lost.

In the Greyhound dispute last summer, for example, the workers were effectively abandoned on the picketline by their trade union leadership (notwithstanding some sterling work by the union organisers most directly involved). In the face of High Court injunctions and the threats inherent in the 1990 Industrial Relations Act, the senior SIPTU leadership proved itself to be craven and spineless. Locked out workers were told that they had no option but to mount ‘legal’ pickets which effectively left them helplessly standing by the gates waving their placards at scab-operated trucks as they drove past them for 10 weeks. It was only when the workers themselves and their supporters basically bypassed the official union position and mounted effective blockades of the plant that some movement was achieved.

Ironically, on some of those unofficial blockades workers were joined by senior officials of other unions, including on a couple of occasions the current president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, John Douglas. Yet the only way in which the senior leadership of the workers’ own union, SIPTU, saw the dispute being resolved was if the government could be persuaded to introduce a Registered Employment Agreement which would “guarantee” wage rates in the waste industry. The contrasts between two visions of how trade unions should operate were probably never so stark – Workers on the picket line, taking collective direct action to defend their jobs and realising that the only way to win was to mount effective pickets which actually shut the operation down, versus trade union officials in suits believing that all that was necessary to win was the right word in the right ear, and that clever negotiation skills are more important than industrial power.

#### Weakest Ebb

That belief in clever negotiators and an almost disdain for ‘old school’ union tactics of pickets and flexing of industrial muscle was responsible for the trade union movement being at its lowest and weakest ebb when the economic crash happened, and completely unable to respond with an alternative vision to the government’s policies of wage cuts, cuts to public services and austerity. Worse than not painting an alternative, the union leadership fulfilled a very useful role (from the government’s perspective) in aid-

ing and abetting government policies. The two major demonstrations organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions under the banner of ‘There is a Better Way’ were more about opening the safety valve and allowing us all to let off some steam than actually organising workers behind an alternative platform or programme.

For workers in both the public and private sectors, union leaders became very much the facilitators of the imposition of austerity. In the public sector they busily and almost enthusiastically sold first the Croke Park Agreement and subsequently the Haddington Road Agreement – both of which slashed wages and gave away terms and conditions that had been hard fought for over the last number of decades. Social partnership had supposedly collapsed but the mindset that had underpinned it still lived on.

#### Density

In the 28 years since the first social partnership agreement, the Programme For National Recovery, was signed in 1987, trade union density - especially in the private sector - has plummeted. Official OECD figures show that the percentage of the workforce who are members of trade unions has fallen from 46% in 1994 down to less than 30% in 2013 . There are, of course, many factors at play in terms of why the trade union movement has haemorrhaged members not just in Ireland but internationally. But it would be foolish to deny that the fact that Irish trade unions, through their involvement in social partnership, effectively hitched their fortunes to that of the government was a crucial factor.

Ironically while many unions remained affiliated to the Labour Party it was Fianna Fáil-led governments

“The wider trade union movement should have called for a complete boycott of all Dunnes Stores until the punishment of workers was reversed”

for the most part with which unions entered social partnership agreements. Successive governments managed to do through ‘talk talk’ what Thatcher’s government in Britain had done through ‘war war’ – effectively defeat the trade union movement as a force for positive social change.

#### Nightmare on Eden Quay

Throughout the years of social partnership, the bigger unions such as SIPTU in particular have become a bureaucratic nightmare. ‘New’ structures mean that it is almost impossible for ordinary members to raise issues or to find a way to have democratic input into the formulation of union policy. These same structures mean that groups of workers in struggle (such as the Greyhound workers last year) often find that the resources of the union are used in the first instance to attempt to dissuade them from taking





“The period leading up to and following the next general election will see the battle for the soul of the trade union movement intensify.”

action. The union bureaucracy is positioned as an impediment to furthering struggle, and union structures are no longer used as a means by which workers in struggle can mobilise the support of fellow workers.

At the same time, within SIPTU as in other unions, a layer of union organisers beaver away at doing what union organisers should do – talking to workers, discussing their grievances, encouraging them to combine with their fellow workers to take on those grievances. While at the same time they have to manoeuvre their way around the bureaucratic minefield that the upper echelons of the union have become.

Many of these organisers are doing sterling work, and see a return to grassroots organising as being the key to revitalising our movement. It is from this same perspective and focus of organising workers and encouraging them to tackle their grievances that some of the more hopeful signs of union life have come in recent times. In early April, staff at one of the most anti-union employers in the state, Dunnes Stores, took strike action for a day in a dispute over union recognition and zero-hour contracts. The strike action came as part of a long and innovative (and ongoing) campaign using social media and other campaigning methods “Decency For Dunnes Workers”.

#### Reaction

As this article is written a week after the one-day strike by Dunnes’ workers, reports are emerging that some of those who participated in the strike have been summarily dismissed, others have had their shifts changed and/or their shift patterns altered. As a strongly anti-union company this reaction from the Dunnes’ management should have been anticipated. Yet the initial reaction from the workers’ union, Mandate, as enunciated by Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light, was “The only resolution I can see to this, other than further escalation of our industrial action, is when the government’s collective bargaining legislation goes live in July... That will give the workers more teeth and may make Dunnes sit up and take notice.” Echoes here of the stance taken by SIPTU’s leadership last year in the Greyhound dispute – a hope that government will come to our aid through legislation.

But a trade union movement that was truly built on grassroots organising and on the concept of an injury to one being the concern of all would have had only one response to this bullying by the Dunnes’ management - The stores where this disciplinary action took place should have been shut down by mass pickets straight away. The wider trade union movement should have called for a complete boycott of all Dunnes Stores until the punishment of workers was reversed. The union movement should have established a solidarity fund to which all union members could contribute a few euro a week to support those dismissed or taking action.

Responding in this fashion would have shown that we know that together we are far stronger than the company. But we are only stronger if we choose to use our muscle. Instead we find the union leadership relying on the possibility of government legislation to put manners on Dunnes management. Yet another stark example of the fact that the hard work of organising being done by many on the ground meets its first obstacle in the failure of the movement as

a whole to see itself as a campaigning movement – one which can mobilise large numbers in defence of vulnerable groups, when it needs to.

Outside of the official union movement, the last couple of years have also seen much innovative work by groups such as Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) in terms of organising groups of workers that are in some of the most precarious employment. The Domestic Workers Action Group has been inventive and original in terms of its strategies and tactics, and has been hugely successful in terms of bringing people together and winning victories through collective actions.

#### Two souls

The on-the-ground organising within the official union movement and the work of groups like MRCI are two examples of one soul of the union movement - the one that gives hope for the future. But unfortunately, as referred to earlier, much of the movement is being smothered and stultified by a bureaucracy that is the polar opposite of the organiser model of trade unionism. And that bureaucracy appears to want to drag the movement away from organising and back into a new round of social partnership and deals with government.

Following the general election of 2011, with the Labour Party in government and many unions still affiliated to that party, the unwillingness of large sections of the trade union leadership to oppose government policy in any real way became even more pronounced. Indeed sections of the union leadership, most notably SIPTU’s general president Jack O’Connor chose on a number of occasions to use public speeches to attack not the government that was imposing austerity policies on his members but ‘the left’ which was attempting to organise people to oppose those austerity policies. Speaking at a commemoration for Alicia Brady, who was killed during the 1913 Lockout, in January 2014 O’Connor described ‘the left’ as having “a poverty of ambition” going on to say that “we have an obligation to offer more than protest and caustic commentary...” He criticised the left for “indulging in relentless political cannibalism on remote points of dogma”, saying that “We must be sufficiently pragmatic to avoid condemning those with whom we disagree on questions of strategy and tactics... [and] be sufficiently flexible to recognise that until we command a majority it is entirely legitimate, indeed essential, for parties and individuals to participate in government with those on the centre right either in Dublin or in Belfast .”

As defences of Labour’s role in government go, this speech by O’Connor was perhaps more upfront than most. It was certainly one that outlined in stark terms the other soul of trade unionism – the one that would keep us wedded to the ‘jaw jaw’ version of trade unionism, and undermine and blunt the grassroots organising taking place on the ground.

#### Social Partnership renewed?

That is clearly the ambition of the trade union bureaucracy – to get us back into some form of ‘partnership’. In recent months, we have seen O’Connor cosy up to Sinn Fein. At a fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference in February, he advocated a ‘left-led’ government and effectively tied the fortunes of the trade union movement to a new social partnership type deal with whatever government is elected after the next election.

The period leading up to and following the next general election will see the battle for the soul of the trade union movement intensify. We will be faced with a stark choice – are we going to continue to build the ‘organiser’ model of trade unionism which has been so successful in recent years? And in order to do so, are we going to rid ourselves of the stultifying bureaucracy that is preventing this move from organising to fighting? Or are we going to allow ourselves to be brought back into a new round of social partnership? If we allow the latter to happen, it is likely to sign the death knell of the movement that has been so painstakingly built over the past 100 years. If we want the former – which I imagine most of the readers of this paper and article do – the question is how do we do it.

That’s an urgent discussion; time for it to begin.







# All the Evil in the World – Pandora, the One Percent and the New European Reaction.

A spectre is haunting the people of Europe, but this time it's not one to be welcomed. All the powers of new Europe have entered into an unholy alliance to raise this spectre: Merkel and Rajoy, Hollande and Cameron, Irish Blueshirts and Greek state police. Where is the movement in opposition that has not been decried as terroristic by it's opponents in power? Where is the opposition that has not cried out for law and order in the face of the more progressive parties? Two questions result from these facts:

What class, classes or section of the population is conjuring up this phantasm? IE, what classes benefit from authoritarian extremism?

What is to be done? IE, What course of action should the people of Europe take to counter this threat? And what role do the libertarian left have to play in bringing that course of action to fruition?

To answer these questions, it is essential to examine the current wave of reaction across the European continent and asses it's purpose and it's source.

## What's in the box?

On December 16th of last year, in what was dubbed Operation Pandora, eleven anarchists were arrested as a result of police raids in Barcelona and Madrid. The raids, ordered by judge Javier Gómez Bermúdez, targeted several anarchist social centres, along with some private homes. They were carried out under the cloak of counter-terrorism, with several online

**"It is hardly a coincidence that the arrests of anarchists and Basque activists came hot on the heels of the passing of the Civil Protection Act"**

media sources uncritically regurgitating the state's categorisation of those arrested as being members of "anarchist terror groups". Among the accusations at the time were "promotion, management of and membership in a terrorist organisation, possession and storage of devices or explosives and flammables, incendiary or asphyxiating, as well as the damage and destruction with terrorist purpose", possession of a "suspicious" book called Against Democracy and the using the security conscious email provider RISEUP. The explosive devices in question were gas canisters used for camping.

Two others were later charged, eight of the thirteen were women. The supposed "terror group" they were accused of membership of, the GAC (co-ordinated anarchist groups) was accused of posting bombs and attacking banks. The "bank attacks" were all acts of vandalism at ATMs. On January 30th, seven of the remaining nine incarcerated anarchists were released on bail. Conditions included confiscation of passports and having to sign on three times a week.

An accompanying police statement, revealed the real purpose of the raids: "according to the investigators, the structure of the GAC/FAI-FRI is disrupted in Catalonia, the stronghold of this criminal organisation with terrorist purposes against the Spanish State"

A month after the initial arrests, the Spanish state moved against it's other traditional enemy, the Basque separatist movement. On the morning of January 12th, seventeen Basque activists, most of them lawyers, were arrested by the Guardia Civil. Three of them were on their way to court in Madrid to act as defense for thirty five of their comrades in a mass trial. Only days before, 80,000 had attended a demonstration in Bilbao demanding the release of political prisoners. Like the case of Operation Pandora, the state action was clearly designed to intimidate a movement, rather than prosecute for specific crimes, and one of the charges was membership of a terrorist organisation.

It is hardly a coincidence that the arrests of anar-





chists and Basque activists came hot on the heels of the passing of the Civil Protection Act, or gag law (ley mordaza) as it quickly became known. This new legislation, which comes into force in July and was passed with only the votes of the ruling Partido Popular (PP), is a range of repressive measures to make life difficult of opposition movements. The laws ban protesting outside parliament buildings and occupying banks, removing barriers erected by police, preventing an eviction, photographing or insulting police officers, and has given the state the power to impose heavy fines without recourse to trial. Protesting outside parliament will carry a fine of €600,000, while burning the national flag could cost you €30,000.

#### Epimethius bound

While the exercise of authoritarian fervour under the Spanish PP may not come as a surprise, another source of repression at the moment, comes from a quarter that was less than expected. With the leftist SYRIZA government installed in Greece, it was expected that state repression against anti-capitalists would recede. SYRIZA had promised to close category C prisons, but that has yet to happen. On March 2nd, political prisoners began a hunger strike calling for the abolition of the 2001 and 2004 anti-terrorism laws, articles 187 and 187A of the penal code, the 'hoodie law', the legal framework for type C prisons, the prosecutorial provision of forcible taking of DNA samples, and demanding that the convicted 17N member Savvas Xiros be released from prison on health grounds.

From the get go, support actions on the outside were organised in solidarity with the hunger strikers. Anarchists occupied a Athens University on March 30th. On April 1st, a protest was held in the courtyard of the Parliament building. On April 8th a march from the anarchist district of Exarchia ended in clashes with riot police. On April 18th, the SYRIZA government sent police into the occupied university to clear out protesters and fourteen anarchists are now awaiting charges.

To call SYRIZA reactionaries however, would be extremely misguided, so something else must be happening here. The problem is that SYRIZA, for all their progressive rhetoric and good intentions, are prisoners of a rigged system. The ongoing repression of anarchists, the humiliating treatment of political prisoners, and the continuing existence of refugee detention centres is inevitable, as the machinery of the state does not grind to a halt because of a change in government.

It is clear that SYRIZA would like to be able to close

**"The problem is that SYRIZA, for all their progressive rhetoric and good intentions, are prisoners of a rigged system"**

the detention centres. Indeed, they have released a number of detainees, though they were mainly minors, sick and elderly. After a visit to one of the centres, minister of citizen protection, Giannis Panousis said, "I am ashamed, we are finished with refugee centres. We just need a few days. We will do what we said before the election and what we have said in parliament." That was in February, but the detention centres that were erected by the Samaras government remain intact, as does the barbed wire fence along the border with Turkey, and Panousis has affirmed the government's commitment to keeping Greece's borders closed. On April 4th, migrants at the Paranesti camp went on hunger strike calling for its closure.

**"Such a massive transfer of wealth from the majority of the population to the rich and super rich, requires the use of force."**

As with SYRIZA's retreat on its economic programme, its difficulty in overcoming the authoritarian nature of the state lies not in the party's programme, or in some comic book villain style conspiracy. To frame the argument in that way would be to suggest that someone else could have come to power and carried out what they had promised. No, there is no mask slipping, revealing the true authoritarian face of SYRIZA, rather, there are cuffs restraining their hands behind their backs. The legal framework they work within, cannot easily be dismantled and in their struggle to retain power to carry out even modest amounts of their programme they will have to use repressive measures to give the appearance of strong government. To do otherwise would to run the

risk of the state taking measures to remove them by military coup or to open the door to the far right. The cry of law and order must be heeded if a party is to retain its right to rule.

#### Who pays the piper?

A few years ago, in Ireland, claims that governments in the European Union were using repressive measures against their people, that powerful individuals and organisations were exerting pressure on democratically elected governments to protect their financial interests, would have only been believed by the few who had experienced repression first hand, along with left activists. To many, these claims would have fallen into the category of conspiracy theory. Yet over the last year, thousands of anti-water charges protesters have come face to face with the real purpose of the state.

There have been dawn raids on protesters homes, water meter resisters imprisoned and the full force of government public relations, the state broadcaster and the capitalist owned media brought to bear against the movement. The connection between Independent newspapers, its owner Denis O'Brien and his company, GMC/Sierra who installs water meters and the charges has not gone unnoticed. Some will also remember the use of the Gardaí at Rossport to protect the construction of a pipeline for the oil giant Shell, which resulted in prison sentences and physical attacks on protesters.

Like in Ireland, repressive measures against protest movements and increasing state authoritarianism have been driven by big business and their desire for austerity measures to pay for the financial crisis. In a time when the majority of the population face a struggle to get by, the one percent richest have increased their wealth. According to a report by Oxfam earlier this year, they now own 48% of the world's wealth, compared to 34% five years ago, and they will control more than half by next year. Not only that, but of the remaining wealth, 54% is owned by one fifth of the 99%.

Such a massive transfer of wealth from the majority of the population to the rich and super rich, requires



the use of force. Certainly, they will use every means at their disposal, such as the media, the political apparatus and legal framework. But when these means begin to fail, the police and the military are brought in to defend state power and thus defend the power and wealth of the billionaires. While austerity policies have been carried out across Europe, Ireland, Greece and Spain were amongst the hardest hit, so it is no surprise that they have been on the front lines of resistance and the front lines of reaction. Make no mistake though, this process of heightening authoritarianism is Europe wide.

#### Sleepwalking to serfdom

The term "passive revolution" was coined by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci to describe significant change in political, economic, and institutional structures, without ruptural events like revolutionary strikes or insurrection. The term in the Gramscian sense is neutral and can apply to right or leftward change. Passive revolution can take generations to carry out and can occur via a series of seemingly unconnected events, that in and of themselves are presented as pragmatic or common sense. The key to carrying out this change, Gramsci contended, was through the control of education systems and thus the minds of children, control of the media and other cultural outlets and the control of language.

**"capitalist democracy has managed to carry out quite a lot of what the fascists of yesteryear sought to achieve without all the fuss of torchlit processions and labour camps."**

Since the end of the second world war, the European project has been a project of cultural and economic hegemony. In a sense, it's logic has been the creation of a new authoritarianism to protect us against the old authoritarianism. Since 1948, there have been twelve European treaties, each one presented as common sense, each one making small changes that when taken together, resulted in greater centralised economic control and security cooperation between states. Since the beginning of the "war on terror", reactive pieces of anti-terror legislation across the continent have gradually reduced personal freedom and have placed limits on our right to free association and our right to protest. Since the victory of Thatcherism in the UK, the ideology of TINA (there is no alternative), has spread across Europe, with anti-union legislation and bureaucratic negotiation processes rendering workers' organisations ineffective. In other words, capitalist democracy has managed to carry out quite a lot of what the fascists of yesteryear sought to achieve without all the fuss of torchlit processions and labour camps.

Why recruit the services of a psychopathic ideologue with a jackbooted political movement under his command, when you could just gradually change the law until any democratically elected government would have to stick to the programme? Both methods are similar in that they use an external threat to justify authoritarianism; The terrorist attacks on London in 2005 made it easy to put heavily armed personnel

on the streets, it allowed the then Labour government to say, "these counter-terrorism laws are here for your protection". The 2004 bombing at Atocha train station in Madrid and the Charlie Hebdo attacks this year in Paris played a similar role. When these laws are firmly in place, all you have to do is gradually expand the definition of terrorist to something so vague that you can lock up practically anyone who tries to resist austerity and state repression.

There's a famous line in George Orwell's nineteen eighty-four, "If you want a vision of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever." That is certainly the dream for the rich and powerful, but while authoritarianism is intensifying, so too is resistance. The spirit of revolt is a difficult thing to extinguish, even with all the power of the state by your side. If nineteen-eighty four had a message, it was that even in a time of universal deceit and total hegemony of one ideology, an ending where the desire for freedom is completely extinguished is simply the unattainable fantasy of the ruling elite. Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, with all their power couldn't stamp out the flame of humanity. Winston Smith's tears are really laughter and ridicule.

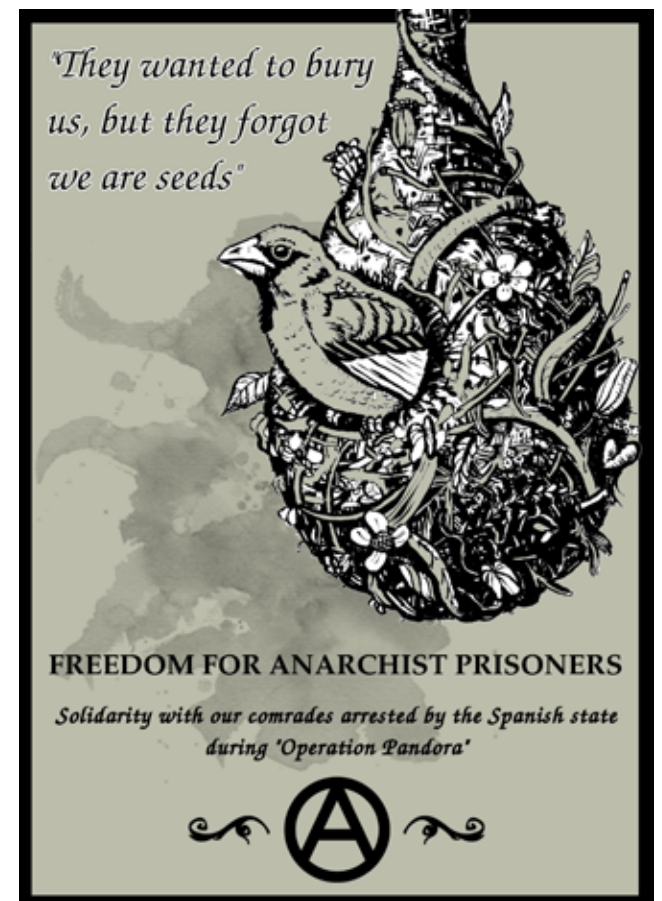
#### The point is to end it

The increasing repression of the Spanish state has not stamped out protest. If anything, the defiance and resolve of the government's opponents has increased. Thousands have protested against the gag law and Operation Pandora. Contrary to state claims that they had seriously disrupted the activities of anarchists, on March 30th, they found it necessary to carry out a fresh series of arrests, this time under the name Operation Piñata. Thirty nine arrests in total were made, twenty four were released without charge, ten were released on bail with similar conditions to those arrested in the first wave, while five were detained. There have been demonstrations in cities across the Spanish state in protest.

As protests across Europe against austerity and state repression continue, the question we must ask is, how can we move beyond reactive protest to a point where we can envisage bringing this dark era of reaction to a close? Yes, we are constantly reminded that there can be no blueprint for a libertarian communist society, but how can we convince people that our solution is best if we don't at least sketch out what the society we envisage might be like and how we might achieve that?

The solution that has been in vogue over the last few years, the left version of Gramsci's passive revolution, should at this point be called into question. This is the path that SYRIZA are attempting to take, it is being shown to be a more difficult one to walk for the left than the right, as the Greek government's plans are being foiled, not by guns and tanks, but by the dull thud of bureaucracy. The system is and always has been rigged in favour of the right. The right only need political change to carry out passive revolution, the left needs political change a complete change in social relations. Any concessions won by the working class in the past required the mass struggle of mighty union organisations, and without the toppling of the capitalist system, those concessions proved to be temporary.

Furthermore, it is worth noting, that this path was taken under far more favourable circumstances by social democratic and reformist left parties in the past. The post war settlement, the spirit of '45 where major improvements were made in the conditions of the working class have all evaporated. To remain in power the British Labour government, at several junctures used troops to break strikes, in fact they did this on more occasions than the Conservatives. Left governments in France were accused of betrayal. The "comrade ministers" of the Communist Party



there in the eighties instructed the unions to restrain workers' action to let them get on with their job. In Bolivia today, the Morales government does deals with mining corporations at the expense of the indigenous population.

In both Greece and Spain, dictatorships were toppled in the 1970's, but the wealthy individuals and corporations who backed up those regimes retained, or at least regained their influence over the state. The Partido Popular can trace its lineage back to the Franco dictatorship and the head of the Spanish state and commander in chief of the armed forces, is the son of General Franco's successor, King Juan Carlos, who oversaw the transition to democracy. Removing the dictatorships without dissolving the power and wealth behind them, left the door open for them to turn back the clock on democratic freedoms.

From that it follows that we should not be shy about agitating for the complete overthrow of the capitalist system and for the dismantling of state authority. But it would be a mistake to stop there. It is often posited that to overthrow capitalism, the wealth of the capitalist class must be expropriated and put to work for socialist society. On the contrary, wealth should not be controlled, like the state, it should be dissolved. Financial wealth's very existence is what gives the one percent their power. It is a method of control, a way to ensure that division of the world's resources is carried out in a manner that requires bureaucracy and the division of labour. Rather than talk about wealth in monetary terms, we can start our sketch of the alternative by describing how we can produce and distribute the things we need, we can keep those parts of the productive machinery that fit our purpose and discard the rest, all the while creating new means of production that suits the needs of a new society. We can look to Rojava and Chiapas for some inspiration, where the weapon with which authoritarianism has been held back, is libertarian in nature. When we can elaborate a viable alternative, on a pan-European basis to begin with, we can shine a torch out of the darkness and light up the possibility of ending authoritarianism and inequality once and for all.





WORDS: FERDIA O' BRIEN  
AND CORMAC CAULFIELD

# THINKING ABOUT ANARCHISM - ANARCHISM AND THE STATE

Ever wonder why the Gardaí show up in large numbers when you're trying to stop water meters in your estate, but haven't got the resources to come straight out when you think your neighbour's house is being burgled? If so, you're thinking about the state.

## Misconceptions & Reality

The most common misconception about anarchism is that it is in favour of 'chaos' or some sort of world generally devoid of order and democratic institutions which would leave us at the mercy of predators within our society. Therefore it aims for the destruction of civilisation and democracy itself, which in this view are represented by the state – the guarantor of peace, freedom, and of course, roads.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Not only is the aim of anarchism to live in peace, but anarchists are in favour of a highly organised society, one based

on mutual agreement and co-operation rather than compulsion and competition. This requires replacing the state, an inherently violent institution founded upon arbitrary authority, with grassroots democratic institutions of a much more voluntary character.

## What is the State?

But what is the state? We know the state by its courts, police, military, government, and general bureaucracy. It claims a monopoly on legitimate force, a 'right' to fine you, tax you, lock you up, or even shoot and torture you. The state is a mechanism by which a minority can wield hugely disproportionate control over a majority. A relatively tiny number of people can launch a war involving millions of people, decide what gender you are allowed to kiss, govern what you are permitted to write in an article, and greatly subsidise ecologically destructive activity. Fundamentally this involves one group of strangers

bossing around or attacking another group of strangers.

## My Property's Keeper

Contrary to popular belief, the state does not exist to protect everyone from harm or provide necessary services which could not otherwise be provided. Instead it exists to preserve and improve the position of the dominant groups in society. The capitalist nation state is primarily a tool to perpetuate the existing private property system – where a person can own offices, apartments, factories, and land, that they don't even use - and hence the grossly unequal distribution of wealth within our society. In a world of huge want, force is required to stop the needy from taking what they lack, to stop the homeless from taking homes, to stop the hungry from taking food. Crucially the state enforces a situation where the vast majority are excluded from control of society's productive capacity. This al-



lows a very small capitalist class to rent out the rest of the population for wages (wage labour) and in doing so achieve great wealth and hence power.

Capitalism and the state have a symbiotic relationship, and they grew up together over hundreds of years. When capitalism is in trouble (or even when it isn't) the state comes to the rescue through bailouts, tax breaks, subsidies, even taking direct control over large sections of industry. In times when the system is under threat from popular pressure, the state's armed forces can restore order as a last resort.

### Rosspport, Water Charges, the Song Remains the Same

That the state serves elite interests is evident to anyone involved in the recent anti-water charge campaign. When people have come together to stop water meters being installed, bizarrely large amounts of Gardaí are consistently deployed to disrupt protesters, often by kidnapping (more commonly known as arrest). Gardaí arrested 23 people at the crack of dawn for participating in a 2-3 hour sit-in protest in Jobstown, yet Margaret Heffernan is free as a bird after Dunnes Stores workers have been fired and otherwise punished for going on strike. The state has attempted to smear the water protesters through the state broadcaster RTE, government politicians, and senior Garda figures. People have even been pepper sprayed for, ironically, protesting Garda aggression.

**“The capitalist nation state is primarily a tool to perpetuate the existing private property system”**

This pattern is a repeat of the state repression at Rosspport, where protesters were routinely arrested (to be released without charge), assaulted, and smeared, for daring to oppose a dangerous experimental pipeline and the gift of our natural gas to Shell. Indeed

in these cases the difference between Gardaí and private security for Shell or Irish Water is academic, and this gets to the root of the purpose of the police. Despite its secondary role to combat anti-social crime (murder, etc), it is hard to entertain the idea that the police exist for the safety of people at large considering the Gardaí were instrumental in stopping the sabotage of US warplanes refuelling at Shannon airport. Rather than seeing the police as the thin blue line between civilisation and barbarity, anarchists see it as the thin blue line between the violence and deprivation of the present and the peace and satisfaction we could achieve in the future.

### Law and Crime

Of course, the police are 'just following orders' and those orders mostly (but not always) derive from what is known as the law. Rather than have an intrinsic respect for the law, anarchists analyse and act in the world according to what is ethically right or wrong. Who would say that it was wrong to illicitly use a condom when they were banned in Ireland? If a law is unethical it should be disobeyed, and if it is in harmony with what is right then it is the right which should be respected and not the law. After all, laws are arbitrary decrees crafted by an elite - the vast majority have, as usual, little to no say over the

matter.

We are told that we need such laws to prevent anti-social and dangerous behavior. But really, laws - when they are not doling out oppression - merely address the symptoms of our sick society rather than the root cause. Drug prohibition is an excellent example of this. Most crime is in fact a byproduct of the system we live under. Broadly speaking, people who have access to what they need do not steal. Broadly speaking, people who are nurtured as children, who are part of a community and live full lives, are not violent. And so forth. Throwing people into prison is not an intelligent solution.

### Divided We Fall

But at least the state brings people together under one big tent, right? Unfortunately not. The state is a deeply divisive institution. It pits citizens against non-citizens, settled against Traveller, white against black, cis heterosexual against queer, man against woman, Protestant against Catholic, Christian against atheist, and so on, in different forms across the planet. Not only that but in the guise of nationalism the state pits the inhabitants of one nation against those of another. The state, in order to maintain the integrity of such an internally antagonistic society, and because it is mostly operated by people





“The state has attempted to smear the water protesters through the state broadcaster RTE, government politicians, and senior Garda figures

from society's dominant groups, has fostered cultural phenomena such as racism, sexism and nationalism which have divided the world's working class.

### Welfare State

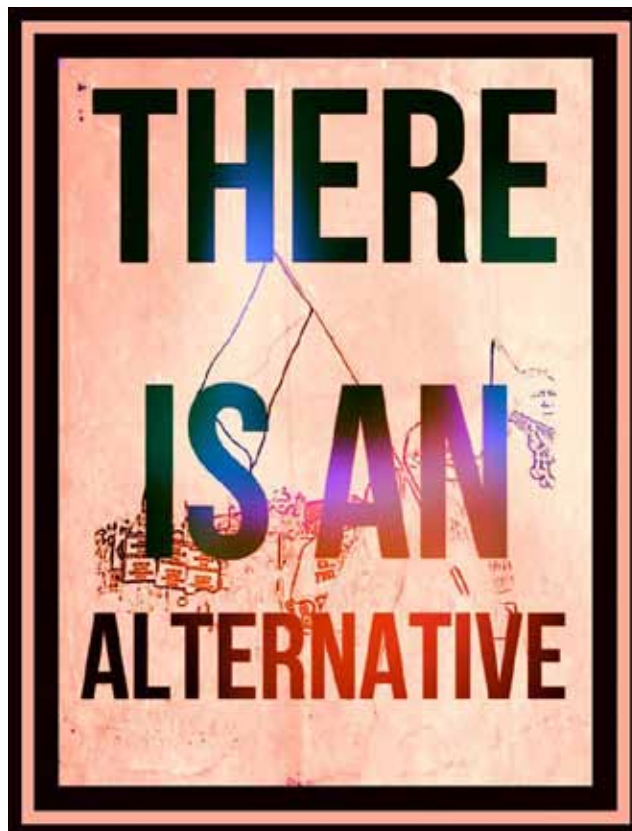
While recognising that the state has many beneficial subsidiary functions such the maintenance of public services, the reasons the state took on many of these roles should also be considered. It did so primarily to mitigate the threat of revolution after the second world war and began to divert part of every worker's wage to form a new social wage which would be used for the education of workers and limited social security. This is what we call the welfare state. It has functioned as a massive bribe which heads off social struggle. In Ireland we see how the state has operated as a supposedly neutral mediator to maintain 'industrial relations' through social partnership, defusing the transformative power of trades unions.

### A Workers' State?

However, the anarchist critique of the state isn't limited to the capitalist state. The problem is not simply who wields it. Unlike Leninists, we do not want to seize state power and try to put it to good use. The state as an organ has evolved over a long time in particular conditions to perform a certain function - it cannot be reined in to perform a totally different purpose of a sudden, just as a heart cannot suddenly act like a kidney. The famous experiments in, for example, the USSR and China have shown that. Therefore, rather than grabbing existing power structures, anarchists want to supplant the state's functions with new popular organs formed upon different principles.

This also calls for a different way of doing politics in the shorter term. Anarchists don't seek to enter government. We see real political change as happening outside of the established political channels. That's why you'll never see the Workers Solidarity Movement run-

ning candidates in elections. Not only that, but entertaining the electoral game lends the system credibility and reinforces the cultural expectation that 'someone else' will solve our problems. Instead, anarchists participate in community groups, like those created to fight the water charges, agitate in unions, take direct action (e.g. stopping water meter installations, striking, squatting), and otherwise work towards building a de-centralised grassroots counter-power to the institutions of the ruling class.



### A New Initiative

The state has the tendency to expand into more and more areas of life, until we look around and wonder what pie the state doesn't have its finger in. Importantly, the state saps people of their initiative. It claims a certain social space by asserting itself as an authority. Part of what defines authority is the waiving of responsibility by those who cede to it. We complain about potholes rather than filling them ourselves because it's the council's job, but if we did fill them we would probably be fined. Communities don't police themselves

because the Gardaí are supposed to do that, even when they do a woeful job. And when Dublin city centre residents tried to do just that in the 1980's to combat the heroin epidemic ravaging their social fabric, the state was more keen on shutting them down than solving the real problem. Remember, the state is the only show in town.

Many people upon hearing about anarchism for the first time ask 'but who would build the roads?' This raises a crucial point: the state doesn't actually do anything, it's an abstraction. People do things, and people will continue to build roads - specifically the relevant workers under direct community control and organised in whatever fashion they feel most adequate.

Remember that fire brigades and ambulances were volunteer initiatives before being co-opted by the state apparatus, so don't believe the creation myth of the state ('before the State, there was nothing ...'). It is perfectly possible to work together freely to create the world we want to live in. All public services and subsidiary roles taken on by the state would come under the administration of the workers and community assemblies and institutions created by them. We don't require a monolithic outgrowth from feudal times, not least one with a history too brutal to contemplate.





# The Water Charges Revolt.



WORDS: FERDIA O'BRIEN

The campaign against the water charges is the most widespread and powerful grassroots movement in recent Irish history. With hundreds of local campaign groups, daily direct actions, and 4 national demonstrations on the order of 50,000-100,000, the cynical refrain that 'the Irish don't protest' has rapidly been replaced by a sense of ubiquitous rebellion. Irish Water is a deprived neoliberal world in effigy, embodying many of the worst problems of our society including the rule of international finance (and private greed in general) at the cost of the vast majority's well being, and the chronic disconnection of the populous from decision making.

As such the movement has become a platform for opposition to austerity, the bank bailout, privatisation, the government, party politics, the EU, and more. Thousands of people have experienced a political (re-)awakening. But while it is possible that we will win this battle, and abolish Irish Water, this struggle represents a precious opportunity to make a grassroots offensive after so many years of being beaten down.

## Movement Background

It certainly wasn't always obvious that the fight against the water charges would be so enormous. The sheer turnout of the 11th October Right2Water demonstration - not to mention that protesters came from all over the country - came as a surprise to most people, including much of the activist left. That day definitively established in people's minds that not only was a serious nationwide fightback possible, but that we could probably win. The mood was of defiance, confidence, and the joy of revolting together.

But people didn't throng Dublin's city centre out of nowhere. After the collapse of the CAHWT (Cam-

**"Irish Water is a deprived neoliberal world in effigy"**

paign Against Home and Water Taxes) around January 2014, crucially, a small number of people decided to stay active and stop the installation of water meters, for instance in Ballyphehane and Togher in Cork and then a few areas of north east Dublin.

On this, Gregor Kerr, who was the secretary of the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charge Campaigns (FDAWCC) in the 1990s, opined 'I don't think it's any exaggeration to say that the huge protest on 11th October wouldn't have been anything like the size it was without the slow burn for the previous months of blockades and protests against meter installations spreading from community to community.

And it was no coincidence either that many of the people involved in water meter blockades had also participated earlier in the summer in blockades of scab-operated bin trucks in their communities in support of the locked out Greyhound workers.' The initiative and hard work of these early campaigners was the germ of the huge movement which has burgeoned since.

This is a large part of the reason the fight against the water charges has been far more successful than the fight against the household and property tax was. As Mr. Kerr added 'the fact that [the latter] was so fresh in people's memories was undoubtedly important. But maybe for many people it was important from the point of view of people saying 'We're not going to

allow the same mistakes to be made again'. There is a huge contrast between the way the two campaigns developed. The CAHWT (the principal campaign against the property/household tax) was initiated by political organisations and was effectively strangled by some those same parties/organisations as they jockeyed for control and positioned themselves to be the anti-property tax candidate(s) in the local elections.

The campaign involved huge numbers of working class people but never developed a grassroots structure, and the steering committee meetings eventually became turgid affairs mired in wanna be leaders lecturing everybody else. In contrast the anti-water charges campaign has emerged from communities and the political parties and organisations have been running after it trying to 'lead' it.

Indeed there isn't an anti-water charge campaign, there are a plethora of groups organising in an ad hoc manner, some co-ordinated, some not. That's a huge strength. It does of course also present difficulties or challenges but they are outweighed by the fact that this campaign won't be as easily derailed because of the diversity and divergence of people and communities involved.'

## Irish Water's Mission to Conserve Profit

The attempt to impose domestic water charges in Ireland is not new. In 1977 domestic rates were scrapped (raising VAT and income tax), but in 1983 domestic 'service charges' were introduced in most counties, being fought off elsewhere (e.g. Dublin, Limerick, and Waterford). From 1994-1997 a grassroots campaign in Dublin (FDAWCC), somewhat similar to the present one, repelled the water charge (which was flat, no meters were used).



“In 2008, Goldman Sachs called water ‘the petroleum for the next century’”

This involved a strong boycott of the bills, mass demonstrations and court protests, a solidarity fund for legal costs, and reversing and preventing water cut-offs. The water charge was then scrapped for the 26 counties. The implementation of domestic water charges was in the previous Fianna Fáil – Green government’s Programme for Government in 2009. Then in 2010 it was a condition of the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund) bailout.

The purpose of Irish Water is certainly not ‘safeguarding your water for your future’. Only the most naive would believe that the same kind of career politicians who decided to critically under-fund our water infrastructure over decades – so that 40-50% of supply is leaked and whole areas are on boil notices – are suddenly driven to make long-term ‘tough decisions’ for the good of humanity.

Furthermore, these are the same politicians who are committed to ignoring the very present catastrophe of climate change, which not only threatens the volume and quality of usable water nationally, but globally. While Michael Noonan sermonises about leaving the tap on all night, he wouldn’t dare mention that animal agriculture – a large component of the Irish economy – is the single most ecologically destructive activity on Earth, particularly because of

its high methane gas emissions and intense water usage. That would not please the rancher farmers. Nor would Alan Kelly stridently denounce hydraulic fracturing, or Phil Hogan valiantly question the need to devour water in the production of pointless commodities for pointless economic growth.

Indeed, Irish Water has been established to transform our water into a commodity – an economic object bought and sold in a market according to the direct use of a consumer – that will be owned and controlled by private interests. Even former Fine Gael junior minister Fergus O’Dowd, not quite an anarcho-communist, spoke of being ‘deeply concerned at other agendas, they may be European’ and ‘[not knowing] where they are coming from’ when he was involved in the foundation of Irish Water.

#### Neoliberalism and the Global Water Rush

But this is not peculiar to Ireland. The global pattern is that ‘familiar mega-banks and investing powerhouses such as Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase, Citigroup, UBS, Deutsche Bank, Credit Suisse ... are consolidating their control over water.’ The UN has predicted that there will be a 40% shortfall in global water supply by 2030. In 2008, Goldman Sachs called water ‘the petroleum for the next century’.

Such corporations have been slurping up water utilities, reserves, and anything else related. For example, in 2012 Goldman Sachs bought Veolia Water which is the largest water services corporation on the planet and already has operations in Ireland. There are a handful of multinational corporations which dominate the global water market. If you can’t trust supposedly accountable politicians to manage water services for the common good, you definitely can’t trust an entirely unaccountable corporation to do so.

But further still, this issue is part of a political trajectory which is even older and goes far beyond the

“There is the sense that there is always some action going on somewhere, and that protest or dissent in general has become a sort of national pastime.”

shores of Ireland – that is, ‘neoliberalism’. Neoliberalism, in theory, is the idea that in order to maximise the liberty of the individual, the state should interfere with the personal affairs and economic transactions as little as possible, merely ensuring the conditions for private property to exist through ‘law and order’, and the conditions of trade by prosecuting fraud. Everything should be a commodity and have a price tag so that it is used in an ‘efficient’ manner, and all companies should be privately owned and operated for the same reason.

Hence neoliberal capitalist policies include privatisation, de-regulation, removing tariffs, and austerity. However, in practice, neoliberalism is far messier, and really involves removing state interference in ways that suit the elite the most, and applying state force in ways that suit the elite the most (see Augusto Pinochet’s neoliberal dictatorship in Chile 1973-1990).







“If anything, this movement is a testament to the ability of so-called ‘ordinary’ people to figure things out themselves and organise effectively.”

As such, neoliberalism is radically opposed to the commons - the idea that, for instance, water is a human right, not a commodity, and should be available to all according to need. Or that land, or indeed accommodation, vehicles, clothing, and food, are held in common. Pleas from professional compromisers in politics and media to ‘ensure’ that Irish Water remains in public ownership are a diversion from the fact that Irish Water exists to be privatised. A referendum on state ownership (different to public, communal, etc, ownership) would merely leave the utility in the hands of the same shower who are currently ramming the water charges through.

The time-tested method of defunding the infrastructure and wailing for the private sector to save us from state inefficiency would be applied. Not only that but EU law on commercial monopolies would require that the ‘water market’ be ‘opened to competition’, not to mention the impending Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Irish Water must be abolished.

#### The Struggle

Resistance to the Irish Water plan has been relentless. The movement has not withered away as the

establishment hoped or expected, even in the face of Garda repression and mainstream media denunciation. There is the sense that there is always some action going on somewhere, and that protest or dissent in general has become a sort of national pastime. I remember visiting a pub, after a meeting which included discussion on the water charges, only to see a man watching videos of water charges protests on a small wall-mounted screen. ‘Now that’s a sign of the times’, I thought.

Another sign of the times is the record distrust of politicians, the judiciary, the Gardaí, the mainstream media, and big business. The Irish Water story has provided ample opportunity for various parts of the system to expose their true nature. This is especially true in the case of the Gardaí, who have enjoyed a reputation of being ‘peacekeepers’ among much of the population. But people who have blocked water meters from being installed have discovered another reality. To many, the Gardaí are like an occupying army. There is no lesson quite like being arrested, and thanks to social media this lesson has been shared the length and breadth of the country.

A ludicrously excessive Garda presence is a familiar sight to anyone following the anti-water charges

movement, with packs of Gardaí crowding around a few meter holes as if protecting someone from murder. One of my favourite scenes was a meter protest in South Dublin where not only had about a dozen Garda cars and vans had been deployed, but also a helicopter. The Jobstown dawn raids, the pepper spraying of protesters in Coolock, and the jailing of the 4 injunctioned protesters only made it harder to swallow the idea that the Gardaí and judiciary exist to serve the people rather than the interests of an elite.

Within the anti-water charges movement the mainstream media have come to be seen as couriers for government propaganda. Attendance at protests is persistently under-reported and the movement has been hounded by the ‘has protest gone too far?’ narrative (sometimes using outright fabrication). We have been able to subvert this by forming our own counter-media which has played an important role. A sprawling network of Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and a host of blogs and other websites provide a means to communicate quickly among ourselves.

With this we keep up to date on activity around the country, digest and react to establishment spin, dis-



“There has been much talk of SYRIZA as a model for change, but far fewer know of Greece’s network of grassroots organisations which has grown out of the movement of the squares in 2011”

cuss tactics, and more. This grassroots media network has given staying power to the movement, allowing protesters who would be otherwise isolated and forgotten to link with and inspire others.

At the heart of this movement is direct action, both in the prevention of meter installations and the boycott of bills. Dedication to the former has been impressive, with people regularly waking at 5, 6, and 7 in the morning to protest for hours on end, often in quite stressful circumstances. These protests can have almost military precision, scouting for meter contractors each day, communicating their movements via text trees. This is typified by, for example, Dublin’s ‘Flying Column’ who respond rapidly to alerts and drive to different parts of the city, and the Cobh, Co. Cork group who even have a make-shift ‘command and control’ centre. If anything, this movement is a testament to the ability of so-called ‘ordinary’ people to figure things out themselves and

organise effectively.

**What Next**

But despite the spontaneity, ingenuity, and grassroots nature of this movement, most of the left are still hell bent on the tired strategy of electoralism. There is much talk of left alliances, broad platforms, and progressive coalitions, in other words another attempt at social democracy. Along with the economic crisis we have a crisis of imagination. Instead of advancing in the natural direction of this movement by renouncing parliamentary democracy as the undemocratic charade that it is, and spurring people on to take further power over their lives, Right2Water is encouraging us to entrust our fates in ‘progressive politicians’ and is drafting it’s own electoral program.

Considering that Right2Water won’t back the boycott, it’s mobilisations are effectively election rallies, and that the closer the elections draw the more it will focus on them to the exclusion of all else, it is worth asking if Right2Water – now a sort of meta-political party - has outlived it’s purpose.

Elections are where movements go to die, demobilising people and fostering divisions. Why bother taking action yourself when some politicians are going to solve the problem for us? And who are going to do the campaigning for these anti-water charges candidates? Well, water protesters of course. Poster-ing, leafleting, canvassing, organising meetings – all of this time, effort, and money, and hope, will be poured into what is ultimately an act of ritual mass delusion, rather than critical grassroots activity. We desperately require a fundamental transformation of society, and that cannot come from the buildings of parliament, it can only come from the great mass of people taking charge of their destinies and organising direct democratically.

There has been much talk of SYRIZA as a model for change, but far fewer know of Greece’s network of grassroots organisations which has grown out of the movement of the squares in 2011 and comprises

hundreds of diverse projects including free medical clinics, alternative currencies and exchange economies, self-managed education, alternative media, and eco-villages. Surely this is more inspiring than a left party being elected to government? Clearly we are far from achieving this in Ireland, but this is the sort of politics we should be aspiring to. This is actually a ‘new politics’.

The Says No groups are promising in that they go beyond the single issue campaigning of strictly anti-water charges groups, linking up issues such as homelessness, evictions, austerity, and corruption. They could be the embryos of powerful community unions through which people can participate in a real form of democracy and organise local issues and services.

**Conclusion**

Even if the fight against the water charges were to end tomorrow, this struggle has caused significant change in this country which will have long-term effects. There are so many people who have become politicised and have risen up, and will not be content to go home and be quiet. The distrust in establishment institutions won’t suddenly evaporate. We have gotten a taste of what real democracy involves, felt our own power, and we like it. What is necessary now is to press on, try to get more people involved, and get more organised.

For instance, Alan Kelly has said that non-payers will be bundled into court, and we need to ensure the National Defense Fund is large enough to cover that possibility. Most of all we need to cling to what we have already seen to be true: this is our movement and our world, not a politician’s, and if we want to make change we will have to take responsibility ourselves rather than rely on somebody else.





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**They also provide confidential, non-judgmental information to anyone who contacts us via phone or email who is seeking information about travelling to England for an abortion.**

**[www.abortionsupport.org.uk](http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk)**



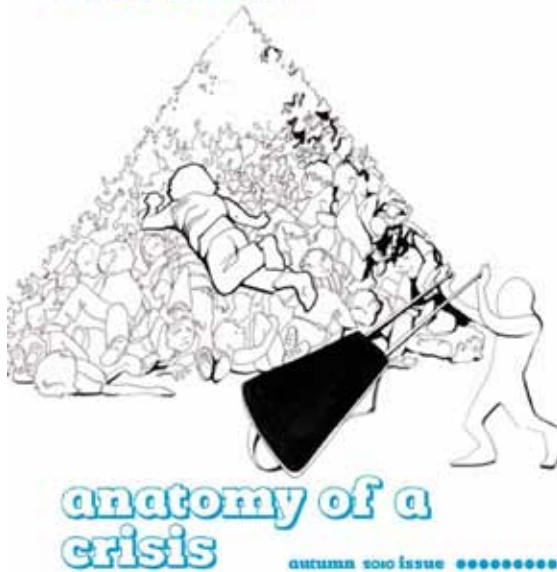
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