

Make **THEM** Redundant

Billions in handouts to bankers | Huge salaries for politicians

Billionaire investor Warren Buffett commented on the US financial crisis that "it's only when the tide goes out that you learn who's been swimming naked, and Wall Street now looks like a nudist beach." Well when it comes to Northern Ireland, the receding tide of the global economy has revealed that not only were our business and political elites swimming naked, they were engaged in a great big orgy as well.

They enthusiastically built up the property pyramid and pumped a vast quantity of hot air into the great debt-bubble, while enriching themselves through dodgy loans, dodgy planning decisions and every variety of backhander known to humanity. Probably one of the most sickening things about the boom was the way that the corporate media was full of hymns of praise to the entrepreneurial skills of our great leaders.

Well the bubble eventually burst, as do all bubbles, and it is now clear that the only legacy that our glorious leaders have left us from the last decade is a ruined economy and lots of abandoned property. Unfortunately, however, it is not the great and the good who will be paying to tidy up the mess, it's you and me, the ordinary worker. We will pay in terms of cuts in the services the state provides us, downward pressure on our wages and benefits and most of all, the increasing possibility of finding ourselves unemployed against our wishes.

The unemployment rate of 4.4% recorded here last year is still below the UK average (6.0%) but its climbing fast. The latest figures for job losses show the largest increase in 28 years.

This is because our genius free-



market entrepreneurs came up with a brilliant new business model based on what they called 'leverage'. Basically, this meant that it was more profitable to build businesses with borrowed money than it was to do so through capital investment, all thanks to the fact that the bankers' chums in government wrote the tax laws so that borrowings could be written off.

With the collapse of the credit bubble, many companies now find themselves in enormous debt that they can't pay back and will be forced to undergo huge downsizing or even bankruptcy, meaning lots more people out of work and facing serious hardship, especially considering the legacy of huge mortgage and credit card debt from the boom years.

And we can't expect any help from the political elites. Our political leaders, from across the spectrum, have been united in their response to the boom. They have

poured billions of public money into futile attempts at re-inflating the burst bubble of the developers and bankers, while putting the squeeze on the public, through cuts in health care, pensions and education. It won't be long before the media is blaming the 'lazy scroungers' on the dole for the mess our leaders have made of the economy.

None of this comes as much of a surprise to us though. Busts are just the occasions when the greed, stupidity, recklessness, corruption and gross unfairness of our capitalist economic system are laid bare for all to see. A change of government or a new set of regulations will change nothing. We need a fundamental reorganisation of our economy and for that we need a fundamental change in how society is run. This is why anarchists keep on saying that we need revolutionary change

Chekov Feeney

Inside: Education Fightback | Defending Public Sector | Housing

Education Cuts: Moving from Protest to Success

The Education Cuts announced in October's Budget have unleashed a wave of protest across the country. During the months of November and December approximately 120,000 people took to the streets of Dublin, Galway, Tullamore, Cork and Donegal to register their anger at the government's attempts to make schoolchildren pay for the financial crisis. Cowen, Lenihan and O'Keefe have been left in no doubt about the level of popular opposition to these cutbacks. In addition thousands of 3rd level students have also taken to the streets and participated in marches, pickets and blockades to protest at the proposed re-introduction of fees.

What the government is now hoping of course is that we've all done our protesting and they can get on with implementing the cuts. While they've been forced to row back slightly on the issue of substitute cover for teachers, their concession has been minimal and begrudging, and there's no doubt that as the state of the economy worsens they'll actually be coming back for more in terms of cuts in essential public services.

But no matter how much the economy worsens, it's clear that the assets of the rich are being protected and that a political decision has been made that it is the families of workers and the poor who they will attempt to make pay for the crisis. We must be prepared to stand firm and to deliver a very clear message to the politicians that we did not cause the crisis and that we are not willing to be the scapegoats. The wealthy bankers and property developers, the multi-millionaires who paid little or no tax throughout the boom years are the ones who should now be made to pay.

We need to let the government know that we're not simply content with registering our opposition but are actually determined to defeat them. In order to do so, we need to be prepared to dig in for the long haul, to be aware that a campaign which will be successful will be one that



is built in every town and parish throughout the country – a campaign of opposition to the actions of the government that will frighten the lives out of politicians and especially out of candidates who will be putting themselves forward for election to local authorities and to the European parliament in the summer.

The massive effort put in by parents and teachers to organise the hugely successful November/December series of demonstrations can be the foundation stone for the building of such a campaign. Let's begin to co-ordinate a series of local protests, marches and pickets aimed at the defence of public services and at the defence of the victims of the financial crisis – be that private sector workers whose jobs have been savaged, public sector workers whose wages are under threat, the users of public services such as education and health whose already threadbare services are being attacked even more.

All of us must stand together and support each other. The wealthy are good at protecting each other's backs and covering up for each other. We need to build a campaign or a series of campaigns which will offer solidarity and protection to the victims of the financial crisis.

The campaign needs to be built from the grassroots up in every area. Let's not rely on any political party or anyone else to act on our behalf, they've all shown they can't be trusted. Let's each of us rely on our own strengths and abilities to begin the process of building that campaign.

We hope that each person who reads this paper will yourself do your own little bit to help start the process of building a campaign in your area. It may mean asking your union branch or local Trades Council or community group to take an active role. It may mean a few people getting together to kick things off in a locality. We're willing to help in whatever way we can to build a broad movement to reverse the cuts.

Gregor Kerr

Belfast WSM will be having its first winter 'school' on Saturday 21st February. This will be a free one-day event for members and non-members alike, with talks ranging from the history of anarchism in Ireland to how we should respond to the recession. Details are at www.wsm.ie

Lower Pay, Less Jobs - Whose National Interest?

WSM member Joe King, a clerical officer in the public sector, responds to the calls for pay cuts and redundancies.

We are told that the pay of senior public servants was more than 10% ahead of their private sector counterparts in 2006, while those on the very lowest grades earned up to 30% more. Is this sustainable?

The reality that some people in secretarial & unskilled jobs in the private sector get little more than minimum wage is a bloody stupid reason for cutting someone else's pay. The logic of this is to reduce everyone's pay to the very lowest rate, the minimum wage.

Why is it that it's only the pay of ordinary working people that's a problem? If there is a 'need' for pay cuts, why is the finger never pointed at people like the chief economist with Friends First Jim Power, the guy who is always on the radio talking about tearing up the pay deal? Oh well, if Jim says it then it must be necessary, doesn't he get his big pay packet because he's some sort of genius. Not seeing the recession coming was probably just an oversight.

This great expert is an economist with a company that is selling pensions to hard working people who are now watching their retirement hopes go down the drain while those who manage the pension funds swan around telling us to 'tighten our belts' while getting six-figure salaries.

But surely, as most of you have secure jobs and a good pension scheme, you should be prepared to make sacrifices?

You would think there was something wrong with having a steady job! Should I fall to my knees and give thanks for my €33,800 a year? And yes, we do have a good pension. Why shouldn't we? Pensions are wages which become payable when we retire; we fought hard to get them, to defend them, and to open them to part-time staff like office cleaners.



We have no apology to make for those achievements that are down to a high level of trade union organisation. For many of us our work rate is a wee bit less hurried than in the private sector. This doesn't mean that we are dassing, just that there is a bit less stress. That's something we should all be looking for.

Do we need all the staff who are employed in the public sector, could we 'trim the fat'?

Who are we talking about? Right wing commentators try to conjure up an image of tens of thousands of people sitting around in anonymous offices doing nothing remotely useful, but they can never tell us exactly who these people are. Do they want fewer teachers, or nurses, or fire fighters, or street cleaners? Or is it the less visible 'backroom' staff, like those who issue your driving licence, or process your tax rebate, or check the hygiene standards in meat plants?

It's a myth that we have an oversized and unaffordable service. In the last major survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development, which Ireland is a member of, only South Korea and Mexico spent less per head.

Of course there are jobs that could be scrapped, a lot of senior management and consultants are about as useful as

an ashtray on a motorbike. However the media never asks if we are getting 'value for money' from massively overpaid senior managers. There's not a mention of HSE boss Brendan Drumm's €358,000 or Coillte's David Gunning who gets €409,000 or ESB boss Padraig McManus who did even better with €534,998. What about Dublin Airport Authority CEO Declan Collier who pocketed €698,000?

Would we really miss any of them? Does the world stop if they don't turn up for work? If they are so essential why do they not have to be replaced when they go on holiday? After all, cleaners and receptionists have to be replaced or the office would be in chaos.

Is that not a bit selfish, what about the national interest?

What 'national interest' are we talking about? Employers want to cut wages and taxes to increase their profits; workers need to increase their wages and shift more of the tax burden to the wealthy. The interests are opposed; there can be no common interest while the rule of the rich continues. The saga of the Corrib Gas Field gives us a good snapshot of how seriously our rulers take the idea of a 'national interest'.

The Department of Natural Resources estimates the value of the oil and gas fields in Irish waters at €450 billion. Will any of this go to hospitals, schools or pensions? Not a chance; Shell and the other multinationals don't have to pay a single cent in royalties. The Minister when this deal was signed, Ray Burke, is on record as telling a senior civil servant dealing with the oil companies, "give these fellas anything they want".

The rich are very good at looking after their own; when are we going to cop on and do the same for our people?

Joe King

Loansharks prey on 40,000 across the North

A major financial company with 40,000 customers in the North has admitted that it charges 183.2% interest. This is no backstreet loan-shark operation, Provident Financial is a completely legal and government regulated firm.

When times get bad, with more unemployment and less cash in the family, parasites like these step up their efforts to trap us into loans with ridiculous interest rates. In the run up to Christmas Provident were emailing people across Northern Ireland offering £500 loans at the click of a button over the internet.



You Can't Eat a Flag

A recent report produced by 'Belfast Healthy Cities' into the direct link between wealth and class confirms what most of us already know - class pervades every aspect of our lives from the cradle to grave.

According to the report, if you live in the Shankill or Ardoyne, for example, you can expect to live several years less than someone from affluent areas just a few miles away. So much for the new era!

The fightback in response to police violence in Greece and the occupation by Calcost workers in Derry remind us that the class war is far from over. As the recession continues to bite, it is us as workers and the unemployed, who are now paying for the blunders of the rich and powerful.

That's right, we're the majority who produce the wealth but only ever get a small portion back in the form of wages. Yet we are constantly told by our bosses at work or in the corridors of power to be 'grateful' and not to rock the boat. OK for a politician, earning at least £43,381 a year before expenses.

Sure, we can all make it to the top can't we? With a bit of luck and slaving our lives away 24/7 maybe. Why is it that those in power, with a few notable exceptions, come from similar backgrounds and went to the same elitist schools?

The stark reality and impact of class hits home in the fact that many won't survive this winter on the island of Ireland, having been forced into choosing between food or heating. You'll need a few bob too, if you're from the Catholic faith and you want to secure a plot for burial at Milltown Cemetery. The Catholic Church is looking for up to £3,000 apiece for 1,300 new plots there - a staggering sum, from one of the world's richest multi-national property tycoons.

The Executive may have been restored but as long as the blight of nationalism, whether of the nationalist or unionist variety, continues to hold sway and prop up capitalism,

then real working-class freedom and equality will never be delivered.

As anarchists, we won't be round looking for your vote every four years or so, we won't spout empty promises in return for a seat round the table because we don't believe that, even if we did get in, the working class can be satisfied with scraps from that table. That class, our class, must wage our own struggles and take control of our own destiny- no political party can do that.



Sean Matthews

Find out more. Check out www.wsm.ie

Informacje i artykuły w języku polskim dostępne na stronie www.wsm.ie/polska

That's Capitalism



One child in eight in less developed countries gets no primary schooling, according to UNESCO. Of the approximately 75 million children who receive no primary schooling, about 55% are girls. In sub-Saharan Africa one-third of all children receive no schooling.

Each of the 12 Residential Institutions Redress Board members took home an average of €135,583 last year for listening to the horrific stories of abuse and stolen childhoods suffered by former residents of care homes and industrial schools. Despite receiving more than €135,000 each in the space of a year, the board members have approved settlements of an average of just €65,000 to victims since the scheme's inception.

Between 1998 and 2003 the United Nations has estimated that the war in the Congo led to the deaths of as many as 5.2 million civilians. The death toll is still climbing. It is the bloodiest conflict since the end of the Second World War. Western multinationals and both European and African states have armed 'rebel' groups in their attempts to control the DRC's huge mining and mineral resources.

You might think that the government appointees to the AIB and Bank of Ireland boards are supposed to represent the interests of the tax payer, whose money was used to bail them out. They include former Labour leader Dick Spring and Fine Gael's Alan Dukes, the first is now a businessman and the other is employed as a lobbyist for multi-national firms. As board members they are legally obliged to look after the interests of bank shareholders first.

According to the London Times of November 26th, a wealthy female surgeon has commissioned a £1.4 million kennel for her two Great Danes, next to her second home on the exclusive Lower Mill Estate, near Cirencester in England. The kennel has a Jacuzzi, a plasma screen TV, thermostatically controlled beds, a £150,000 music system and a security gate with retinal scanner.

Meanwhile, the following day's BBC News reported an Age Concern poll which found many over-60s were worried about being able to heat their homes because of soaring energy prices. With one of the coldest winters for some years predicted, the death toll among seniors is expected to rise.

Anarchists want to change the world. Instead of the present order – capitalism – with its focus on inequality and profits for a few, we want to build a new society based around the principles of participatory democracy, freedom and production for need not profit. For anarchists the type of society we want to build is best summed up by the slogan: 'To each according to their needs, from each according to their ability.'

Is an anarchist society possible? Although many people agree that it sounds like a good project, there are also plenty who argue that an anarchist society simply wouldn't work. 'Come off of it,' the objectors say. 'People are selfish and only interested in looking out for themselves. After all it's human nature – most people, given a choice, would put themselves before the rest of society. How could an anarchist society function if this is true?'

For anarchists human nature is not an obstacle. In actual fact, anarchists look at it the other way around. In other words anarchists think that it is precisely because of human nature that the prospects for building an anarchist society are so good in the first place.

For anarchists the important issue is the conditions of life under which we live at any one time. Right now – in capitalist societies – at work and in large areas of society, we are forced to compete with one another all the time. Indeed for most of us from an early age it is the idea of competition rather than cooperation that is fostered. For example at school we learn competition via the exams process. And at work we are divided into 'contract' or 'full-time' workers – and so on and so forth.

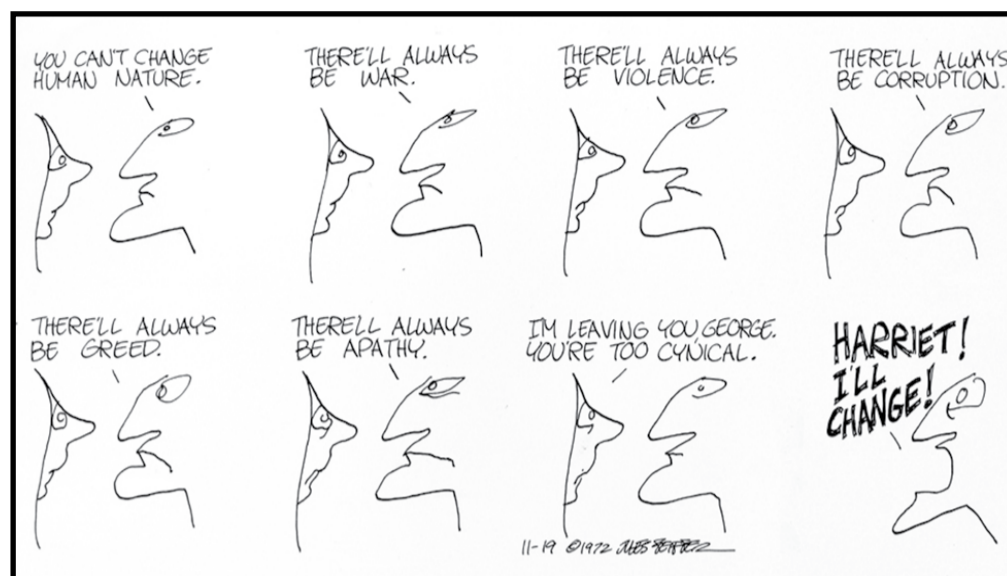
Everywhere in fact, around us, we are confronted with the notion that as individuals we should be 'doing better' and working harder – and to do this we should compete more with our neighbours. The idea of competition is central to capitalism, and is very effective because under capitalism society is organised hierarchically. The ever present hierarchy means that there is the constant sense of the

November saw WSM public meetings about anarchism in Cork and Dublin, with 40 people at one and about 60 at the other. With the crisis and a growing employers' offensive on wages there is a greater openness to radical ideas, and we will be holding more meetings around the country over the next couple of months.

November also saw big numbers turn out for demonstrations against the education cuts. A leaflet by WSM education workers asked "why do we keep inviting Fine Gael and Labour TDs to speak at our rallies. When they were in government, they were every bit as mean as Fianna Fáil, every bit as good at cutting services in order to keep down the tax bill of the rich. When in opposition they make promises, when in government they stick the boot in.

"Surely we should be looking to others in the same situation as ourselves. Surely we should be looking to join up with other working people who face the same attack on their jobs and services." The government's cuts strategy is an attack on the standard of living of all working people, a united resistance where "an injury to one is the concern of all" is the

Thinking About Anarchism : The Selfish Gene?



pecking order – in terms of pay, social position, individual standing.

This has the overwhelming effect of creating a climate of competition and it's not any surprise to anarchists that as a result we do see a lot of negative impulses in society and around us. But what must be borne in mind, first and foremost, is that this negativity (or selfishness) has more to do with how society is organised than with who we are as people.

But there is even more evidence that fundamentally human nature is a very positive force. Despite the competition fostered in this society people find loads of ways to make things different. For example throughout the ages workers have created unions and have struggled together – very often against great odds – to shorten the working day and improve pay rates.

Although we all know things could be hugely better, we still owe a debt to those who made the effort and collectively fought for better conditions for all workers. How do such advances by workers – based around the idea of solidarity - tie in with the notion of 'people being selfish'? The truth is they don't. People aren't universally selfish or self-centred. A huge part of our lives is about helping others and cooperating – it is on this platform that a

future anarchist society can be built.

Human nature is actually one of the strongest weapons we have – as anarchists see it. Why is that? Well, people want to be free! The desire to be free, to run your own life and not be ordered about by a boss (or a husband or a teacher or a cop) is an irrepressible and central part of who we are. It's why people from time immemorial rebel as individuals against an injustice but it is also why communities and groups of workers come together to fight for their rights and for a new order.

Essentially – and you will find it hard to find anyone who will dispute this – we all want to live in conditions where we have justice and equality. Sometimes the idea of 'justice and equality' can seem like a small demand, but at other times the desire for it is the stuff of revolutions. We only have to look back through our own history to see countless examples of where people have taken small stands against seemingly small injustices only to end up shaking great powers into dust. They did this not in spite of human nature but because of it. To be human, after all, is to want to be free.

Kevin Doyle

Anarchism & the WSM

best response.

December saw 15 year old Alexandros Grigoriopoulos shot and killed by police in Athens in December. WSM spokesperson Siobhan Rattigan said that "While Greece was preparing for the December 10th general strike against making working people pay for the economic crisis, Alexandros was killed in cold blood. That is how a 'special forces' police officer answered anti-police slogans that a small group of school students were chanting."

Far from frightening people it sparked off riots throughout the country. A General Strike was called for the following day, and 10,000 marched on the Greek parliament. Schools all over Greece were occupied by their students, and a 3-day strike declared by the High School Teachers' Union.

In Dublin WSM members helped to organise a protest outside the Greek embassy. A Greek anarchist addressed the crowd and explained that "the special forces are trained by the old guard, the military who were in power. They are not respected by the people, and neither is the government which mirrors our own

with its corruption and ineptitude. That is why Greece is in the grip of its greatest social upheaval in decades."

We were on the streets again that month, joining protests against the Israeli slaughter in Gaza. A joint statement from our sister organisations in Palestine/Israel, South Africa, Italy and Canada summed up our rulers' attitude:

"Hundreds of dead and thousands of injured, sacrificed on the altar of Zionist expansionism and fundamentalism. In Europe, the foreign ministers of every EU country talk about an "exaggerated", though "legitimate", reaction on the part of Israel, reversing the true situation with an operation that would make the most cynical illusionist feel proud by making the aggressor, the State of Israel, appear to be the victim."

On a happier note, December also saw the first of the WSM's monthly radio shows on Dublin community radio station NEAR 90.3FM. If you miss the live programme you can download it from www.archive.org/details/RadioSolidarity-Show1FromTheWorkersSolidarityMovementIreland

Organising in Challenging Times: Cork Grassroots Gathering

The Grassroots Gathering is a twice-yearly coming together of anarchists and libertarian socialists who are active in political groups and campaigns up and down the island of Ireland. The second of 2008's Gatherings was held in Cork on 14th-16th November. The 90 or so attending, combined with the quality of the discussions, left its organisers very pleased with the weekend. It showed that there's a lot of life left in the Grassroots Gathering as a show-case for trends and thinking among Ireland's libertarian left.

The big issue was the attack on the working class currently happening worldwide. The workshop titled 'Kicking Capitalism While It's Down - Responses To The Recession' was a particular highlight of the Saturday time-table, with almost the whole attendance engaged intensely in a discussion of activities and strategies our class might use to fight back against the designs of the rich, as the crisis in the capitalist economy unfolds. Thanks are due to the Cork branch of the Workers Solidarity Movement for helping organise that part of the weekend's programme, and also to Cork-based socialist activists from other left organisations and traditions for organising or participating in many of the weekend's activities.

An important part of all the Grassroots



Gatherings to date has been the invitation to local campaign groups in the host community to showcase their struggles and talk about their community's engagement with political ideas through struggle. Cork this November was no different, with members of groups as diverse as Cork Women's Right to Choose, Traveller and Settled Solidarity, Niger Delta Awareness and Cork Harbour for a Safe Environment among those participating over the weekend.

The dialogue between all was sometimes heart-rending, occasionally sharp, but always constructive. Information, photo displays and book stalls were there too,

from a range of interests and campaigns from Palestine Solidarity to the Revolutionary Anarchafeminist Group to Shell to Sea to swap shops and foods.

While the Gathering is an occasion for friends and comrades to meet for serious talk about serious things, there's always time for conviviality and craic, with the pinnacle of entertaining Anarchy being Saturday night's Cabaret Éclectique - a "participatory revue" with everything you would expect: from boos and cat-calls to calls for encores!

Ray Hanrahan

What the *hell* is a Social Centre?



Mark Malone spoke to Workers Solidarity about Dublin's social centre. He is a member of the WSM and also of the Seomra Spraoi Collective.

Mark, what exactly is Seomra Spraoi?

Seomra Spraoi is a self-managed, self-funded project on Belvedere Court, just off Gardiner Street in Dublin's north inner city. It's a project that functions both as a resource to different campaigns, groups and individuals to use for meetings and workshops, as well as being home to a radical cinema, cafe, internet access and library. This month there will be a creche opening too.

Why did you get involved with the project?

Along with other people, I recognised a need for physical spaces that embody anti-capitalist ways of working, not just in the future, but in the here and now. In 2004 when we first started, there were

no visible, self-managed social centres in Ireland. We were responding to our own needs as well as making a project that was open to all who wanted to get involved. It was a form of direct action, with a rejection of paid labour and hierarchical structures.

Seomra Spraoi is designed to be an entry point for a largely depoliticised population, and offers a living example of how people can work productively together without bosses or a profit motive. At the same time we wanted to take on some of the issues of social relationships that often get ignored in revolutionary politics, like actively challenging sexism, making the project family friendly and increasing accessibility. Things that are often invisible barriers restricting peoples involvement in political and social life.

We work on a basis of direct democracy and hold weekly open meetings where decisions are made. We have working groups dealing with events, the cafe,

cinema nights, etc. that break up the running of the project into manageable chunks. Since starting in 2004, we have developed aims and principles through a process of discussion and consensus and anyone who respects and agrees with these can use the space. We are funded through donations and standing orders from supporters.

How have anarchist ideas influenced projects like Seomra Spraoi?

Projects like this don't work on political purism, as many people are coming from different personal and political places themselves. Although many people who use Seomra wouldn't call themselves anarchists, it's fair to say that anarchist ideas are at the heart of what we are about. Rejecting the exploitation and greed of capitalism, working democratically as equals and challenging oppressive social norms are central to anarchism. These are things we embrace and encourage.

How can people get involved?

We have weekly meetings on Thursdays at 7.30pm and anyone is welcome to come along. For more details and a map see:

www.seomraspraoi.org

The Anarchist FAQ What is anarchism? What would an anarchist society look like? What's wrong with capitalist economics? What do anarchists do? Why oppose the state? And much, much more.
www.anarchyfaq.org

Contacts

Anarchist Organisations

Workers Solidarity Movement
PO Box 1528, Dublin 8.
www.wsm.ie
wsm_ireland@yahoo.com
cork@wsm.ie | belfast@wsm.ie

Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group (RAG)
PO BOX 10785, Dublin 1.
<http://ragdublin.blogspot.com/>

Organise!
PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ
<http://organiseireland.blogspot.com>

Libertarian Networks

Indymedia Ireland
Alternative user-generated Irish news.
<http://www.indymedia.ie>

Seomra Spraoi
Dublin Social Centre
10 Belvedere Court, Dublin 1.
<http://www.seomraspraoi.org>

Galway Social Space
24 Middle Street, Galway.
<http://www.galwayspace.org>

Revolt Video
Radical Video Collective
<http://revoltvideo.blogspot.com>

Campaigning Groups

Shell to Sea
Campaign to move Shell's gas pipeline offshore from Co. Mayo.
<http://www.shelltosea.com>

Hands Off the People of Iran
Anti-imperialist network for solidarity with Iranian trade unionists and the women's rights movement.
<http://www.hopoi.org>

Choice Ireland
Abortion rights action group
choiceireland@gmail.com
<http://www.choiceireland.org>

Alliance for Choice (NI)
<http://allianceforchoiceni.org>

Residents Against Racism
Opposing racism and deportations.
24 hour helpline: 087 666 2060

Anarchist Black Cross (Belfast)
Assists class war prisoners worldwide.
www.myspace.com/belfastabc