

# Red & Black Revolution



## Creating Solidarity in the slums of Santiago

Interview with Goyo, a militant with the OCL (Organización Comunista Libertaria) and a community organiser from Santiago de Chile (16/09/04)

by Paddy Rua

On September last year, we held an interview with a comrade from the OCL, a Chilean anarcho-communist (platformist) organisation with a presence in the biggest cities of that country - Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción. This organisation has a policy of building up the movement amongst the popular rank and file, organising Frentes (Fronts or Networks) among the traditional popular factors in revolutionary struggle in Chile: workers, students and neighbours from the slums of the cities.

This approach is born out of the Chilean revolutionary tradition. But more importantly it comes from their immediate experiences. In the early days of the organisation, there was a process in which different tactics were implemented, with contradictory results. Eventually tactics were defined by the comrades' participation in different struggles: students' occupations of campuses and community struggles. This approach has sprung from the meeting of theory and practice. The comrade interviewed is one who has been active for almost ten years in students' and community organisations. He had been through the period in which the Chilean approach to anarcho-communism was defined. This first led to the forming of the CUAC (Congreso de Unificación

Anarco-Comunista), which then developed in the OCL.

We reproduce this interview as it's a very interesting account about the start of their community work, how they've faced the work at a mass level and the different problems posed by this, as well as how they are attempting to make anarchism relevant for people's struggles and their everyday lives. Finally it shows how practice has affected theory and vice-versa. We hope this interview contributes to the debate as to what sort of anarchist-communism we need for the 21st century, and that the ideas exposed serve to enrich other comrades' practices.

**Q. First of all, tell us how did your experience in community work as anarcho-communists start?**

As you know, we started using our intuition. We knew that community work had a lot of potential, that it exposes a lot of social contradictions, and that our presence would help to radicalise those contradictions. We were very young and hadn't much experience; the oldest of the group now are between 27 and 30 or so years. So the handiest thing was to start with a Cultural Collective, because we were young and affected by stuff like

the military service and other problems. But on the way we realised some weaknesses. In our communities, hunger and unemployment are real and cultural work was a bit distant from that reality. But we managed to form a small group of people and started working on propaganda.

Then, we got in touch with a bunch of comrades who aren't anarchists, but who are close in terms of rank and file organization. So we started to work in their preuniversitario popular<sup>1</sup>. From there, we took part in the demand for education of the youth in the slums. Education is almost entirely private in Chile, so we started educating the youngsters there, teaching them what they needed to get to university, and at the same time, we put across our arguments. For instance, when teaching the official history, we gave a different version as well, for them to know. And many of them got involved in the organisation. For us, it was not the only aim to help people to get to university; we wanted to create popular organisation, from the bottom up, to generate debate and to prepare the field for the struggle.

It has been a work of years... I have been four years working there. We have been learning from these experiences and from the other people there, as an active minority and as part of the People. There has been some tension with some authoritarian tendencies that want to limit the spaces for participation and decision making. For us, that meant to educate people in concrete terms.

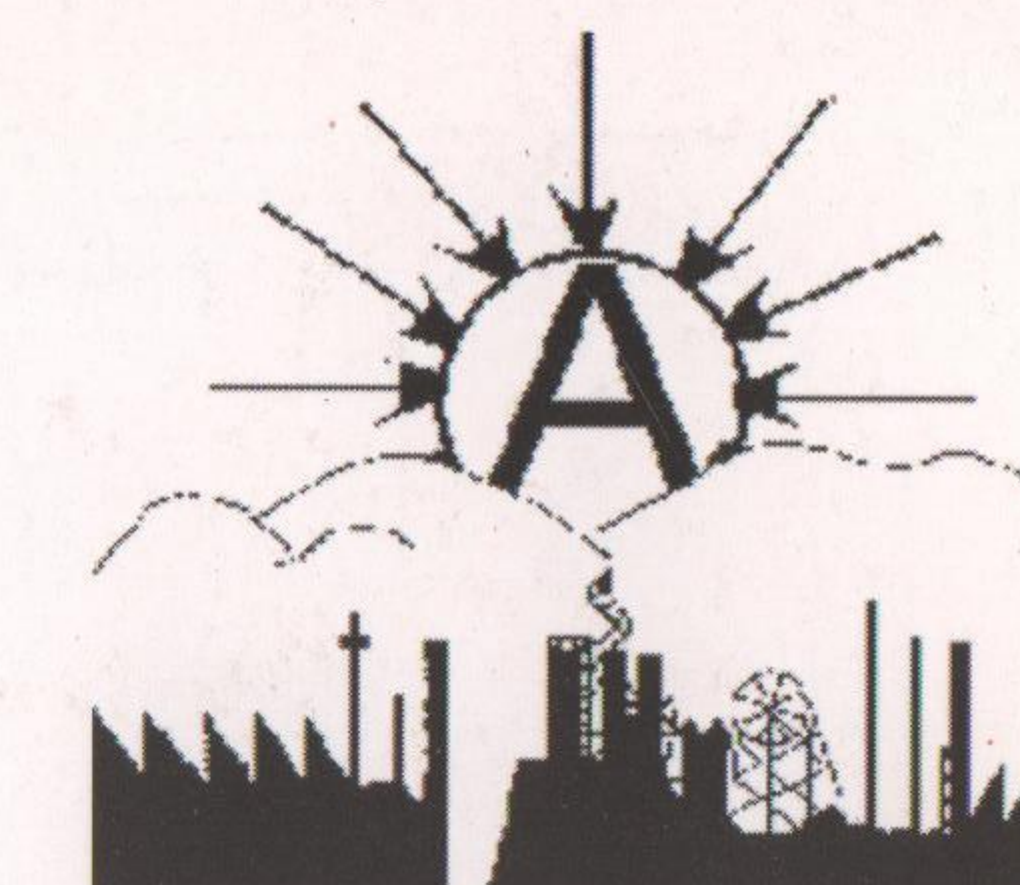
In those discussions, our participation in the political organisation was very useful, because we discussed there [in the CUAC] issues that we were also discussing in the communities, so we got a lot of elements for debate. So the political

*continued overleaf...*

Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice, socialism without freedom is tyranny and brutality

# Red & Black Revolution

A magazine of libertarian communism



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**The Spectre of the Summit Protests**  
**Work in the 21st Century \* Workers Creating Solidarity in Chile**

Also: After Nationalism, Reviews: To Live by Mick Parkin, Parecon: Life After Capitalism, by Michael Albert



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Our time and resources are limited and at times of busy activity our publications are often delayed. So any help that you can offer would be a real help in getting our ideas out to a wider audience. If you want to help out, get in touch at the address below.

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## About the Workers Solidarity Movement

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

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

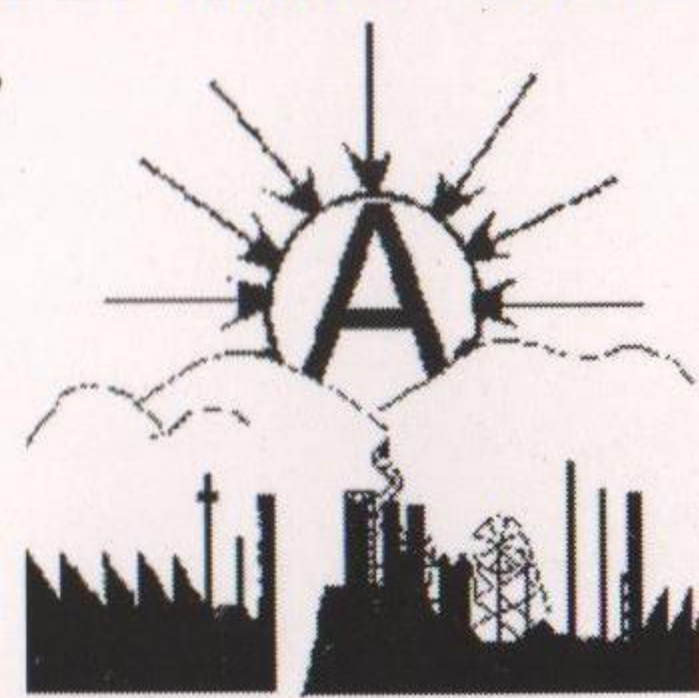
Anarchism has always stood for individual freedom. But it also stands for democracy. We believe in democratising the workplace and in workers taking control of all industry. We believe that this is the only real alternative to capitalism with its ongoing reliance on hierarchy and oppression and its depletion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

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

As anarchists we see ourselves as part of a long tradition that has fought against all forms of authoritarianism and exploitation, a tradition that strongly influenced one of the most successful and far reaching revolutions in this century - in Spain in 1936 - 37. The value of this tradition cannot be underestimated today. With the fall of the Soviet Union there has been renewed interest in our ideas and in the tradition of libertarian socialism generally. We hope to encourage this interest with Red & Black Revolution. We believe that anarchists and libertarian socialists should debate and discuss their ideas, that they should popularise their history and struggle, and help point to a new way forward.

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

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



# The Nomad, the Displaced and the Settler

# Work

## in the 21<sup>st</sup> century



**In many countries there has been a debate as to the nature of the changes in western workplaces; in Britain they talk about increased casualisation of the workforce, in the US they talk about contingent labour and on the European continent they use the language of precarity. Central to in all these debates is the issue of job insecurity.**

by Aileen O'Carroll

A number of issues are being discussed. Firstly has the workplace changed fundamentally such that people increasingly are in temporary work rather than permanent work? Secondly is the division between work time and non-work time dissolving, are we spending more of our lives 'in work'? Thirdly are the non-work aspects of life becoming increasingly insecure?

In this article I argue that the world of work has changed, yet it has also stayed the same. There has been a

decline in the numbers working in manufacturing jobs, and an increase in numbers working in the service industry. There have also been the creation of totally new occupations based around computer work. However, it is also the same in that there has always been fragmentation within the workforce. There has always been a diversity of experiences. What is important is that we identify the different workplace realities that exist and that we develop strategies that allow us to address a variety of struggles.

### The end of a job for life?

As mentioned above, many accounts of today's workplace concentrate on the job insecurity and the end of a job for life. Yet the argument that work in the private sector is more insecure now, implies that in the past work was more secure. However the idea of a job for life, is an idea that held true for a very specific time, place and workforce. The economic boom that followed the Second World War and lasted until the oil crisis of the 1970s was perhaps rather unique. It led to the growth of mass manufacturing in certain areas in certain western countries. In northwest Europe this industrial region stretched from the English midlands, to Northern France, Belgium and Southern Holland, to the Ruhr area of Germany with some isolated pockets in Northwest Italy and Southern Sweden. In North America a similar industrial region existed in the north-east, also based on the mass production of cars, machinery and domestic appliances. Those employed in these huge factories became known as the 'mass worker'. The rise of the welfare state, and employment in the public sector paralleled the growth in mass manufacturing.

Sociologist Colin Crouch describes the idea of a job for life that existed here as the 'mid century compromise'<sup>1</sup>, that is, there was the expectation that in return for a commitment to the employer, men would receive job security. Permanency and mass workplaces facilitated union growth and power. In Michael Moore's first film 'Roger and Me', he showed how the manufacturing belt had turned to rust, and depicted the enormous social cost of the destruction of this dream.



However it is worth making a number of points. While the job for life (for the blue collar worker) or career (for the white collar worker) was a realistic expectation for some, it was not a realistic expectation for all. For example in the Republic of Ireland, with almost no manufacturing base, emigration rather than job-stability was the norm and remained the norm almost until the Celtic Tiger boom of the 1990s<sup>2</sup>. Similarly for most women the expectation was that after marriage, work in the home would replace paid employment and indeed until 1977 in the Irish civil service this expectation was formalised by the marriage bar which required women to leave work once they got married. Even in industrialised nations not all workers experienced job security. For example in the UK in the 1960s only half of all male workers and two thirds of all female workers had been in the same employer for more than 5 years<sup>3</sup>. Many occupations, such as dock work, construction and domestic work have always been insecure. So the job security, which many nostalgically refer to, was never a reality for all.

### Is job instability increasing?

So much for then, what about now? It is very difficult to get exact data on job stability in the workplace. Certainly there has been an increase in part-time work and this is often cited as evidence of an increasing insecurity in the workplace. The mid-century compromise was based on male full-time workers, not female part-time workers. Until very recently part-time work was associated with fewer benefits than full-time. However recent EU directives are aimed at reducing this discrimination<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, part-time work is not necessarily temporary work. It is not necessarily insecure.

Another way of measuring job stability is to look at those in long-term employment, however definitive data on job stability is difficult to find. Researcher Kevin Doogan, using European Labour Force data argues that contrary to received wisdom, the number of people working long term (that is more than ten years for a single employer) has actually increased in most European countries. Yet he also shows, citing European social attitude data, that across the occupations, there is a growing sense of insecurity. So here there seems to be a contradiction, on one hand there is more job security, on the other, there is a sense of foreboding about the future.



### Why do people feel more insecure?

There are a number of factors that can account for this. Firstly, with the dismantling of the welfare state, the cost of losing one's job is increasing. In the US the popular saying goes 'you are only two pay packets from the gutter'. In January 2005 the Irish Central Bank noted that for the first time ever, borrowing had exceeded incomes. Our economic growth has been accompanied by increased house prices, which has forced people to live further and further from the cities and become increasingly dependant on private transport in order to get to work, shops, hospitals etc. In addition our health service fails to meet basic needs. While there has been a huge increase in the number of women in paid employment, there is almost no support for childcare or care of the sick and elderly (jobs that traditionally were the responsibility of women working in the home). Increasingly many of the services which were previously provided by the state are now being charged for. The introduction of a waste collection charge is to be followed by a water tax. Electricity, gas, telephone and transport costs have all increased in recent years and unless further privatisation is successfully resisted, are likely to increase even further. Job loss therefore might also mean losing one's house or having to watch an elderly parent being denied adequate health care for lack of money. It is these fears that cause even the most secure employee to feel anxious for the future.

Secondly, Kevin Doogan argues that in the private sector this is the era of outsourcing and mergers. Employees find

their employers changing about them and are left unsure as to what their position is within these ever changing organisations. This process of re-structuring is mirrored in the public sector. Most recently in Ireland the public sector has introduced Benchmarking and has altered their organisational structure in a way that has left many unsure as to where (or whether) their job will be in the future. In the past, for those with a job for life, the future was secure and dependable. These days the future seems more uncertain and unpredictable (though this may be more perception than reality).

### What have we lost?

Returning to the death of the mid-century compromise, why was job-stability for the few important and why is its death lamented? To the Marxist organisations, whether they be revolutionary or reformist, in the mass worker could be found the revolutionary subject. That is, here was a section of the working class<sup>5</sup> whose industrial strength and organisational capabilities could be mobilised to bring about political change (whether that be a welfare state or a revolutionary society). Though the anarchist perspective doesn't seek to identify any particular sub-section of the working class who will 'lead' the rest, we have to be aware what we have lost in the end of the mid-century compromise.

Where workers expect to be spending a considerable proportion of their lives in the same workplace, it is in their interests to improve the terms and conditions of their workplace as best as they can. Collective organisation is based on relationships and trusts built up over time. It is not

surprising therefore that these mass workers built strong trade unions and were able to exercise considerable industrial and political power. Their demands contributed to the creation of the welfare state. For those others working in more normal, unstable conditions, the mass worker provided the good example, the alternative, the example of workplace power which could inspire those working in less permanent jobs. With the mass worker came a rhetoric of rights and expectations, which even if it did not hold true for all, provided an important challenge to the power of capitalism.

Yet, it can also be argued that the job for life is a limited demand, in that work was/is often mundane, boring and tedious. In itself there is no liberation from capitalist control over our lives. It places limitations on the ways in which capitalism exploited us, but it does not challenge the servitude itself (as the slogan goes, 'bigger cages, longer chains').

It is also true that, despite the expectations of many in the traditional left, many workers embrace job flexibility and impermeancy because it gives them the opportunity to either modify their working conditions or to reduce the role of work within their lives. This can particularly be seen in Ireland in those working in the Information Technology sector (ICT). These workers are a very small, yet fast growing segment of the Irish working class (7.5% of all jobs are within the ICT sector). It is a sector in which there are skill shortages and high job mobility. Put simply, if people are unhappy with their working conditions, they leave and move to a new (and hopefully better) position. It is worth noting



that although there are no reliable figures on the numbers working on temporary contract it seems that in Ireland numbers working in contract positions has decreased within this sector. This is a mobility from permanent position to permanent position, a mobility that is chosen and not forced, that is not based on insecurity. While it is difficult to get statistics on over all job-mobility, case studies indicate that there is also high job turnover among less highly-skilled occupations for example, high job turnover has been reported among those working in the hotel and restaurant sector.

There are a number of points worth making here. Firstly, embracing flexibility in this case is as much a strategy as the mass workers' call for job security. Here we have the difference between nomads, and settlers in that while settlers have a long-term interest in improving the place they have settled in, nomads seek improvement via exit. The settlers solution is collective, the nomads individualistic. Secondly, the nomadic strategy makes sense only in very particular economic conditions. Ireland in 2005 has very low unemployment, and many sectors experience skill shortages. It is these particular economic conditions that switch the balance of forces, such that employers are willing to offer security, while employees are rejecting it. Thirdly, the risks are minimised where there is a welfare state to soften the blow. It is within this context, that government policy seeks to redress the balance in favour of the employers, as we have seen above, by increasing the gamble that workers take when they move between jobs.

Lastly whereas there has been a ten-

dency to speak of the mass worker as if that was the experience of work for all in the post 1960s, there is also a tendency to speak of the workplace today as if the experience of particular countries (the US and the UK) reflects the experiences of all. From the above it is obvious that the experience of job stability and instability is not the same for all. Different countries have different levels of social welfare provision, legal protection and unemployment rates; and even within countries, instability can be experienced differently. For example the illegal immigrant worker in Dublin had a very different experience of impermanence than does the software worker mentioned above. For some job mobility is an often successful strategy to improve working conditions borne out of labour market strength or resting on the welfare state's safety net. For others it has the exact opposite effect. It is imposed, unwanted and arises out of employers strength and employee weakness. Here the end of a 'job for life' represents a significant defeat for the working class.

### How do we develop strategies?

So what are the implications of this diversity of experience? Can we develop a strategy that encompasses those who jump, those who are pushed and those who stay; the nomad, the displaced and the besieged settler.

One approach to the issue of organising is to try and identify which category of worker will fill the shoes left vacant by the demise of the mass worker. Some focus on the two sectors that have been the fastest growing in Europe, the expansion of those working in the knowledge economy and the rise of the service sector. The difficulty is that, firstly these are sectors that have very different experiences of work, expectations, problems and needs. Beyond the fact that both are paid labourers, it is hard to see what is gained by trying to establish a one-size-fits all strategy that can be applied to both of these groups (or should that read, one size fits nobody). Secondly, there doesn't seem to be any practical rationale for elevating the experiences of these groups of workers, above the experiences of more traditional workers. We shouldn't be blinded by the shiny and new at the expense of the old and dusty.

This may seem like a trivial point, but we do need to be aware that there is a political legacy that seeks to identify the 'leading sector' of the working class, a legacy which runs counter to the anarchist ideal of a revolution in which power is exercised and held by



all in society. The elevation of the mass worker, full-time and male, came hand in hand with the marginalising of the experiences of the woman worker, the part-time worker, the woman working in the home, the unemployed, etc. We shouldn't repeat this mistake. Instead we need to identify the diversity of experiences, and develop multiple strategies that address this variety, and ways of writing which can highlight the experiences of some without excluding the experiences of others. And when for reasons of limited resources, we focus our organisational efforts on one group we need to be clear that our decision to do this is driven only by pragmatism.

### Politics is global and local

The first thing we need to do is be aware both of global influences and the local particularities which create the stage we revolutionaries act upon. The second thing we need to do is, within these structures, identify the problems and opportunities within different sections of the working class mentioned above, the displaced, the settlers and the nomads. In doing this we are identifying areas of struggle because we want to both improve our position in the here and now, and to build the confidence and skills among our class and the sense of collectivity that will be necessary to overthrow capitalism.

For example, what is the structure of the Irish political and economic environment? As in many countries, the Irish economy is increasingly globalised (indeed Ireland is cited as one of the most globalised economies in the world<sup>6</sup>). Also as in many countries the ruling party in Ireland (Fianna Fáil) has adopted a strongly neo-liberal agenda, an agenda which is dismantling a welfare state. Unlike many European countries, we have never had strong social democratic legacy so that our experience diverges from those in Northern Europe and in the UK in that our welfare state has always been weaker. Fianna Fail is a party that has, since the founding of the state in the 1920s, successfully managed to sell itself both as the party of the working class and of big business. Despite multiple corruption scandals it is extremely good at getting itself re-elected. Ireland diverges from its own history (and also from other European countries) in that the last ten years have seen sustained growth in the economy, skill shortages, enormous decreases in unemployment and immigration instead of emigration. Finally, and possibly the factor which has presented the most difficult to us, and has coloured much of what I am



## Work in Ireland

Alex Foti of the Italian Chainworkers group ([www.chainworker.com](http://www.chainworker.com)) coined the term Chainworkers and Brainworkers to describe new types of work. By Chainworkers he means the 'workers in malls, shopping centres, hypermarkets, and in the myriad of jobs of logistics and selling in the metropolis'. By Brainworkers he means the knowledge workers, the programmers, the creatives and the freelancers. How do these categories pan out in the Irish labour market?<sup>13</sup>

In 1996, just over 3 million people were over the age of 15. Of those just over 1.8 million or 58% were in the labour force (i.e. either working, looking for their first job or unemployed). A third of these workers lived in the greater Dublin area. Of those not considered part of the labour force, 34% were working in the home, 27% were students, 25% were retired, and 10% were not in the labour force due to illness or disability.

The big change in Ireland in the last 10 years had been the rapid increase in the number of women in paid employment. Female participation rates rose rapidly from 36.5% to 47.9% during the 1995-2000 period (The EU average in 2000 was 46.9%). Not surprisingly this has been mirrored by a drop in the numbers of women working in the home, from 661, 510 in 1986 to 417, 663 in 2002.

The largest category of workers are indeed the Chainworkers, the unskilled workers concentrated in manufacturing and the service sector (these accounted for almost a third of the Irish labour force). Those in personal services (the waitresses, the cleaners etc) experienced the highest growth rate of any occupation (their numbers grew by 49.7%).

However the second largest category are the blue collar workers found in manufacturing, construction and the drivers. These account for almost 20% of the Irish labour force. Finally the third largest group, are also in a more traditional form of employment, those employed in the public sector (13.5%). So a third of the Irish labour force are employed in the 'newer' service occupations, while a third are in more traditional fields.

How about the Brainworkers? These are a relatively small percentage of workers, representing 7.6% of the labour force. However they are also the category of workers that has experienced the second greatest rate of growth (their numbers grew by 35.6%).

These figures highlight that the numbers of displaced and nomads are growing, but also that a significant proportion of those working in Ireland, continue to be settlers. This has implications for the type of propaganda we produce and the struggles we are active in.

going to say below, is that for almost twenty years the major trade unions have participated in social partnership<sup>7</sup>. This has resulted, for the most part, in stagnant, conservative unions, who have been incapable of capitalising on our economic growth and have atrophied at the shop-floor or grassroots level (the phrase 'couldn't organise a piss-up in a brewery' comes to mind). In the final section of this article, I look at the different segments of the Irish working class in order to identify possible areas of struggle and opportunity.

### The Displaced

Firstly we have the displaced. By this I mean the temporary or insecure worker, what sociologists refer to the peripheral labour force. They are hired and fired according to the whims of the market place. These are the low skilled, the low paid, the woman worker, the young worker, the student and the illegal. In terms of time, here the issue is the increased unpredictability and fragmentation of working hours that comes with working shifts and Sundays.

A key need here is security and protection from the vagaries of the employer and the market. The trade union movement should provide this protection, but here we meet the first shadow of partnership. The experience of unionising has not been positive in Ireland in recent years. Although there have been a few successes in terms of campaigns for trade union recognition<sup>8</sup>, there has also been a string of defeats<sup>9</sup> which reflected a failure on behalf of

the union bureaucracy to fight seriously on this issue. At a partnership level the unions have failed to win the legal right to union recognition<sup>10</sup>. In other instances, once recognition has been won it has only been in the short term. On one hand the employers have managed to isolate and exclude trade union activists, on the other, as partnership has destroyed the local life of the union, the membership see less and less reason to actually belong to the union and membership gradually erodes over time.<sup>11</sup> Finally, high turnover within the sector brings with it all the difficulties of creating a sense of collective identity, solidarity and power within a frequently changing group.

The difficulties are considerable, how do we overcome this isolation and at the same time change the trade union movement in Ireland? This is a problem we have been struggling with, and we have not found any easy answers. In face of such difficulties there could be the temptation to avoid a union focus altogether, yet unions provide the stable support which temporary workers need. Without a union, as activists we would be condemned to a life of continually re-inventing the wheel, continually fighting the same battles over contracts, working hours, pay, working conditions while providing a worse service than our existing unions.

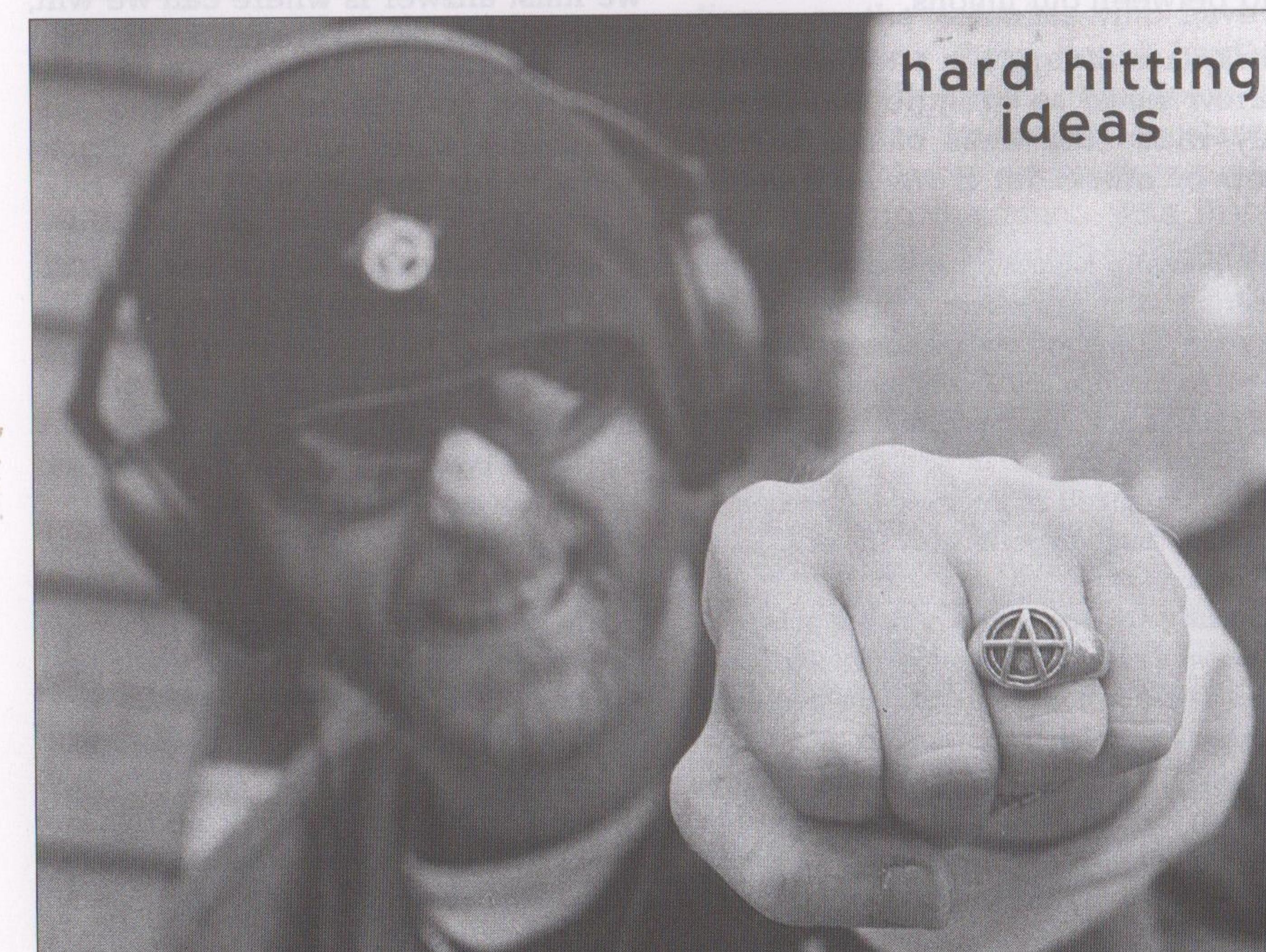
Yet there are some strategies that can be adopted. One is to build networks which work both within and between the trade unions. A first step in this process is to, through our propaganda, highlight the similarities of experi-

ences that exist within these groups, break down the isolating effects of the workplace and of temporariness, to build a sense of collective identity. To those not in unions we can raise awareness of rights that already exist. We can provide encouragement and support when trying to unionise. And critically, after unionising is successful, we can use the networks to force our unions to respond to our demands. It is sometimes assumed, in error, that unions are incapable of organising the transient worker. In a sense we are recreating the struggles of the early trade unions, such as the ITGWU, a century ago.

### The Settlers

The second groups of workers I referred to above are the settlers, those who are in long term, stable employment. These are often unionised, yet thanks to partnership, rarely involved in union struggles. Within the WSM, the attempt to build networks within the unions is not a new strategy, and to be frank, we have found it extremely difficult. We have been most successful when we have addressed this section of the workforce, not in the workplace, but on issues outside the workplace. So for example we fought against the imposition of the water charges (successfully), the bin tax (unsuccessfully) and will probably be faced with another anti-water charge campaign in the new future. However, despite the difficulty in building a grassroots trade union movement, it is not a strategy we should abandon in favour of a focus outside the workplace. Union work is very dependent

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on having people in the workplaces at the time when disputes occur. Though the level of workplace struggle has decreased, occasionally conflicts do emerge. We can't control whether we are going to be in any particular workplace at the right time or place, but if the opportunity does arise for political activity, it would be foolish not to capitalise on it.

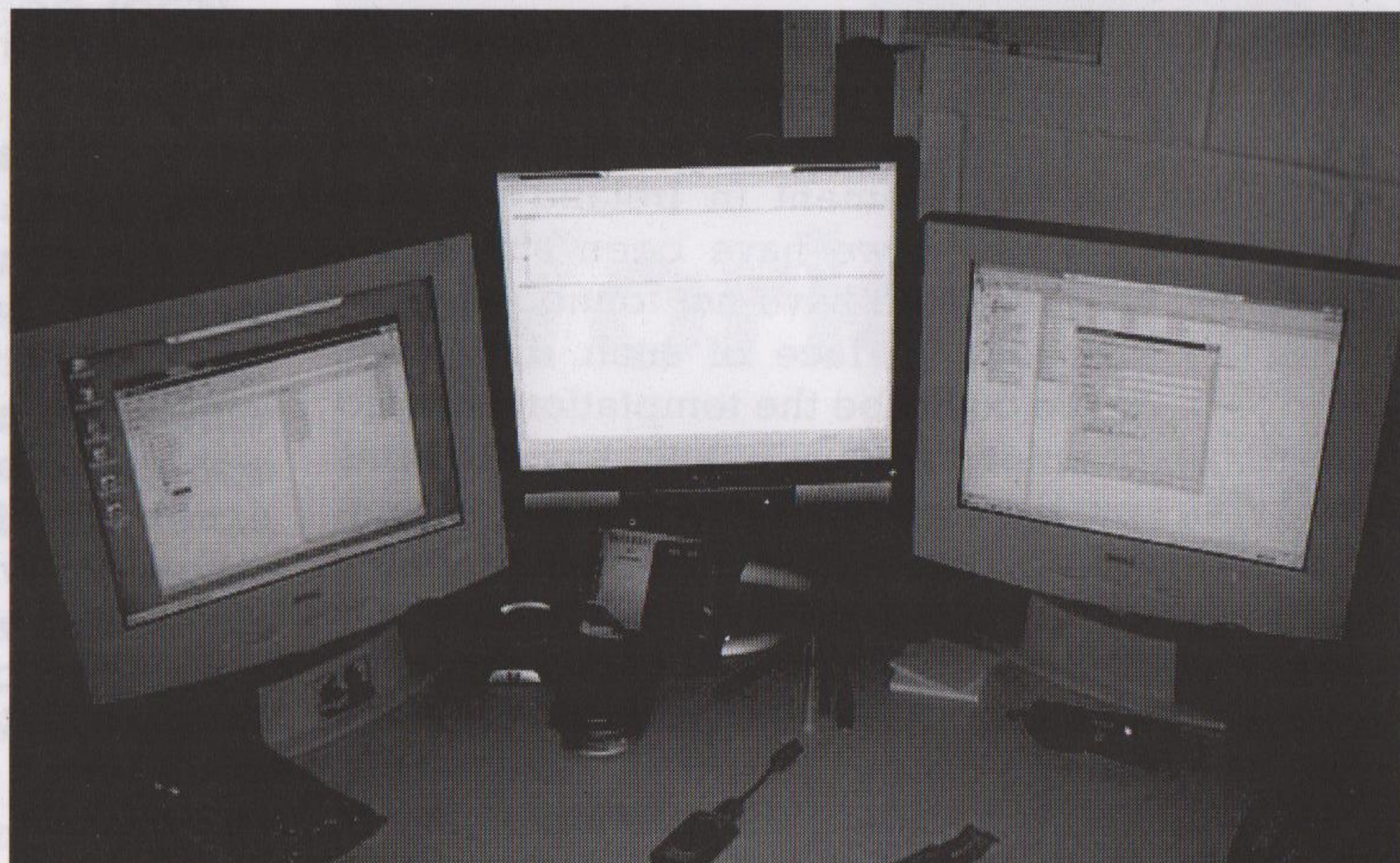
### The Nomad

Finally, we reach the nomad, the highly skilled, highly paid worker whose mobility reflects labour market strength. The unions here have even less appeal. Partnership pay rises of 3-5% per annum (barely in line with inflation) represent a pay cut to those who can expect 10% rise on switching jobs. Even the dot com crash did little to dent their security as it was relatively short lived and many received redundancy packages far in excess of the statutory minimum. It is also a sector in which the dream of getting rich quick and thus escaping work altogether is particularly widespread. Within the workplace, these are difficult to mobilise. However there are aspects of their working conditions which cause tensions. In terms of time, here the issue is an increased vulnerability to long working hours and the ending of the separation between work time and non-work time (for example being on call, that is carrying a mobile phone during non-work hours and being forced to return to the workplace is the need arises).<sup>12</sup>

A more central time issue, which affects both the settler and the nomad, may be the erosion of 'free time' caused by long commuting hours as people are

forced to move further and further in search of affordable housing and the government's prioritising of private transport over public transport.

Whether it be in a computer company or in a supermarket, people co-operate, communicate and work together to create an enormous range of services and goods, the services and goods that fundamentally alter our lives. In a very real sense, the world is of our making. Though most of us are in one way or another part of this enormous collaborative effort, we do not have ownership of our workplaces, we do not have control over what we do. Despite the cooperation that occurs daily, an increasing sense of isolation seems to be the hallmark



of contemporary society. This is a contradiction that creates enormous barriers to those of us who are trying to change society, contradictions that we have to find some way to overcome. However there is no point in adopting a one strategy suits all approach, no point in prioritising one field of struggle above all; instead we need to struggle both in the workplace and between workplaces, in our unions and between our unions.

Workplace struggle is often seen in a narrow sense as struggle that occurs only within the walls of the factory, shop or office. Yet if we look at the

early trade union movement we see examples of workplace organisation been conducted hand in hand with organising outside the workplace. For example, a number of years ago I conducted a piece of research on Irish dockworkers.

As part of this research I came across magazine known as *The Waterfront*, which was produced by one of the dockers' unions in the 1960s. Its by-line proclaimed, that this was 'the paper for the port, produced for the workers, by the workers'. Not only did it seek to present the port workers' side of the story; but they also employed three doctors, introduced a sick and medical pay scheme for all port workers, men and women, Christmas savings schemes and children's scholarship schemes. They arranged socials and cultural events (interestingly this was a Catholic union, so these events often centred around the church - a tactic we aren't likely to copy). Many of the articles were aimed at creating the type of solidaristic identity that we now take for granted. Here was a trade union that managed to organise one of the most insecure workforces, and did so by engaging dockers on a number of different levels; on the docks, in the communities and culturally.

As fragmentation of the workplace continues, we need to examine again strategies such as these. We need to adopt a variety of tactics, some will address the settler, some the displaced, some the nomad, and we need to create networks that will link the struggles of all. In the end the question we must answer is where can we win, because few things are more powerful than victory. ♦

9. Ryan Air, Nolans Transport, Pat the Baker.  
10. While anyone has a legal right to join in Ireland, there is no legal requirement on behalf of the employer to negotiate (ie there is very weak legal support for the right to join a trade union).  
11. For example, this occurred in the archaeology sector.  
12. Though a significant proportion resist and working hours in this sector are lower than those in the UK and US.  
13. Data from the 1996 census as reported in Proinsias Breathnach (2002) 'Social Polarisation in the Post-Fordist Informational Economy: Ireland in International Context', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol 11.1

# After Nationalism...

**I joined Sinn Féin in the mid eighties with many others on the back of what we saw as a radical shift to the left and a commitment to build a 32 county Democratic Socialist Republic. I find myself outside that movement now, thoroughly disillusioned with it and its shift to a left nationalist and social democratic electoralist future.**

by James McBarron



We are many years into the Irish peace process - how many depends on your perspective - but we can at least agree that the Good Friday agreement of 1998 is a key point in the evolution of the process. The current impasse centres largely on the question of accommodating Sinn Féin into the political establishment north and south. Though the IRA was defeated and Sinn Féin began the journey towards an accommodation with imperialism and the southern state, many of the activists and indeed many in the communities from which the republican movement drew its most hardcore support have had a difficulty adjusting to the new realities. This has arisen primarily because of the lies that the leadership of that movement have fed the grassroots in order to keep them on board.

Mostly this has consisted of pretending that the road they are now on is something new and innovative that will lead them to the Republic. But time has taken its toll and the British and Irish states have become impatient of the Adams leadership's slow

softly approach and want the open capitulation of the republican movement, an end to the IRA and the full integration of SF into the system.

This isn't easy either for the republicans or the unionists who have to also abandon their stated hardline approach. (Unionism represents the politics of the former ruling class in the north, almost exclusively protestant and pro the union with Britain, they monopolised power after partition and used this power to build a sectarian little state. Unionist politicians enjoy the support of the vast majority of the protestant working class at election time. Unionists are a majority in the north. The unionist leadership has realised that a carve-up of power with nationalism is their only future hope of any power). The various crises around the process have revolved around these issues.

Of course it is inevitable that Sinn Féin in its current manifestation will go in to the system and fully endorse policing, the courts the prison system, the civil service etc. Sinn Féin have always believed in the use of the

state and the division of people into leaders and lead. All institutions of the state will be accepted and Sinn Féin will become the new and more organised SDLP of the north. They will share in power eventually with a pragmatic and realistic unionist leadership which will emerge more strongly as the old guard die off or become marginalised with time. What we will have then will probably be a government in the north enjoying a large degree of acceptability or at least benign indifference amongst the population. Sinn Féin in the south will follow the well worn path to participation in administering power in the Dail. Outside of the mainstream republican movement some few of those embittered by their experience will hang onto the old politics and recruit, drill, train, fund-raise and prepare for another round at some day in the future.

And us, the working class, well we will again be faced with the same old problems of exploitation, oppression, inequality and constant struggle that we always are. But we will have to fight a movement that once proclaimed itself revolutionary and keen to abolish capitalism north and south but that is now bought and part of the structure. How many good sincere activists will be destroyed, buried in the bullshit of paliametary politics, trying to get the odd pot-hole filled whilst the whole show goes on as before and past dreams of social revolution slowly ebb away to "a favour here or there" and a few dry empty commemorations of past deeds.

If all the peace process had done was end the armed struggle that would have been great, but it has done far more than that. It has strenghtened the states north and south. The struggle for social justice continues. Today fighting the Water Tax in Belfast, on a picket line in Dublin, pushing for abortion rights in Cork, fighting racism in Galway, demanding housing in Derry. All these struggles and many more push our class interests forward. Unifying them in ideas of self reliance, mass democracy and direct action, libertarian ideas, anarchist ideas - that is where the struggle is at. Republicanism will rise again, taking many good young activists to the grave, prison and despair unless we popularise truly revolutionary ideas to act as a positive pole of attraction. ♦

### Footnotes

1. The only exception to the trend toward emigration was the period after we joined the EU in the 1970s.  
2. Crouch, C. (1999). *Social Change in Western Europe*. Oxford, Oxford University Press  
3. Stimpson, Alex (2004) *Mobility in the eEconomy*  
4. Richard, Greg (2001) *Mobility in the European tourism sector The role of transparency and recognition of vocational qualifications*, Cedefop Panorama series, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2001  
5. By working class, I mean the majority who do not own the means of production

and therefore have the most to gain by the destruction of capitalism. I'm not defining class in terms of occupation or income level. As the discussion outlines, the working class is not a particularly homogeneous or unified group.  
6. Ireland ranked as the most globalised of 62 states due to exports. *Irish Times*. Dublin. 8th of January  
7. Social partnership refers to the arrangement whereby the government, the business organisations and the trade-unions come to centralised agreements on a range of industrial issues, including wage increases. This means that that there is very little trade union activity at the workplace level.  
8. The defence of the unions right to negoti-



# The Ghost of May Day past

Compared to many other European countries May Day demonstrations have always been small in Ireland, even in the 1980's when the Stalinist left was much more influential and the unions were much more powerful. By the mid-1990's, with the old left in complete disarray and the union bureaucrats more focussed on partnership with the state and the bosses rather than workers' rights, May Day had become a fairly underwhelming event.

by Dec McCarthy



So, given this dismal tradition why were the explicitly libertarian May Day events in 2004, comparatively speaking, such a success? Of course there was the impetus of a major European Union summit but to understand why anarchists were in a position to organise big May Day events calls for a brief examination of the development of libertarian ideas and practices in Ireland over the past few years.

Obviously, part of the story is the general realignment of the radical left in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism and the subsequent growth of interest in the anarchist alternative. A lot of this can be attributed to the anarchist involvement in the burgeoning anti-capitalist movement. Like countless others across the world the Zapatista rebellion and the massive protests against the institutions of global capitalism have inspired, bolstered and strongly influenced Irish anarchism. The central themes of the alternative globalisation movement

echo and develop ideas that are central to, or complementary to those of anarchism: the practice of direct democracy, the use of direct action, a genuine internationalism, network building, a distrust of politicians and wannabe politicians. Gradually, many of these ideas and practices have permeated beyond anarchism into broader activist circles and these ideas and the dynamism of anti-capitalism has drawn a swathe of new people into political agitation.

Dublin's May Day 2004 was to a large extent the product of this movement with its new models of protest. It is no coincidence that a large number of the activists involved in organising May Day have travelled abroad to various counter-summits, encuentros<sup>1</sup> and conferences; and taken part in the central debates and many of the struggles that have shaped the anarchist part of the alternative globalisation movement. In Dublin the enthusiasm and energy generated by these developments and the appearance of a new generation of libertarians was strengthened by the presence of a small but consistently hardworking group of anarchists active in various campaigns in the city for the past two decades.

## The Alphabet soup war: GG, GNAW, DGN vs. SWP

It was activists influenced by Zapatista solidarity work, radical ecology and anti-capitalism who organised the first

Grassroots Gathering in 2001. This initiative was, in retrospect, one of the most important taken by Irish libertarians in the past few years. Since 2001 the Gathering has been held two or three times a year providing a discussion forum for libertarian activists who want to network and share experiences and analyses. These events, which attracted hundreds of activists from various backgrounds and non-authoritarian political tendencies, galvanised the libertarian left and played a very important role in spreading anarchist ideas and the emergence of new forms of campaigning. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that without the Gatherings it is unlikely that there would have been any large-scale anti-authoritarian protests.

The Gatherings do not function as decision-making bodies but they have given birth to a number of practical initiatives and activist groups. Probably the most significant of these was the Grassroots Network Against War (GNAW), which from 2002 on sought to create a libertarian pole of activity within the anti-war movement. This was separate from the Socialist Workers Party dominated Irish Anti-War Movement who were, in practical terms, trying to ignore the US refuelling at Shannon and who opposed the use of direct action against the war. Simultaneously, a number of punks and anarchist squatters started to make an impact on anti-war events with Ireland's first black bloc actions<sup>2</sup>. These activities met with varying levels of success but for the first time in radical politics in Ireland there was a well-publicised and clearly identifiable libertarian presence on the streets.

So between 2002 and 2004 it was becoming clear that a series of overlapping and interlinked groups and individuals, largely within the orbit of the Grassroots Gatherings, could fruitfully work together on a range of issues. This fuelled a growing sense of confidence and ambition amongst libertarians and in July 2003 at a Gathering in Dublin plans were laid to organise a demonstration against the World Economic Forum<sup>3</sup> meeting in Dublin in October. Grassroots activists, in collaboration with the Irish Social Forum<sup>4</sup>, planned to disrupt the summit. When it was announced that the WEF meeting was cancelled the same activists who later established the Dublin Grassroots Network (DGN) started planning for May Day.

## Organising May Day

Informal discussion of a May Day protest against EU policies began in mid-2003. At the Grassroots Gathering in

Galway in November 2003 plans were discussed in a more structured way. Although a lot of the important details remained vague, working groups were set up that envisaged a May Day closely modelled on previous international summit protests with the aim of either shutting down the bigwigs shindig - or at least disrupting it - and using this as an opportunity to put forward our vision of an alternative Europe.

The pace of activity picked up in the New Year as Ireland assumed the EU presidency.

For the next five months there were regular meetings of the newly formed DGN to discuss what we wanted to do and to begin the practical organisational work for the protest. From quite early on in this process DGN decided that one of our most important priorities was to devise events and actions that would have popular appeal and allow for mass participation. What emerged over the next couple of months was an ambitious four-day timetable of events that was themed as a 'No Borders' weekend. The SWP led coalition 'Another Europe is Possible' also announced that it was going to hold some type of protest over the same weekend but based on our previous experience of SWP fronts we thought it wise to continue our plans separately and discuss possible coordination in the future.

At these meetings considerable time and thought was given to how we might get our message across effectively to people outside of the small libertarian scene and the traditional left. Despite a fairly small group of activists and very limited resources, it was decided to print fifty thousand leaflets explaining our opposition to the EU - one of the biggest print runs of any libertarian propaganda ever undertaken in Ireland.

We wanted to ensure that we couldn't be simply written off or easily marginalised. This was of particular concern because historically the EU has enjoyed widespread popular support in Ireland both as a cash cow for infrastructural projects and various subsidies and by parts of the left as the harbinger of progressive social legislation.

We also wanted to clearly distinguish ourselves from the rather unappealing coalition of nationalists, rabid pro-lifers, racists and other loons who have traditionally opposed the project of

European integration in Ireland. So in the final version of the leaflet we were careful to stress that we welcomed the admission of the people of these countries into the EU per se but that we objected to the neo-liberal policies of an EU run by bosses and multinationals that was intent on the privatisation of public services and tightening border controls. DGN was conscious that lefty whingeing and outrage on its own doesn't often inspire people so the leaflet also tied to outline a positive and constructive alternative to the bosses' Europe. When the leaflets were finally printed up we started distributing them in the city centre and in housing estates around Dublin, and to a lesser



extent in other Irish cities. In addition, thousands of flyers, stickers and posters were printed up and plastered all over the city.

As part of the effort to go beyond the 'usual suspects' activists made contact with refugee groups, the anti bin-tax campaign that was opposing the imposition of neo-liberal service taxes and other campaigns and groups. An international call out to libertarians was also sent out. By February it was clear that a number of English groups were going to respond to the call, the most organised of which was the W.O.M.B.L.E.S who held several meetings in London in preparation for May Day and travelled over for the Grassroots Gathering in Cork in early March in order to network with Irish activists.

## Enter the cop mob

In the run up to May Day the police mounted an unprecedented security operation and media offensive of their own, and their efforts played a massive role in determining what happened over May Day. There was talk of mass arrests and specially trained riot squads. A well-known Garda representative opined that the

police should have guns to confront the protestors. In the couple weeks before May Day things became really ridiculous with the police regularly harassing activists for simply distributing leaflets or fly posting as well as mounting an intensive surveillance operation.

In the couple of days before May Day over three thousand extra cops were drafted into the city and Irish troops were deployed and billeted near Farnleigh house, where the EU leaders would be banqueting on May 1st. The police's new anti-riot toys - water cannon borrowed from the PSNI - were trundled out in front of the media who reported the whole farce in tones

of breathless excitement. The police stated in august and serious manner that they were now ready to defend the great and good against the much anticipated horde of international anarchists. More seriously for the protest organisers, though, was the discovery and closing by the cops of the planned accommodation/convergence centre in a recently squatted derelict house. Worse still, three English anarchists were arrested nearby and held in custody on trespass

charges. The cops then further upped the ante by raiding the homes of two anarchists. This carnival of reaction provided even further testament, for those who needed it, to the boundless vanity of Irish politicians, the craven servility of most of the media and the ability of senior police to talk unmitigated shite.

The arrests and the loss of the convergence centre was to bedevil us over the following days, with many of the international anarchists far from impressed with the set up or DGN's tactical choices. In turn, the attitude and approach of some of the visitors didn't exactly enamour some of the internationals to DGNers. These conflicts over tactics, infrastructure and how to deal with corporate media brings into sharp focus a lot of the more important issues thrown up during May Day and this is discussed more fully in the online version of this article.

## Here comes the weekend

The weekend began with a small demonstration in support of the English arrestees in custody at Mountjoy jail. The first billed event - the Critical Mass cycle - put fears that people would have been too intimidated to take to



the streets, to rest as 600 people turned up on the Friday evening.

Early the next day a worryingly small group, even given the tardiness of some Irish anarchists, witnessed a series of street theatre pieces against Fortress Europe. The police on the other hand had no problem getting up early and police lines and crowd control barriers were in place all over the city while vans full of riot police criss-crossed the city and a surveillance helicopter followed us overhead. On top of this, the cops had, without warning, imposed a de facto ban on the planned Saturday evening protest by declaring our long publicised meeting point for the Bring the Noise march a no go area. All the same the mood and numbers picked up as we finished our No Borders protest and we gathered to 'Reclaim the City'.

Reclaiming the city consisted of a circuitous, RTS-style<sup>6</sup> wander around the city centre. This moving carnival briefly halted as activists dropped a huge banner about the housing crisis from the roof of a recently evicted squat. This was followed by a mass break-in at a privately owned park in one of the posher areas of the city centre. Thousands of picnicking anarchists enjoyed the sun, chatted, listened to live music and old 78s on a wind-up gramophone - temporarily returning the beautifully appointed Fitzwilliam Park to the commons. Then we crossed the city to blockade a Top Oil petrol station as this company has been helping refuel US planes on their way to Iraq. Because this had been a regular target of Irish anarchists the cops had pre-empted us and when we arrived there was a solid line of police guarding the forecourt, resulting in a far more effective and hassle free shut-down that we could have hoped for.

### Bring the noise

As we made our way to the hastily chosen alternative meeting up point for the 'Bring the Noise' march it was clear, despite our worst fears, that a sense of momentum and excitement had built up over the previous week and the day was going to be a success. All along Dublin's main street the cops were guarding the banks and the crappy fast-food outlets but in the middle there was a crowd of thousands. People continued to flock towards the march, including people from the 'Another Europe is Possible' rally that had finished some time earlier. Impromptu speeches began. As the crowd of about 3,000 moved off the chants and shouts grew to a crescendo and as we passed through the inner city the protest swelled to about 4,000 people. The sense of resolve, spontaneous revolt and joy was infectious and to

# Learning from May Day: Anti-Capitalist Strategy

## direct action, militancy and building the movement

The experience of May Day brings up us back to some of the perennial questions thrown up by counter-summits protests: how do we broaden our movement and what role do direct action and confrontational tactics have in that process. These are, of course, the issues that have been mainstay of *Red and Black Revolution* debates over the past few years but have been usually viewed through the prism of events outside of Ireland. The following article is a personal account of the Dublin Grassroots Network's approach to such issues in relation to May Day and goes on to argue for increased tactical flexibility from anarchists within the anti-capitalist movement.

### DGN and direct action

The two defining, and in Irish politics novel, characteristics of the various Grassroots groups -including DGN - has been the advocacy of non-hierarchical organisation and an insistence on the importance of direct action in protest. This emphasis on direct action has undoubtedly helped libertarians carve out a political space for itself. However, it is clear from May Day and other events that Grassroots groups have planned over the past three years that we are primarily focused on spreading libertarian ideas and regard direct action as only one, albeit vital, element of libertarian struggle. This approach has meant that at least as much time and effort has been spent on making persuasive arguments and distributing leaflets as planning actions.

Furthermore, many of those actions could be characterised as "fluffy", "moderate" or even simply symbolic. Some of the visiting protestors thought that we should have been much more confrontational. I would argue though, that our approach was principled but pragmatic and that we had to take local sensibility and political experience into account. I think this is why May Day was a relative success. What is important is that we communicated our ideas to a fairly large amount of people and we did so without compromising ourselves. This doesn't mean I think we did everything perfectly or that the same approach would yield the same results in the future but simply that at that particular time in Ireland these were sensible choices.

To discuss this properly I shall first clarify what sort events DGN envisaged when planning the protests and what level of confrontation we imagined

this would entail. The overall strategy and the main aim of the organisers of the No Borders weekend was to plan events that could potentially involve large numbers of people (including any acts of civil disobedience). As street confrontations are, more often than not, determined by the cops it was difficult to know in advance how all this would pan out but the actions were devised to minimise the possibility of arrests and to avoid physical confrontation without giving away our right to protest.

So generally, over the May Day weekend DGN chose to defy rather than confront - more akin to a pink/silver bloc approach than black bloc tactics - and The Critical Mass, the No Borders picnic, the RTS, the Top Oil Action and the Bring the Noise march, and the mass direct action at Fitzwilliam Square are all examples of this. Many of these actions had some element that could have been deemed illegal but the hands-off policing policy employed for most of the weekend meant that this never became an issue.

Early on in the planning process disruption tactics such as blockades were also mooted as was the possibility of direct action at the banquet centre itself but nobody within DGN advocated targeting property or employing militant tactics against the police. Most activists, anarchist and non-anarchist alike, thought that widespread property damage or attacking the cops would be counterproductive and inappropriate in an Irish context. At the same time DGN consistently reaffirmed our support for a "diversity of tactics" in resisting neoliberalism both at home and abroad. DGN organisers were conscious of how at anti-capitalist events elsewhere divisions and splits had emerged between various alternative globalisation factions over the issue of militant tactics and because of this strived to avoid the terms violent or non-violent to describe the planned protests.

### In Ireland, one bloc fits all

So why did DGN chose this "fluffy" approach? First of all Grassroots and its spin-off activist groups are broad libertarian coalitions which includes people who are convinced pacifists and this has definitely had some influence on Grassroots initiatives. But the question then remains why most of the anarchists within DGN, who are not pacifists, fully supported this approach. In practical terms, DGNers knew that we were not a small part of a general mobilisation, we

were wholly responsible for whatever mobilisation took place.

The small size of the anti-capitalist movement in Ireland and the magnitude of the security operation meant that militant action would probably attract very few people onto the streets and, in all likelihood, result in beatings and arrests. In the long term it was also thought that such forms of protest would alienate people and provide a pretext for the criminalisation of anti-capitalist activity in the future. However, more importantly these choices also reflect in a very fundamental way the political orientation of most Irish anarchists, including the WSM, who believe that mass participation and direct action should be one of the main objectives of anti-capitalist activity. This does not mean that we oppose other forms of protest and resistance but that we think that this orientation to "mass politics" is more likely in the medium term to build the confidence and momentum of radical social movements.

### Push it, push real good

In the run up to the May Day weekend it was impossible to know if groups apart from DGN were intending to use more militant tactics and we were concerned to accommodate a diversity of tactics while ensuring that there was a clear demarcation between groups that wanted to use different methods of struggle. The obvious logic of such a demarcation is to give people participating in protests the choice of what sort of actions and risks they want to take. To this end the DGN organisers of the Bring the Noise demonstration met with most of the international visitors before May Day. It was agreed that any group who did not want to abide by the general guidelines drawn up by the march organisers, including using "any form of offensive physical confrontation", should do so away from the main march.

This is why the most confrontational action of the weekend, taken by the "pushing bloc" at the Ashtown roundabout near Farmleigh, was done separately from the main Bring the Noise march. This bloc was made up of a mixture of foreign activists including the Wombles<sup>5</sup>, some DGN activists and Irish black blocers. Their attitude was that it was important to contest the boundaries imposed by the state on protest so when the DGN march finished they emerged from the crowd, largely masked up and in formation, and advanced on the police lines. With only a hundred or so people within the bloc and another few hundred from the Bring the Noise contingent behind them there never was any possibility of breaking through the police lines. In fact, I don't think, even if every single

person at the protest joined in, this would have been a possibility without the use of molotovs and other weapons. This was never on the cards and consequently the whole incident had a stagey quality as if we were all playing our allotted roles in a grand spectacle of rebellion.

However, the pushing bloc did not see the action as an exercise in futility but a visible and empowering act of resistance. It is open to debate whether this action was a positive thing for libertarian politics in Ireland but my own opinion is that, on balance, the pushing bloc's symbolic confrontation was an important part of the May Day weekend and a good, if unplanned, example of diversity of tactics in action. The pushing bloc could certainly not have acted without the existence of DGN's larger protest and although their action had no chance of success it served a purpose by showing that through solidarity resistance is possible.

### Tactical flexibility and strategy

May Day shows that, as a movement we need to avoid being boxed either by others or by ourselves by defining ourselves simply as the militant direct action wing of the anti-capitalism. Popularising our ideas and methods of struggle can take many forms and May Day worked because we took this into account when planning our actions, dealing with the media and cooperating with groups outside DGN. Unpredictability, imagination, and a willingness to defy any limitations imposed either from within or outside will, I believe, broaden and strengthen anarchism. Sterile purism, dogma and formulaic thinking, on the other hand, will ensure that anarchism remains an obscure tendency of left wing thought confined to dusty rooms above pubs. The difficulty is, of course, to be tactically flexible without abandoning the passion and the combativity at the heart of the anarchist tradition. This demands that we are scrupulous in assessing our own activities and clearly distinguish between media stunts, symbolic protest and genuinely effective direct action. In that spirit, the worst lesson to draw from May Day would be that same tactics will necessarily work in the future or that we can avoid confrontation and still achieve our aims.

Anarchism is nothing if it is stripped of its willingness to confront power and the tactical choices made over May Day are not in any way a blueprint for future struggles. We have quite rightly criticised the old left for ritualistic and meaningless forms of protest and we need to examine our own politics with the same rigour. If we are simply going through the motions, whether repeating the same type of symbolic protests or property damage at a summit, we will end up as bad as the Trots. ♦

music, foghorns, whistles and roars we marched for over an hour towards the banquet centre.

Many of us were surprised that the march got as far as it did but as we came within half a kilometre of Farmleigh house at the Ashtown roundabout we saw the police lines. We came to a halt eighty metres in front of the cops and water cannons. The end of the march was announced and the largely masked up 'pushing bloc' came forward with arms linked and approached the police lines accompanied by a sizeable number of protestors from the DGN march and the odd pisshead. After some pushing and the throwing of a few fairly ineffective missiles like half empty cans and plastic bottles, the riot police replaced the uniformed Gardai and there were a number of baton charges. At this point one uniformed policewoman was taken to hospital with a superficial head injury. The 'pushing bloc' was broken up and there were a number of scuffles.

Then came the moment the hacks, the senior cops and perhaps even a few of protestors had been waiting for - the water cannon were deployed. After spraying the protestors there were some more scuffles. This prompted an ill-advised sit down protest by a handful of people and some wonderfully surreal antics involving dancing protestors and a large bearded man scooping up some of the water being sprayed by the water cannon and throwing it back at the tender.

The police, not known for enjoying gentle mockery, moved forward at this point and they began to aggressively push the protestors back down the Navan Road. After the fracas at Ashtown Gate the police had broken an arm, sprained an ankle, cracked several heads and inflicted numerous other minor injuries on marchers and arrested 28 of them. This was the 'May Day riot' that was on all the front pages the next day and although we had spent four days on Dublin's streets engaged in various forms of protest none of this existed as far as the media were concerned. There had been a 'riot' in which the only serious injuries were sustained by demonstrators.

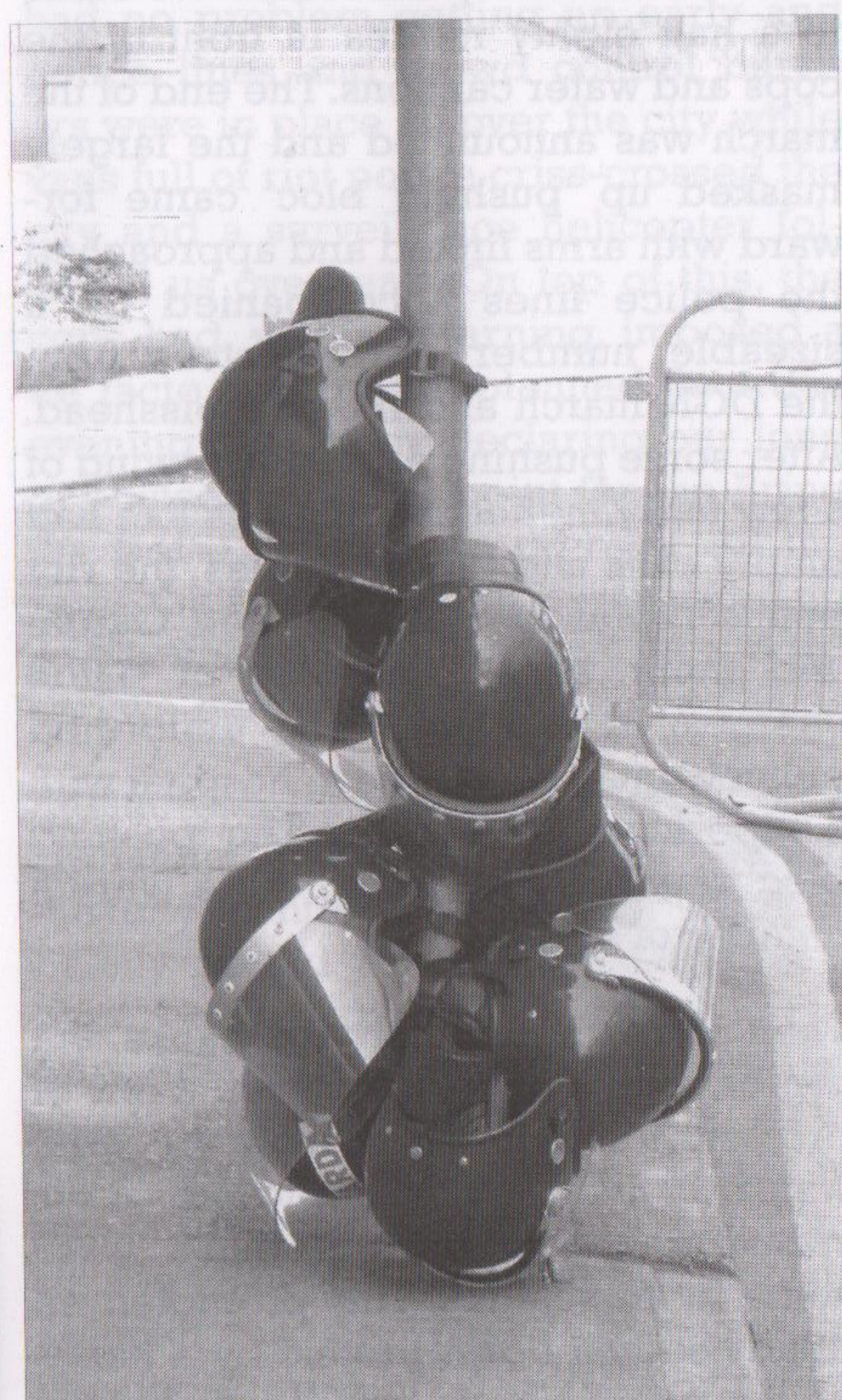
Early the next day a couple dozen people made their way out to an accommodation centre for asylum seekers north of Dublin as a small gesture of solidarity. Monday began with another solidarity demo for the arrestees which was followed by the last May Day event - a city centre RTS. After some huffing and puffing by the Gardai around one of the sound systems the party kicked off and the paranoia, stress and tension were danced away in a celebration of



freedom and resistance well into the evening.

## Aftermath - Protest and criminalisation

Of the twenty-eight people arrested



after the disturbances at Ashtown Gate twelve were held in custody without bail after a special sitting of the courts. Just as with the English anarchists charged with trespass in the run up to May Day the courts acted with perhaps unprecedented severity treating very minor charges with great seriousness. Many of the May Day cases are still waiting to be heard but it has become clear from some of the cases that have come before the courts that the judiciary and the cops are continuing to deal with May Day defendants with great zeal and unusual severity. The intention behind this is twofold: it retrospectively justifies the absurdly large police mobilisation on May Day and it sends out a message to anyone thinking of questioning the status quo in the future.

The charges against the English anarchists were summarily dismissed when, six months later, the court finally heard their case. The judge really had no option but to do this as the police case against them was almost amusingly shoddy. Nonetheless, the state got their pound of flesh; due to punitive bail conditions they had to put their lives on hold for nearly six months living away from home separated from friends, family and comrades.

The criminalisation of protest is a European wide phenomenon, and

# Learning from May Day: Organisational Problems

## 1. DGN fucks up with accommodation

A couple of days before May Day the police discovered and shut down the squat that was intended to serve as a convergence/accommodation centre during the protests. Although the 100-150 or so international activists were all found somewhere to sleep, this loss obviously caused difficulties. Without a proper convergence centre in which to debate and discuss issues related to the protests many of the international activists felt excluded and blamed and resented DGN for not providing what they regarded as basic facilities for a protest like May Day. On the other hand, a large number of Irish activists felt they were doing their best in difficult and stressful conditions and that the visitors were treating DGNers as disreputable tour operators rather than comrades. Unsurprisingly, over the week a very discernible them and us attitude developed between some Irish and English anarchists. (It should be noted that the visitors were a very heterogenous group and 'some' means only some).

This led to further difficulties when the Indymedia centre began to serve as the default convergence centre with people hanging around, eating and drinking. This was not what the Community Media Network (CMN) had agreed to when it had made their premises available to Irish Indymedia and it ended up creating tensions and misunderstandings between people from CMN/Indymedia and people from DGN. CMN/Indymedia had no problem with meetings being held in the building but understandably felt that if the place was treated as a social centre it would undermine its role as an alternative media hub. On the other hand, some of the visitors believed that Indymedia, as a constituent part of the anti-capitalist movement, should make the space available to them because DGN hadn't provided any other options. This underlying tension flared up in innumerable little incidents. At one point tempers were so

intimidation of this sort is to be expected even in response to mildly confrontational protest. Nevertheless, such consequences demand a sober and dry-eyed assessment of what was really achieved by May Day.

## So was it worth it?

In the immediate aftermath most of the

frayed that CMN activists were pushing to have the Indymedia centre shut down early because of the behaviour of some international activists.

The lack of solidarity and the rudeness of small minority of visiting activists was not the real cause of the problems though. The blame rests with us in DGN for not thinking through the consequences of issuing an international call out without having the capacity to provide the basic infrastructure for visiting protestors.

Why did this happen? While many people in DGN have had a lot of experience organising protests and campaigns of various sorts we had not, until May Day, organised anything that included the sort of logistical support that an international call out demands and we underestimated the work that it would involve. The group dealing with accommodation provision was too small and included activists who were already burdened with an extraordinary amount of work. We should have collectively made much more of an effort to support them or made the decision that we were not in the position to provide accommodation much earlier. This highlights one of the observable drawbacks of the working groups model that we used when people are overstretched; difficult and problematic tasks, such as accommodation provision, get doled out as a way of taking them off the agenda rather than really dealing with them collectively.

Wisdom in hindsight is a fairly useless luxury but it is also worth reflecting on how we took an international model and applied it wholesale to a local context without entirely thinking it through and how that ended up colouring the perception of a good number of the visiting activists. As effective network building both between various elements of the Irish anti-capitalist movement and international activists is one of the secondary aims of events like May Day this stands as one of DGN's greatest failings over

60 or so people in DGN who had a hand in organising the events felt exhausted but exhilarated that we had pulled off such an ambitious programme with little more than enthusiasm, hard work and a couple of thousand euro. The protests reinvigorated May Day and were a milestone in libertarian activity in Ireland. It is also undoubtedly true that through Indymedia, DGN leaflets and

the weekend.

## 2. DGN's Legal support

Similarly, DGN's legal and defendant support work was more piecemeal than it should have been. The main reason for this is that once again we left an important job in the hands of too few people and we failed to understand just how much preparation and effort is needed to do such work effectively. Because of this, going into May Day, we didn't have a proper bail fund and ever since May Day a small number of people doing legal support having been trying to play catch up.

In the run up to the protests the legal team distributed thousands of bust cards with a solicitor's phone number and legal briefings to prepare people for the possible consequences of protesting. It appears though that many of the people who were arrested near the Ashtown Gate were new to politics and had never taken part in anything confrontational and did not have this information. This meant many of those arrested were processed without knowing what was likely to happen to them or whether they could expect support. This was further complicated by the fact that the Gardai refused to allow the arrestees to make their phone call until Sunday, which slowed down the response of the legal support group. Nonetheless, they were nearly all contacted one way or another over the weekend. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the media furore about the riot, the vast majority of defendants contacted opted not get involved in a defendant support group or accept any help from DGN. For those who did opt to accept our solidarity money was and is continuing to be raised but there is no May Day defendants group to speak of.

Two of the English anarchists arrested did ask DGN for solidarity but were unhappy with the level of support they received. DGN's lack of organisational coherence is part of this story because, despite some individuals' best efforts on this score, we failed to make defendant support a collective priority. Some of this is a question of experience but for something as important as legal support this is not acceptable and this aspect of the May Day experience begs political as well

the DGN media group's work innumerable people were exposed to anarchist ideas for the first time and this has led to a partial shift in the public perception of anarchism, from an obscure and pointlessly nihilistic philosophy to an active and combative movement for social change.

It is also worth reiterating that one of the real strengths of May Day was that

as organisational questions.

## 3. DGN's failings as an organisational model

These problems were not just oversights, they are serious political problems. We need to develop sustainable legal support structures within the libertarian movement but there are a number of obstacles to this, not least the organisational form of DGN. One of the fundamental strengths of the DGN network model is that it is easy to get involved, have a say, work on a given issue and then, if you choose, take a break. This is very attractive in certain respects but as the network is primarily a network of individuals, rather than groups, it can lack organisational coherence and consistency. This is compounded by the fact that many of the people in DGN have only been working with each other for a relatively short period and the informal patterns of cooperation and interdependence that might compensate for such organisational weaknesses haven't fully developed yet. This has meant that problems and issues can present themselves at a time when DGN is not meeting very regularly or at all and often nobody takes up the slack. This is in contrast with more established anti-capitalist networks elsewhere, which consist mainly of groups that have had a longer experience of working with each other.

Potentially, this could create other problems: not least unclear decision-making, the development of informal hierarchies, and a lack of accountability. It also seems as if the structure of DGN makes it impossible to plan political activity in a paced and strategic manner. For instance, after May Day many activists felt completely burnt out during a period which saw an anti-immigrant referendum and Bush's visit to Ireland and this definitely hampered the libertarian campaigns in response to these two events. Politically, such an unstable network is also very unlikely to build the sustained links with communities and workplaces that could make anti-capitalism a genuinely subversive force. It is not clear at the time of writing whether DGN has a future or not in its current form but hopefully these very serious failings will be addressed by the anti-authoritarian community in the future. ♦

the public heard arguments against the European superstate on the basis of a positive vision of the future rather than the worship of an idealised and romanticised past. These achievements are even more impressive if one takes into considers the fact that unlike many other European countries 'civil society' in Ireland, as represented by NGO's, the trade union movement, community

workers and the like has yet to be genuinely mobilised by the demands of the alternative globalisation movement. It goes without saying that without this sort of support it is more difficult, in terms of infrastructure and resources, to mount a weekend of protests.

It is impossible at this point to measure the long-term impact of these events but it is clear that the experience of May Day has consolidated the small but significant gains made by libertarians in Ireland over the past decade. May Day has bound the small anti-authoritarian community more closely together and confirmed that we can work together collectively and have an impact. This sense of hope and confidence is reflected in a range of ongoing activities; work on setting up social centres, preparations for the G8 summit in Scotland, a new anarchist bookshop in Dublin, benefits, meetings and various political campaigns, and also in the fact that anarchist groups such as the Workers Solidarity Movement have seen a rise in membership.

I think the other most immediate gain is that May Day (and the activity of GNAW that preceded it) put anti-authoritarian ideas at heart of anti-capitalist activity in Ireland and created space for new forms of struggle. Of particular importance is the emphasis on non-hierarchical organisation, direct action and support for a diversity of tactics amongst anti-capitalists. On a more subjective and ephemeral level the distinctive atmosphere of May Day is also worth mentioning because May Day was more than anything an empowering and defiant carnival and that may be one of its most enduring contributions to protest culture in Ireland. All of this doesn't really mean that much in the short term as anti-capitalism is a very small tendency in Ireland. But if these ideas are to thrive we will need a genuine diversity of tactics - something that was impossible until we loosened the cold and rigid grasp of Trotskyism on the political expression of dissent. With continued hard work we can begin to influence major political campaigns and social movements ensuring that direct democracy and direct action remain become an integral part of protest in Ireland.

## Towards a conclusion: May Day in context

May Day was imagined and planned in a similar way to hundreds of other anti-capitalist events around the world, and this links DGN to a global movement for radical change. But what does that mean in an Irish context? Anti-capitalism as a set of hopes, values, ideas and practices has been successful in creating a space for anarchism but nonetheless, as I have



said, at the moment Irish anti-capitalism remains marginal; a movement in embryo that has only the shallowest of roots in workplace and community struggles. May Day 2004 was bigger than we expected but it was not the expression of a mass movement of any sort. For instance it was noticeable that over the weekend that we failed to attract significant numbers of Irish workers threatened by neo-liberal policies. They may well have been there at the march but they were not there in an organised fashion.

In contrast, in Genoa part of the Irish contingent was a group of bus drivers against privatisation with their own banner. It is a small and telling detail that these workers or others in a similar



## Book Review

# To Live

By Mick Parkin, self published, £5 incl.  
P&P from mickmcparkin@aol.com

For many people the 'civil war' within the Civil War that occurred in Spain between 1936-39 is a difficult business to understand. Not only were many different organisations involved, but it was set against the background of an even larger conflict that in itself was rife with brutality and betrayal. Although it appears at times to be an impossible quagmire to make sense of, Mick Parkin has succeeded admirably in his short novel *To Live*.

Mick Parkin will be known to some that read these pages as the one-time publisher of *Sinews*, the English-language publication which played a valuable role in publishing articles on the split in the CNT in the 80s. Parkin is a fluent Spanish speaker and has lived for

situation didn't do the same in Dublin. Similarly, the weekend didn't include any action in support of the non-payment of waste charges introduced as part of the neo-liberal agenda of privatising public services. This was discussed and several attempts were made to see this happen but because libertarians were a minority within a campaign dominated at a central committee level by Trotskyists these attempts came to nought.

Finally, our No Borders weekend was not backed or attended by any organised immigrant groups. Clearly, we are currently far from being a 'movement of movements'. To change this and create broader networks will need patient, assiduous campaigning and increased levels of organisation on the libertarian

left. It will, I believe, also demand greater ambition and much more sophisticated strategic thinking on our part.

May Day was a whispered threat, a promise to the future, a party for the sake of a party, an example of direct democracy in action but in the end only a very small beginning. ♦

### Footnotes

1. International gatherings hosted by the Mexican Zapatista rebels.

2. For a discussion of the 'black bloc' tactic see Red & Black Revolution numbers 6 and 7, [www.struggle.ws/wsm/rbr.html](http://www.struggle.ws/wsm/rbr.html)

3. The WEF is a pro-privatisation body which 'represents the world's 1,000 leading companies'. A think tank and lobby group for the super-rich.

4. The ISF describes itself as 'a gathering for everyone opposed to war, racism and the implications of corporatized globalisation or neo-liberalism'. [www.irishsocialforum.org](http://www.irishsocialforum.org)

5. The WOMBLES (White Overalls Movement Building Libertarian Effective Struggles) are a loose anti-capitalist group in Britain that dresses in white overalls with padding, helmets and breathing protection at protests. They should not be confused with the animated children's television characters, the Wombles.

6. Reclaim The Streets want fewer cars and more public transport in cities. Have blocked off streets and held parties many times, both in Ireland and abroad. To confuse the cops they begin with a march which suddenly stops, a sound system comes out and the party kicks off.

many years in Spain. He now resides in Scotland where he is a member of the Scottish Socialist Party.

*To Live* begins with the theft of twelve tanks from the production line at a metal works plant operated by POUM aligned workers in April 1937. The CNT, the anarchist aligned general union of workers, appoints two of its members, Ramon Alvarez and Vicente Rossell, to investigate what has happened. Ramon is recently returned from Zaragossa Front while Vicente is a worker in the Co-operativa Vigor, a worker-run factory. As the story follows the movements and discoveries of these two comrades we get a wider picture of balance of views and ideas at the crucial time in the course of the Spanish Revolution.

*To Live* does not waste a lot of time with detail - an achievement in itself given the large amount of information that is still conveyed to the reader through dialogue and descriptions about situations and places. It moves swiftly between the main characters' investigative work and their personal lives, giving the book the quality of a good, fast-moving read. One of Parkin's strengths is dialogue, and this

is cleverly used to convey a sense of the debate that is raging about the future course of the revolution. The story begins in late April 1937 and closes just as the main Telephone Exchange in Barcelona is attacked by the Guardia Civil at the behest of Stalinist PSUC - an event that was to mark the end of revolution in Spain. In the interval we catch a glimpse of what life might possibly have been like for the many participants who struggle admirably during those days to change the course of history. What emerges is a world under siege, where the more far-sighted are able to see the dangers that are approaching but are unable to do what is needed to affect the necessary change. The story of the Spanish Civil War? Hardly so, but in some respects we do see another dimension to the struggle here, and that is useful.

I wasn't too happy with the end - nothing to do with the politics as such - but this doesn't distract from what is a good book about a time we rarely see represented in fiction. Contact the author by email to get a copy of this book. ♦

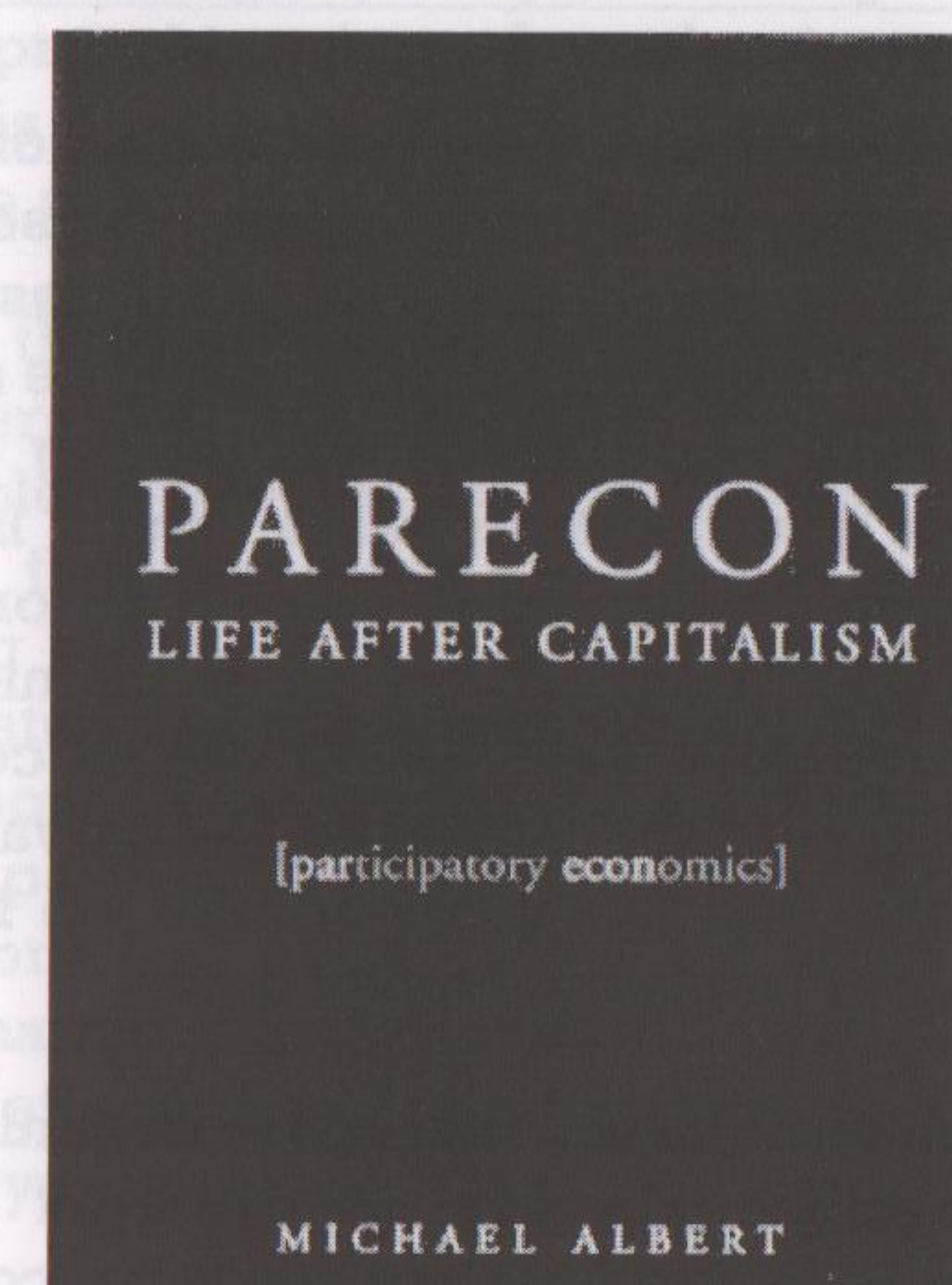
reviewed by Kevin Doyle

## Book Review

# Parecon

## life after capitalism

By Michael Albert, Published by South End Press



Reviewed by Cian Lynch

Anarchists, in common with all radical proponents of social change are continually asked what their vision of a new society/economy is. What is the "Master Plan", the "Blueprint" that will be followed? We are justifiably wary of outlining any "Blueprint" for an anarchist society that would suggest that it is THE solution and should be followed to the letter - who would enforce this great master plan after all!?

Any set of theoretical ideas about a new society and economy is only a model and we should all remain flexible in any approaches to its implementation. All of us together will ultimately decide co-operatively on which elements are worthy, which need to be modified, and which may be discarded.

This book was written by Michael Albert who helped to found Z Magazine and South End Press. Z Magazine is an excellent progressive political magazine in the U.S. and is also published in an e-mail newsletter format, which I highly recommend.

The book outlines a radical vision of social and economic reconstruction whose core principles and values, Solidarity, Equity, Diversity and Self-Management, are very familiar to anarchists. A quick glance at the table of titles referenced shows up such titles as: Daniel Guerin's - "Anarchism", Kropotkin's - "Mutual Aid", and Rudolf Rocker's "Anarcho-Syndicalism". Indeed as will be quickly discovered, the entire vision is built on well-known anarchist values.

What is interesting though, is that the word "Anarchism" does not appear anywhere in the main text, and will only be discovered if you look through the short bibliography at the very end.

Was Albert trying to hide what he saw as a "dirty secret" here? I admit this is just a conjecture, but it seems hardly accidental that a book so firmly founded on anarchist principles should so carefully avoid mention of the word anarchism anywhere in the text.

The book is subdivided into 4 parts, part 1 contains an introduction to some basic economic terms and definitions - ownership, allocation, division of labour, remuneration, decision making and class structure. There follows an analysis of economic systems and how they match up to the goals of Parecon: (1) Equity, (2) Self-Management (3) Diversity (4) Solidarity and (5) Efficiency.

Capitalism and Centrally Planned "Socialism" are thoroughly picked apart here and Albert shows how each system will undermine each of the anarchist values I mentioned: Solidarity, Equity, Diversity and Self-Management.

Part 2 contains a comprehensive vision of participatory economics that outlines in some detail the economic structures that are being proposed. We can summarise the core Parecon elements as:

- (1) Social ownership of the means of production
- (2) Direct democratic councils (Workers and Consumers)
- (3) Balanced job complexes
- (4) Remuneration based solely on effort and sacrifice
- (5) Allocation through participatory planning

It would be impossible to cover these in any real depth here, but suffice it to say that these economic structures

do a very good job of describing how one type of anarchist economy might function in practice. A key difference between Parecon and an Anarcho-Communist economy is the continued existence of a form of "money", which some might instinctively balk at, with the implication that some form of "market" economy will continue to exist in Parecon. However I believe this fear is quite unfounded.

The fundamental allocative structure of anarcho-communism, "of each according to his need" is also fundamental to Parecon. Any extra remuneration received by individuals will be due to their own personal effort or sacrifice. To clarify, if someone works in more difficult or dangerous conditions than average, or puts in more hours of work than average, they would be remunerated for this. On the other hand, there is no remuneration for "contribution to output" - e.g. a stronger worker may cut more sugar cane in a days work than a smaller, weaker worker, but they are not paid any differently (at least on the basis of their output).

There is also social ownership of the means of production and participatory planning, organised in a federative and co-operative structure throughout all industries, so there is no "market" system as such. One of the key things to keep in mind is that prices in a parecon are generated and modified through participatory planning, starting off annually as merely "indicative", and consequently passing through several rounds of adjustment. In these pricing adjustment phases, changing productive capacity and demand is taken into account in addition to any arising social or environmental concerns.

Overall, I believe Parecon provides a comprehensive vision that is worthy of serious consideration and debate among those who are interested in more progressive economic structures. For those looking for practical examples, some of the economic structures of Parecon have been implemented on a small scale in South End Press, a publishing co-operative, which Michael Albert helped to set-up. ♦

The entire book: *Parecon "Life After Capitalism"* is online at [www.zmag.org/books/pareconv/parefinal.htm](http://www.zmag.org/books/pareconv/parefinal.htm)

The Parecon website is: [www.parecon.org](http://www.parecon.org)

The South End Press website is: [www.southendpress.org](http://www.southendpress.org)



# Creating Solidarity in the slums of Santiago

continued from back cover

organisation was a useful tool. We had to argue against the Leninist tendencies that have their own project, where there is no room for Popular Power, for bottom up organisation.

At that time, we were very reluctant to mix with non-anarchists groups. But as we were not going to make the revolution all by ourselves, we had to participate with other leftist groups. But we have to be very clever: we know they will try to use us. The Communist Party (CP), for instance will always look for voters, and we, as well, are looking for the popular movement to grow, but also the anarcho-communist movement to grow.

So we got closer to some of those groups, and we learnt a lot from them. First, because we had no experience in legal matters, we needed that to form committees of *allegados*<sup>2</sup>. Because at that time, in our analysis, we realised that one of the biggest problems in the area where we are working, Peñalolén, was the big numbers of *allegados*. There are at least 10,000 people in that situation, or much more, so you are talking of around 3,000 families. We started organising in that conflict, but the experience of the *pre-universitario* was vital, especially all that we learnt about assemblies, propaganda and mass organisation.

So what could we offer to people? Well, the people weren't going to come to us because we were anarchists and want the revolution. They came to us because we gave them a quick and dignified way to get a house. The government, since 2002, due to some trade agreements, had to start building houses called "dynamic housing with no debt". Those are undignified houses, unfinished, with no roof or stairs, for instance, that look more like matches' boxes. But you pay a small amount of money, and then it's yours. And apart from this, the houses were quite far away from the workplaces, and in this moment, Spanish business are willing to buy all the public transport, so it seems that the cost of travelling will increase at least three times.

## Q. What did you decide to do?

What we are doing is to use a law that allows the *SERVIU*<sup>3</sup> to expropriate lands for public benefit - that law, in the past, was used by Pinochet to rob the lands of the Mapuche (the largest indigenous group in Chile). Now, we are using the same law that the bourgeoisie used to its own benefit, now to attack it.

In Peñalolén there are many fields without use, that they bought for peanuts through the town hall, in a fraudulent way, and now they are speculating with them, and they look forward to selling those lands with expensive houses, generating well

off areas in a very poor sector of the city, as they're already doing. Those houses cost so much, that a working class person will be able to afford it only if he saves his entire wage, without spending a penny, for one hundred years, which is impossible. Those lands belong historically to a poor area, and we are reclaiming them, [and this] puts the people in confrontation with the State and the private investors. And the more people we have, the more pressure we can make.

In Peñalolén, we have organised 600 families already, in different committees. In San Luis, we started a committee and we have 30 families, quite few, but I moved to Las Torres, and there are lots of young families that live like *allegados*, and we have organised 80 families. In Lo Hermida we have 150 families, and so on. So now we are the biggest organisation in Peñalolén, and the biggest organisation of *allegados* in Chile. The organisation is called *LUCHA Y VIVIENDA*<sup>4</sup>, (*LYV*), and we [the radical left] have an internal network as well, because in *LYV* there's a bit of everything: people from the Communist party, people that are just looking forward the elections, people that just want to get a house, people that vote for the right because they have no idea of politics.

## Q. What are the concrete struggles that *LUCHA Y VIVIENDA* is leading?

To sum up, we started to meet in September 2003, people from different political groups and others without any militancy, to analyze the problem. The people of the CP tried to put forward their slogans and we didn't care really. We were more interested in how you bring people together, how we organise, the attributes of the delegates and representatives. So we started organising meetings to let the people know about their rights and about the red tape: how to open an account with the *SERVIU* and how to fill the *CAS* files.

These files are the instrument used to measure poverty in the country, and are full of traps in order to show a better image of the country, as its results are handed to the World Bank. If you are *allegado*, for instance, they will tell you "you live in a house with 4 rooms, and have 2 TVs", while the reality is that you live with all of your family in just one room of the house, and have no access to tv because other families own them, so they distort reality this way and have less chance of getting a social house quickly.

That's the first part of the work, to make ourselves known, to gain the trust of the people, to make them believe and then to bring more people together. And we need more people, because if we have 500 families, we can demand land; if we

have 1000 we are going to get it immediately, it's a matter of pressure.

So we sent a letter to the town hall, introducing ourselves as *LUCHA Y VIVIENDA*, and we wanted them to know our demands and to recognise that in Peñalolén there is a housing crisis. If they admitted the crisis, we would have made the first step to get authorisation to get the lands, and the Ministry would have had to give the final authorisation to build. But they didn't like the idea, so we organised three marches to pressure them, and the mayor would tell us "we want to talk with the leaders" and we all went inside, with the rank and file neighbours, all to talk. And thus we showed a new type of leadership, one of a more popular nature, of a more libertarian nature. We had problems in the beginning with the word "leader", but we understand it as being the visible head of the movement, but always obeying our rank and file, and we reflect that in our practice.

So we won that first phase of the struggle: we got the signature of the major, and now we pressured the Ministry and the Deputies' chamber to use the law of expropriation, and that's our struggle now. We want to show to all of Chile, that an organised group of people can gain a fight with the government. And obviously, we won't stop when we get the neighbourhood: we'll stay there to build it, live in it and make it revolutionary. We'll keep on going, because the problems won't stop when we solve the housing problem: there is still the problem of health, education, unemployment.

## Q. Tell us as well about the experience of the house debtors?

That's another big movement. To get a house, people pay some money and then have to pay the rest of the mortgage. And when the business was in the hands of the State, there were lots of people whose debt was "forgiven" because of their poverty. But now the debt is privatised. Now the *SERVIU* handed all this problem to *Inverca*, a company that builds the houses and then gets the debt. So now the cost of housing has gone to the roof, and these people of *Inverca* are really ripping off everyone in the most indecent possible way.

Now, there is a big group of debtors in Chile. Because wages in Chile are not enough to live; they are alright if you never get sick, if you don't have to buy yourself clothes, if you eat just once a day and only bread. So you just don't get money to pay the mortgages they are asking for. And the debt increases due to high interest rate. So we formed committees of debtors so the whole community would start paying a "poor mortgage", according to what the people could actu-

ally afford.

You have to understand that the people don't want to be beggars, they do want to pay for their house. I know it's not to be a beggar to demand a right, but the people see it as begging. We made the demand that people pay according to their own capacity our first step.

And our further demand is the abolition of the debt. Since the year 2000, the people with a lot of debt are being transferred to the Banking system, and there the interest rates are a real rip off. So we are asking to be assimilated into the "dynamic housing with no debt" system, because the majority of the houses, are basic public housing, really crap housing, you know them. But that system started only in 2002, so the people that got the same sort of houses in 1997, though finished houses, have to pay a lot more. So we are organising the people and starting demonstrations.

This is the work with more potential for the future, as there are more debtors than *allegados*. But we are working on unemployed people's committees, as well; we are collectively bargaining getting access to work. Because if the town hall has employment for 40 people, and we have 80 organised, we rotate them, and make some work one month, the others the next month. So we create solidarity where the government is creating conflict, because they just throw the offerings and let the people fight each other to get a job. For that reason, organisations of this type are necessary.

As well, we are organising collective canteens, where people are facing hunger together and satisfying the basic need of having something to eat, there are also some cooperatives being formed of the *cartoneros*<sup>5</sup>. They are collectively getting the hard paper from the rubbish, and collectively they are selling it. There are experiences of this in Brazil, that some of our comrades are familiar with<sup>6</sup>.

So we generate solidarity among the ones who are surviving, among those with more need. All these last ones are recent experiences and I wouldn't be directly involved with them.

## Q. What do you think has been the contribution of the anarchist-communists to the popular movement?

One of the things we've set up in the popular organisations, and something that now is common currency, are the assemblies. [Setting up assemblies] in the past was difficult, because of the Leninist view of leaders and masses, and on the other hand because the struggle against the dictatorship didn't let you be so open.

We've organised people from the bottom up, and with good results. There are more people coming to the struggle, because they're part of it, they're active mem-

bers, they make decisions. I think we've brought fresh air to the popular struggle, as we've made changes that affect the social relationships. Now you don't get someone preaching at you from the stage, but there is discussion and that's the best to educate our neighbours.

The other thing, is the nature of the leaders: leaders that are listening, that are accountable to the rank and file. Because we know that you need people to be organising at the front, but they have to be mandated. And the bargaining now isn't anymore done behind closed doors. In many parts still that's the case, for trade unions for instance. But we know we are changing that and that'll have a powerful effect over the struggles in a couple of years.

But there is more to be done. The direct criticism of the State that we are constantly doing, is something we need to push, for the people still trust a lot the politicians and believe a lot in the State.

## Q. And what's the contribution you think the experience of community organising has brought to the anarcho-communist movement?

Quite a lot. In the beginning<sup>7</sup>, many anarchist circles were only linked to cultural stuff and just met in the centre of the city. We went to lots of demonstrations, with lots of papers, flyers, but we didn't have a real influence. But then, little by little, we started linking to certain struggles. But we didn't just merge them, as part of the people, we started creating struggle as well. We weren't there for the occupations of land of the 90s, but we inherited all that. Popular struggles have helped anarchism to come down to earth, to be involved in mass practices, where we have learned to be more open and had matured.

We look to the past and think it's a bit funny the way we tried to imitate European models of squatting, and we thought that that was the revolutionary thing to do, and we failed to realise that you can't copy other people's struggles just like a mould. And it was all because of our lack of experience... there were other experienced comrades, but they were working other issues. Now we are dealing with something real, with a powerful struggle that really tackles the problem of housing. We started in the wrong way, ignoring the struggles of our people, while we were busy imitating squatters in Europe. It took us some time to realise all this, but now we are on the right path, regardless that we still need more political developments.

## Q. How do you see the relationship between the libertarian movement, the community struggles and the prospect of revolutionary change in Chile?

We have to be realistic, because hunger is haunting Latin America and Chile is used as an example of neoliberalism.

So I imagine that they'll inject loads of resources for it to stay in a dead-like peace. But there are many things, like the Free Trade Agreements (FTA), that will create radical changes for they're attacking us from all over the place. And our task has to be to keep on going with the project of building up socially, to create the conditions to smash Capital.

Right now, the majority of the population are satisfied with the economic model, because during the governments of *la Concertación*<sup>8</sup>, the proletarians had access to consumer goods that in the past were exclusively for the elites. But we know as well that this created social relationships that were far more enslaving, like the use of credit to hook people into consuming.

At the same time, and as the circus of democracy and the market opportunities go on, people are starting to realise what lies behind the curtains, especially in moments when the FTA show the real nature of the system. We work in the slums because we know that there lie the biggest contradictions. We are bringing tools for the developing social movement, and we know that as it grows, they will be very useful.

Among the left of the world and here in Chile, there isn't a revolutionary project that is more coherent than libertarian communism, as every other attempt of revolution has failed because of the problems posed by power, the State and Capital, that was never abolished. It is a big challenge, as our project is the only one that remains standing. ♦

## Footnotes

1. In Chile in order to have access to University, you have to successfully pass a test called PSU. In order to prepare students to be successful in that test, there are *Preuniversitarios*; *Preuniversitarios Populares* are free and were born as a response to the big class differences expressed in the levels of preparation to the PSU, sprung out of the inability of the working class to pay *Preuniversitarios* and of the lower quality of public education.

2. Are families without a house of their own usually live with relatives of friends overcrowded in one room, which generates a lot of tension and problems. But despite all the hassle this situation can create, the solidarity of the people makes that, in spite of everything, there are no expelled from the house (G.G.)

3. Ministry of Housing and Urbanism.

4. Struggle and Housing

5. Unemployed people that, in order to survive, and in the face of the complete absence of social security, have to gather hard paper in order to sell it and make a living.

6. The FAG, *Federación Anarquista Gaúcha* from Porto Alegre, has work of similar type.

7. That is from the early to mid 1990s.

8. Alliance of parties (mainly Socialist Party and Christian Democrats) that replaced in government the dictatorship of Pinochet. They have been in power since 1990.