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ANARCHISM AND IRELAND



WORKERS
SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

The Workers Solidarity Movement is an anarchist organisation. We believe in a revolution by the working class which will overthrow the bosses and their governments, and create a society run and controlled by those who actually produce the wealth of the world. We believe that it is possible to live without government and to put in its place councils and assemblies where the "ordinary people" can decide what happens to this wealth. We believe in the equality of all and that maximum solidarity is needed between workers and other oppressed groups if we are to defeat those who live off our sweat.

Anarchists are against chaos

When you hear about anarchists you are led to believe that we are mad bombers. Every other group that lets off a bomb is immediately labelled 'anarchist' whether they be nationalists, socialists or even fascists. The myth is created that we believe in violence for the sake of it.

The other myth is that anarchism is chaos. It is claimed by politicians, bosses and their hacks in the media that if there was no government there would be chaos.

But did you ever wonder about society today and come to the conclusion that perhaps we are already living in chaos. At the moment thousands of builders are on the dole yet homeless people need houses to live in. The price of butter is scandalously dear yet every year the EEC has to deal with a butter mountain. Thousands of people are dying of starvation around the world yet millions of pounds are spent every day on nuclear arms which have the potential for wiping us and the world out.

You might ask why is this so? We say that there is one big reason — PROFIT! At the moment we live in a society in which there are two major classes — the bosses and the workers. The bosses own the factories, banks, shops, etc. Workers don't. All they have is their labour which they use to make a living. Workers are compelled to sell their labour to the boss for a wage. The boss is interested in squeezing as much work out of the worker for as little wages as possible so that he/she can maintain high profits. Thus the more wages workers get the less profits the bosses make. Their interests are in total opposition to each other.

Production is not based on the needs of ordinary people. Production is for profit. Therefore although there is enough food in the world to feed everyone, people starve because profits come first. This is capitalism.

What is the State?

There are other classes in society such as the self-employed and small farmers but fundamentally there are workers and bosses whose interests are in opposition to each other. For workers needs to be fully met we must get rid of the bosses. But this is no easy task. The bosses are organised. They have the media on their side. They also have the *state* and the force of the army and police that go with it. We only have to look at the miners strike in Britain to see how the forces of the state can be used against the working class. We only have to look at the North to see to what extent the ruling class are prepared to go to protect their interests.

The state (i.e. governments, armies, courts, police, etc.) is a direct result of the fact that we live in a class society. A society where only 7% of the people own 84% of the wealth.

The state is there to protect the interests of this minority, if not by persuasion

Photos on pages 7,9 and 11 by Derek Speirs (IFL) and on pages 15, 17,18,19 and 20 courtesy of the Kate Sharpley Library.

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then by force. Laws are made not to protect us but to protect those who own the property. Look at how the Ranks workers were flung into jail when they decided to fight for their jobs.

Compare this with the treatment handed out to the multi-nationals who were able to take £500m in profits out of the country tax free without the government even knowing about it. If you think that the state is there to protect you, think about the fact that PAYE workers pay 88% of all income taxes while the rest — farmers, self-employed, bosses and multi-nationals pay only 12% between them.

Elections: Putting numbers on a piece of paper

We are led to believe that the state is run in our interests. Don't we have elections to ensure that any government not behaving itself can be brought to task? Democracy is about putting numbers on a piece of paper every four years. We are given a choice alright but between parties who all agree with the system of a tiny minority ruling the country.

People often say that if we really want to change things we should run in elections. Take a good look at this idea and it becomes clear that it cannot be done if we are to remain true to our anarchism.

Electioneering inevitably leads to revolutionaries foresaking their revolutionary principles. Look at the so-called Labour Party. First of all they do not go to the people with a clear socialist message. They go for whatever is popular and will ensure that they get elected. This becomes more important to them than educating people about the meaning of socialism. It also means that they look on the mass of voters as mere spectators. People are seen as voters, not as people who can be actually involved in politics and bringing socialism about. We do not accept that we should hand over the running of our lives to 160 odd people who are not accountable and can basically do whatever they like.

Can socialism come through the Dáil?

There is another reason why we do not stand for election. Socialism cannot come through the Dail. If we look at a country like Chile we can see why. In 1973 the people elected a moderate socialist government led by President Allende. This democratically elected government was toppled by a CIA backed military coup. Repression followed in which the workers movement was smashed and thousands of militants lost their lives.

This happened for two reasons. The Chilean socialists did not understand that real power is not in the parliament but in the boardrooms of the multinationals. It is those who have the money who hold real power. Socialism does not come through electing socialists to the Dail but through the direct action of workers taking control of the factories and land. For us socialism can only come from below, not from the top.

This point is not understood by the so-called socialist parties of Europe which are in government at the moment. In France, Spain and Greece 'socialist' governments are pushing working class peoples living standards down because international banks want loans repaid and multinationals want to maintain profits.

The second reason is that the Chileans did not smash the state but tried to capture it peacefully. We must understand that the army and police are against us. They are there to protect the wealth of the ruling class. To make a revolution it will be necessary to use violence, not because we believe in violence for the sake of it, but because we recognise that the ruling class will not give up its wealth without a fight. Allende refused to arm the workers and so made the job of the military much easier.

Socialism from Below

Central to our politics is the belief that ordinary people must make the revolution. Every member of the working class (workers, unemployed, housewives, etc) has a role to play. Only by this participation can we ensure that anarchism is made real. We believe in a revolution that comes from the bottom up and is based on factory and community councils. Freedom cannot be given, it has to be taken.

This is where we disagree with what is called the "revolutionary left". While they say that they agree with all this they still hold to a belief that a party is necessary to make the revolution *for* the people. Most of them base their ideas on Lenin who believed that workers were only capable of achieving what he called "trade union consciousness". According to him they needed a party of professional revolutionaries to make the revolution for them. The result of this thinking is to be clearly seen in the Eastern Europe of today. What we see in Russia has nothing to do with socialism. Power rests in the hands of a tiny party elite. The state is the boss and the workers are still exploited and told what to do. This is state capitalism. Workers do not control their workplaces. All power is held by the bureaucracy. A workers revolution will be necessary to overthrow this bureaucratic elite and bring in true freedom.

Of course the likes of the so-called Workers Party have no problem supporting the Soviet system because that is what they aspire to. They were very quiet when Solidarnosc was suppressed in Poland. They support the Russian system up to the hilt so they decided for the sake of electoral advantage to stay quiet and not say anything. The reason for their attitude is that their vision of socialism is one where the state controls all. Socialism will come through nationalising everything. They would have no problem turning Ireland into a satellite of the state capitalists in Moscow.

So we say it is up to ordinary people. Some ask is this possible? Would it not be chaotic? Of course not. At the moment capitalism would collapse without the support of the working class. We make everything, we produce all the wealth. It is possible to organise production so that the needs of all are met. It is also possible to create structures that allow everyone to participate in making the decisions that affect them.

Democracy and Freedom

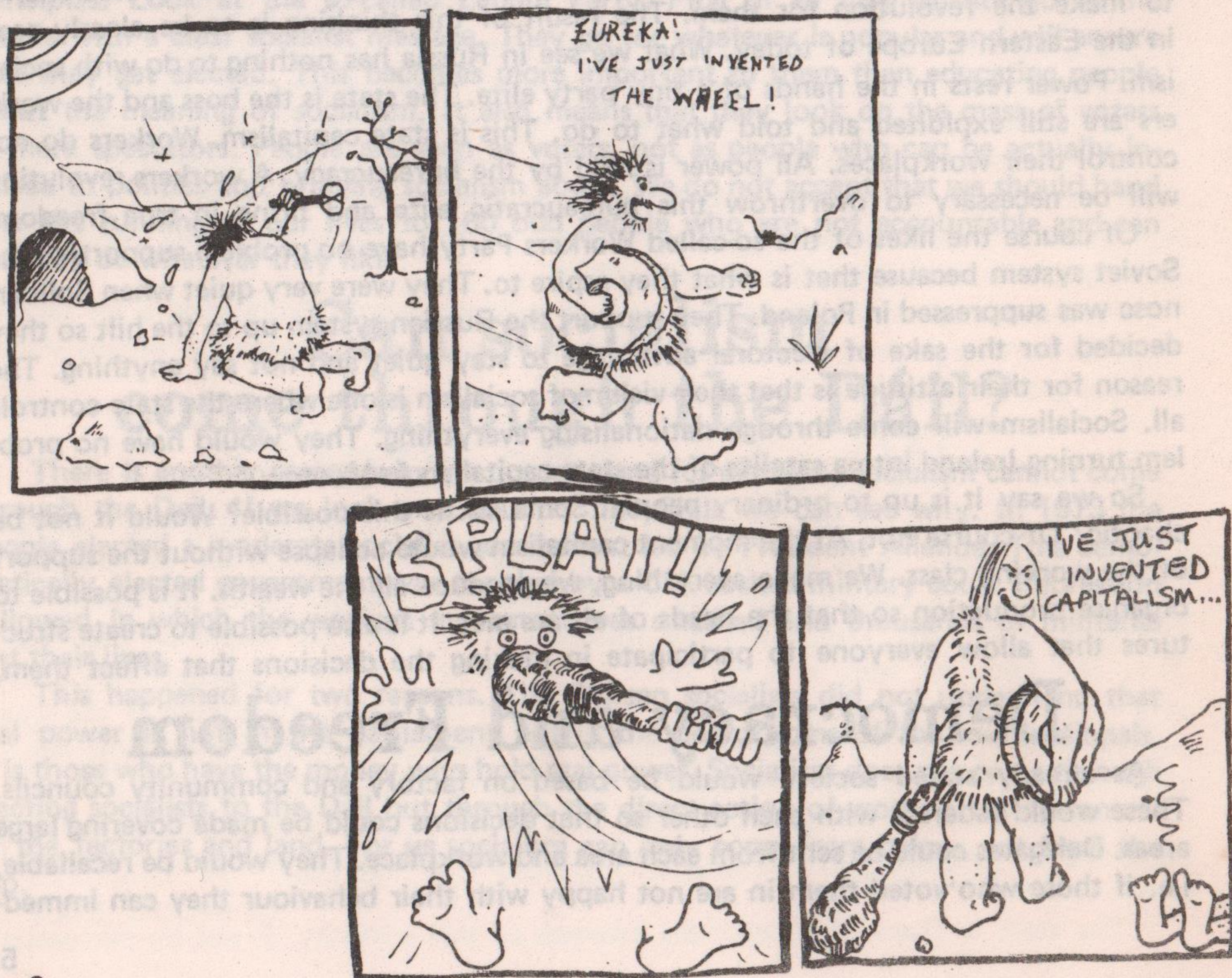
As already stated society would be based on factory and community councils. These would federate with each other so that decisions could be made covering large areas. Delegates could be sent from each area and workplace. They would be recallable, i.e. if those who voted them in are not happy with their behaviour they can immed-

...ately replace them with someone else. With the new technology it will be much easier to involve lots of people in making quick decisions.

Within this society there would be genuine individual freedom. Individuals would have to contribute to society but would be free to the extent that they do not interfere with the freedom of others. Fundamentally we believe that people are good and if they won freedom would not easily give it up or destroy it.

So where does the Workers Solidarity Movement fit into all this? We are a new organisation — small in numbers but rich in ideas. We don't set ourselves up as "the leaders who know it all". We believe that our ideas are good and are worth trying out. We believe it is necessary for those agreeing with them to organise together so that our ideas will spread and be understood by a lot more people. To us it is important that those revolutionaries active in different areas are brought together so that experiences can be shared and learned from. We believe that in day-to-day struggles or in campaigns it is important that the message is driven home that only a revolution made by the working class can give us the freedom to run society so that all our needs are met. We see our role as encouraging the initiative of working people and arguing for structures which allow people to take part in local or workplace activities.

We do not believe that the revolution is around the corner. We believe that making it is a slow process during which there may be huge jumps forward. Overall though it is a slow process of spreading ideas and building peoples confidence to bring about change. We accept that winning reforms and short term demands are all part of this process. Below we set out some of our ideas in relation to the Irish society of today.



for women to be really free we have to smash capitalism and build a society based on anarchism. We disagree with those feminists who think that all you have to do is for women to become bosses and politicians to achieve equality. We want to destroy the existing power structures. We also disagree with those who think that men are the cause of womens oppression. We do not deny that men gain from this but we identify the source of this oppression as the class system, not individual men.

Womens oppression is not purely a struggle for women as it is a class issue but we hold that women have the right to organise seperately because it is they who suffer the oppression. We do believe, though, that the priorities of the womens movement have reflected the fact that it largely consists of middle class women. We believe that it must become more relevant to working class women. Our priorities are those issues which immediately effect thousands of working class women e.g. work, childcare, housing, etc.

We believe in the right of women to control their own fertility. Women must be free to decide to have children or not, how many and when. Thus we believe in the right to free contraception and abortion on demand.

For these demands to be won as many working class women as possible must be brought together to build confidence and defeat the isolation that comes from being in the home. Thus in campaigns to win these demands our emphasis is on building in workplaces and on the estates where women are directly affected.



Young women who occupied their factory take to the streets of Drogheda

Anarchism in Action

You probably agree that what you have read so far are mostly good ideas. You probably accept that the wealth of society should be distributed equally and also that ordinary people should have more say in the running of their lives.

Like most people who hear about Anarchism you probably believe that it is a good set of ideas but...."unfortunately it would never work. People are naturally greedy and selfish, if there was no government to look after our interests there would be complete chaos".

It has already been stated that we believe capitalism is chaos. It does not and never can meet the needs of ordinary people. On the other hand, a society run by those who actually produce can. This kind of society is not myth we have dreamed up. At various stages of our history it has become a reality. Working people have taken their destinies into their own hands and made a success of it. Far from being naturally greedy and selfish these experiences actually show that given the right conditions people can co-operate and act in a spirit of mutual aid.

In the Beginning

As Anarchists we trace our tradition back to the first International Working Mens (sic) Association where the Anarchists formed a distinct tendency influenced mainly by the ideas of Michael Bakunin. Since then Anarchism has always been deeply rooted in the working class. Contrary to popular belief Anarchists do not spend their time plotting in back rooms. For most their activity means bringing their politics into the daily struggles of the factories, the offices and the communities. Anarchists have been involved in all major modern revolutions. They have been there arguing and fighting for the right and necessity of working people running society as opposed to any so-called "socialist party" or bureaucratic elite.

Russia

"We say to the Russian workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionists: above all continue the revolution. Continue to organise yourselves solidly and unite your new organisations: your communes, your committees, your soviets. Continue, with firmness and perseverance, always and everywhere to participate more extensively and more and more effectively in the economic life of the country, continue to take into your hands, that is into the hands of your organisations, all the raw materials and all the instruments indispensable to your labour. Continue the revolution. Do not hesitate to face the solution of the burning questions of the present. Create everywhere the necessary organisations to achieve these solutions. Peasants, take the land and put it at the disposal of your committees. Workers, proceed to put in the hands of and at the disposal of your own social organisations — everywhere on the spot — the mines and the subsoil, the enterprises and the establishments of all sorts, the works and the factories, the workshops and the machines".

Golos Truda Russian Anarchist-Syndicalist paper
August 25th 1917

The Russian Revolution was truly a turning point in modern history. For the first

time workers took control and asserted their right to run society. At the time of the revolution there were about 10,000 active Anarchists in Russia, not including the movement in the Ukraine led by Nestor Makhno. There were at least four Anarchists on the Bolshevik dominated Military Revolutionary Committee which engineered the seizure of power in October. More importantly, Anarchists were involved in the Factory Committees which had sprung up after the February Revolution. These were based in workplaces, elected by mass assemblies of the workers and given the role of overseeing the running of the factory and co-ordinating with other workplaces in the same industry or region.

Anarchists were particularly influential among the miners, dockers, postal workers, bakers and played an important role in the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees which met in Petrograd on the eve of the October Revolution.

It was to these factory committees that the Anarchists looked as the basis for a new self-management which would be ushered in after the revolution. They resisted all efforts to undermine the Committees and take away their power.

The Anarchists had co-operated with the Bolsheviks in seizing power from the ruling class, believing that once captured power could be diffused. It was not long before they saw that the real intention of the Bolsheviks was to take power and keep it. Their concept of socialism did not allow them to trust in the ability of ordinary people to run society in their own interests. Power was wrested away from the Factory Committees and placed in the hands of bodies controlled by the Bolsheviks. Firstly they were subjected to control by Bolshevik-dominated trade unions. These unions were then put under the thumb of the state, which was totally dominated by the Bolsheviks. Once the Anarchists' usefulness to them had ended the Bolsheviks ensured they were suppressed. Their papers were closed down and many of the activists arrested.

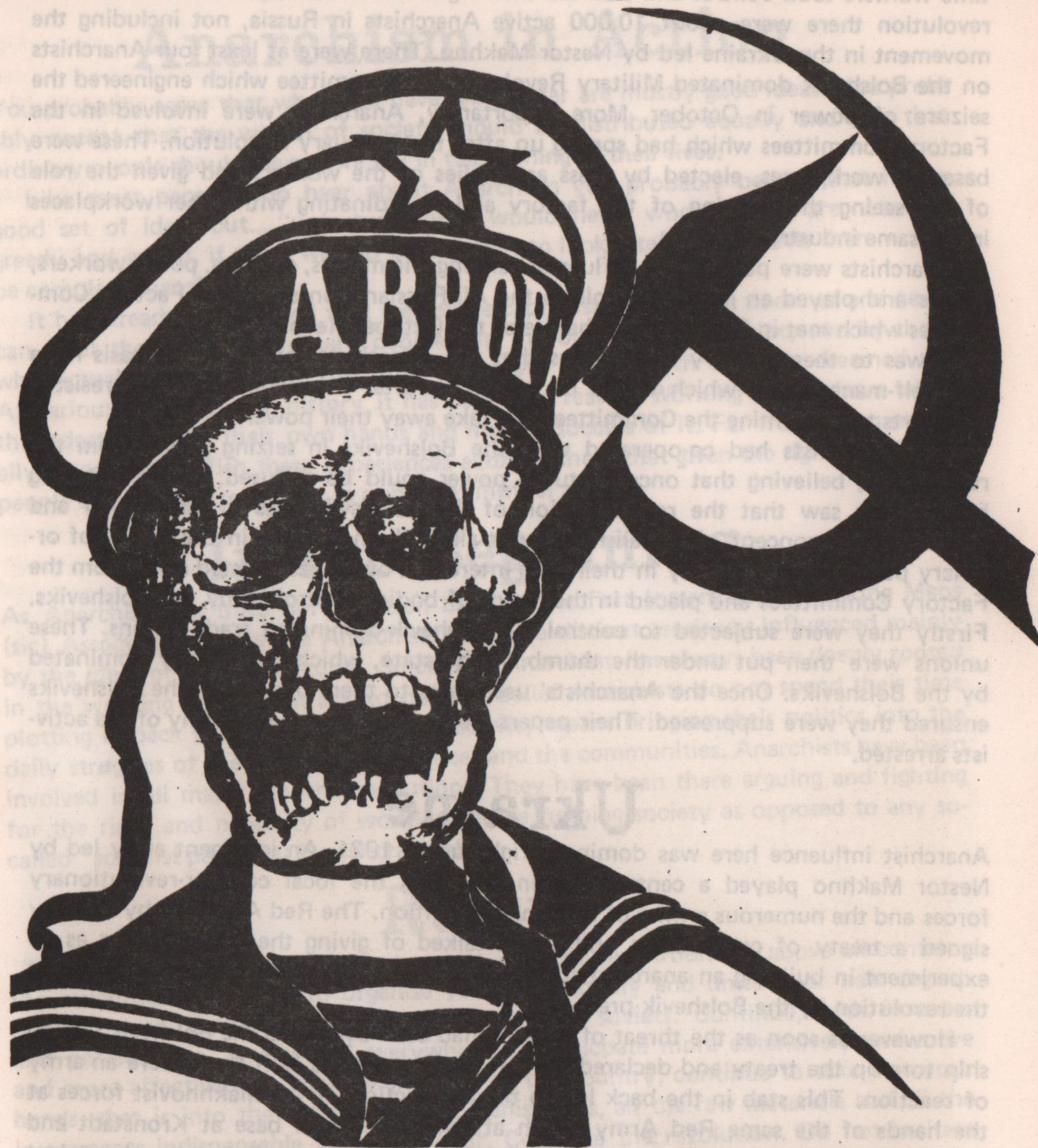
Ukraine

Anarchist influence here was dominant right up to 1921. An insurgent army led by Nestor Makhno played a central role in defeating the local counter-revolutionary forces and the numerous armies of foreign intervention. The Red Army led by Trotsky signed a treaty of cooperation and Lenin talked of giving the Ukraine over as an experiment in building an anarchist society. The Makhnovists were hailed as heroes of the revolution by the Bolshevik press.

However as soon as the threat of invasion had been overcome the Bolshevik leadership tore up the treaty and declared war on the Anarchists as if there were an army of reaction. This stab in the back led to the destruction of the Makhnovist forces at the hands of the same Red Army which attacked the naval base at Kronstadt and murdered the revolutionaries who had been in the forefront of the struggle against the Tsar and the Provisional Government. Their "crime" was to resist the new elite and demand workers power and freedom for all revolutionary organisations.

Collectivisation

The achievements of the Makhnovists were not only military. As their army moved through the Ukraine they encouraged and helped the setting up of collectives among the peasantry and farm labourers. Often this had to take second place to the need to fight and defeat the varied foreign armies of occupation. What was important was



1921-1981 Kronstadt

that it was proved, even in the conditions of war and invasion, that production could be organised to benefit all rather than to line the pockets of a few.

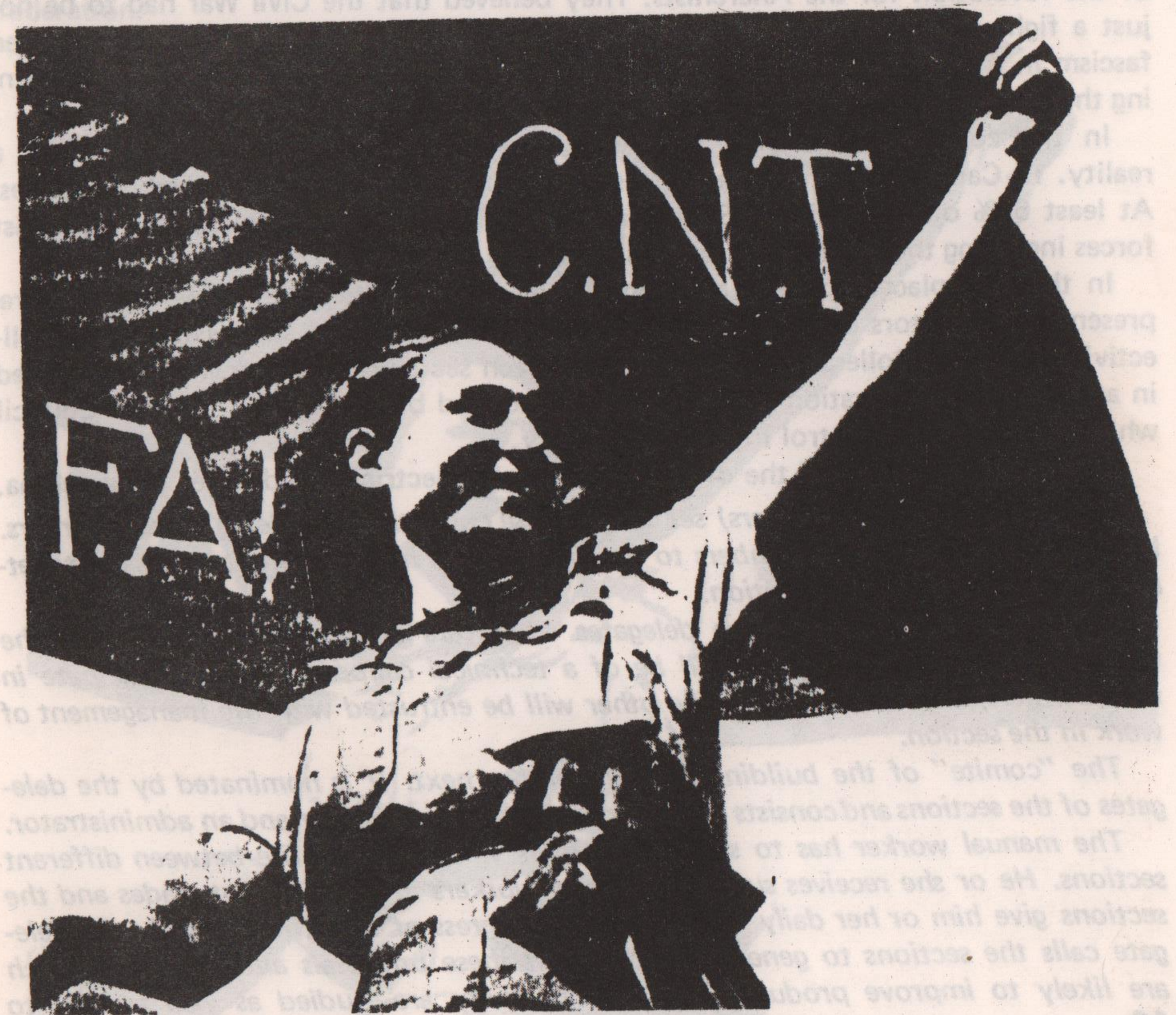
The Russian experience also shows that the fake socialists and their parties cannot be trusted. If socialism is to triumph power must stay with those who produce society's wealth. No party, no matter how well intentioned, can deliver socialism on a plate. Workers must take power and build the new order themselves.

Spain

Of all the western countries Spain is where the Anarchist influence predominated. Introduced in the last century it rapidly spread throughout the country. This led to the formation of the Anarchist Union C.N.T. (National Confederation of Labour) in the 1911. In the years up to the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 the CNT had over two million members. It was the major union in the most industrialised areas, especially Catalonia and its capital Barcelona. It also had a large base among day labourers and small peasants in most provinces.

The CNT was a revolutionary union of workers (usually described as syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist). Its role was twofold. Firstly to fight to improve conditions for workers and secondly to organise for the overthrow of capitalism. Its beliefs were translated into action at every opportunity and this militant tradition attracted workers in their hundreds of thousands.

The CNT organised itself from the place of work. Each workplace joined in a federation with other workplaces in their region to form a regional committee. These regional committees were then federated on a national basis and formed a national committee. Within each particular industry there was also a regional and national federation.



Assemblies of workers were the core of the CNT. These made the decisions and elected delegates to regional and national level. All delegates could be recalled and replaced by the assembly if the members were not satisfied with their conduct. Thus no decisions could be made without consulting the rank and file membership. There were no full-time union bureaucrats beyond the control of the workers.

The number of full-time officials was minimal. They were elected for specified periods after which they had to stand down and return to their previous job. At all times they were subject to control by the rank and file. The experience and organisation of the CNT shows that contrary to popular belief Anarchists are not anti-organisation. In reality Anarchism is highly organised and allows for the participation of all. Nor are we against centralisation. What is important is that those at the centre are recallable and directly responsible to those they are elected to represent.

The Civil War

The Civil War started with an attempted fascist coup following the victory of the Popular Front (an alliance of liberal, republic, socialist, and Stalinist parties) in the 1936 elections. In response to the coup the workers mobilised to defeat fascism. Popular militias were formed by the unions and workers seized factories. Peasants took over land which had been abandoned by the landlords. This marked the beginning of the revolution for the Anarchists. They believed that the Civil War had to be not just a fight against fascism but also against the capitalist system which had spawned fascism in the first place. Thus they set about seizing factories and ranches and turning them over to workers control.

In the zones controlled by the Anarchists workers self-management became a reality. In Catalonia there were at least 2,000 industrial and commercial collectives. At least 60% of "republican" Spain's agriculture (that part controlled by anti-fascist forces including the Anarchists) was collectivised.

In the workplaces councils or "comite" elected by assemblies of workers and representing all sectors of the enterprise, were given the task of administering the collectivised factory. Collectivised enterprises in each sector of industry were represented in an Economic Federation. This in turn was topped by a General Industrial Council which would closely control the whole industry.

Here is a description of the organisation of gas, electricity and water in Barcelona.

Each type of job (e.g. fitters) set up a section consisting of at least fifteen workers. Where they were not the numbers to do this workers from different trades got together to constitute a general section.

Each section nominates two delegates which are chosen by assemblies of the workers. One of the delegates will be of a technical calibre and will participate in the "comite" of the workplace. The other will be entrusted with the management of work in the section.

The "comite" of the building or plant comes next. It is nominated by the delegates of the sections and consists of a technician, a manual worker and an administrator.

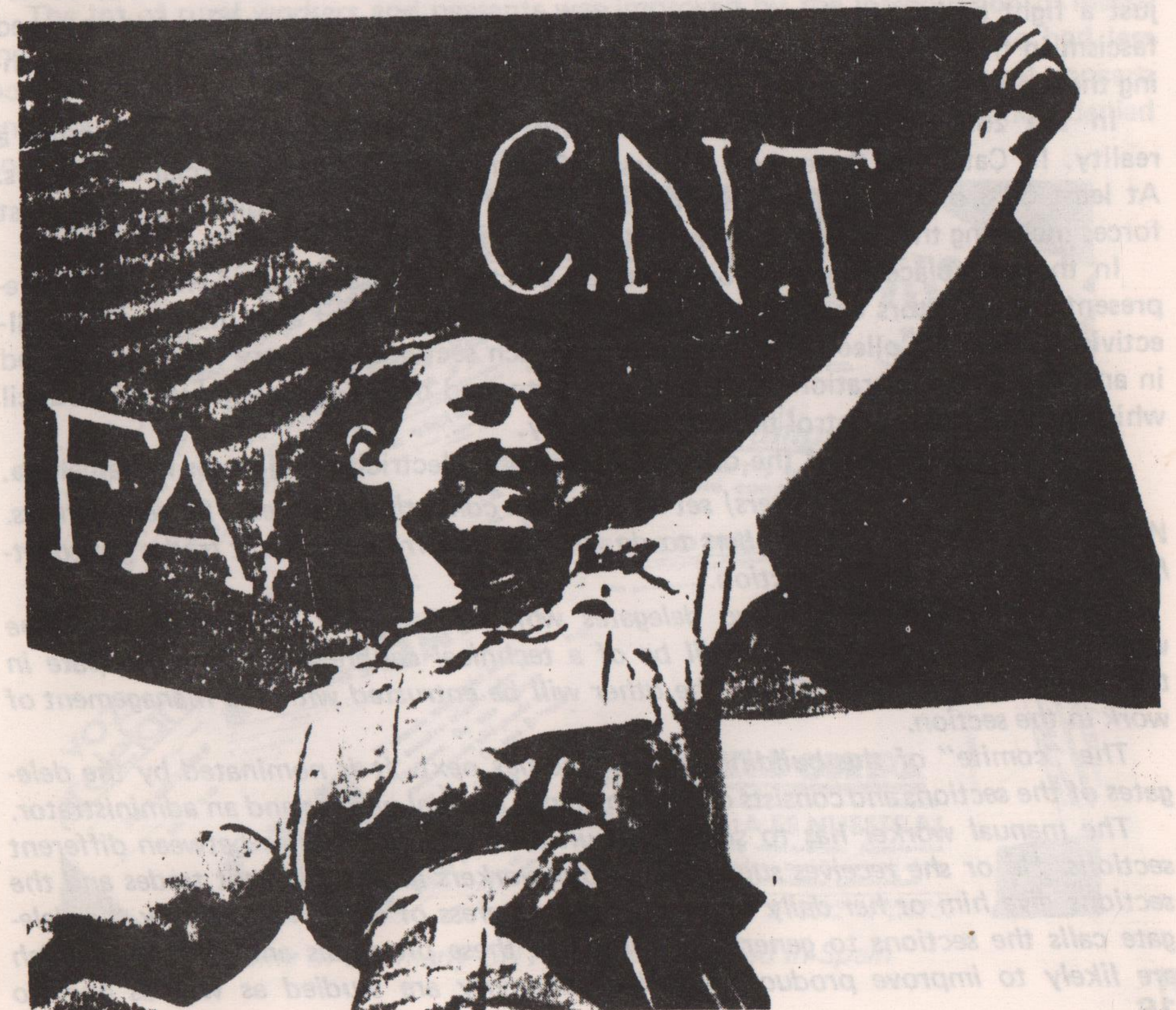
The manual worker has to solve difficulties which might arise between different sections. He or she receives suggestions from workers in the different trades and the sections give him or her daily reports on the progress of work. Periodically the delegate calls the sections to general meetings. At these proposals and initiatives which are likely to improve production and productivity are studied as well as ones to

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On the Land

The countryside also saw collectivisation. In Aragon which was near the war front-line collectivisation took root and spread like wildfire. In February 1937 there were 275 collectives totalling 80,000 members. Three months later there were 450 collectives with 180,000 members. Often the peasants and farm labourers went further than their counterparts in the towns and cities. Not only was production collectivised but in rural areas consumption too. In many of these areas money was abolished.

Large estates were taken over by landless labourers, small holders put their land together so that it could be worked more efficiently by the use of machinery. Collectives were based around the villages and federated on a regional basis.

Usually the decision to collectivise was made at an assembly (a meeting of all the village). It meant handing over land, livestock, tools, seed, stocks of wheat and other produce. The land was then divided into sectors, each of which was assigned to a work group of about a dozen who elected their own delegate. Produce went into the "pile" for communal consumption. Each would produce according to their ability, each would consume according to their needs.

Collectivisation did not only apply to the land. In the villages workshops were set up where all the local trades people would produce tools, furniture, etc for the village and also carry out repairs to the collectivists houses. Bakers, butchers, barbers and so on were also collectivised.

The lot of rural workers and peasants was improved by the introduction of machinery. Living standards rose, in the words of one collectivist "those who had less now ate more and better — none went short". Education became a central concern and young children who had never gone to school were given the education denied to them by the landlords and their system.



Some of the many CNT papers published in Spain

Womens' Action

Gains were also made by women. In relation to their role during the Civil War observers have pointed out that they played a full part in the anti-fascist resistance. They were present everywhere — on committees, in the militias, in the front line. In the early battles of the war women fought alongside men as a matter of course. It was not merely a case of women filling in for men who were away at the front. (Which is usually the case in wartime. When the war is over and women are no longer needed in the labour force, they are pushed back into the home).

They were in the militias and fought alongside the men as equals. They were organising the collectives and taking up the fight against the sexist attitudes of the past which have no place in any real revolution.

The Anarchist womens organisation, Mujeres Libres (Free Women), had 30,000 members. It had been active before the Civil War organising women workers and distributing information on contraception. During the war abortion was legalised in



Women members of the anarchist militias at the front

the "republican zone". Centres were opened for women, including unmarried mothers and prostitutes.

From all accounts there truly were changes in attitudes towards women. One woman participant in the Civil War has said "it was like being brothers and sisters. It had always annoyed me that men in this country didn't consider women as beings with full human rights. But now there was this big change. I believe it arose spontaneously out of the revolutionary movement...."

"Margorita Balaguer quoted in *"Blood of Spain"*
ed. Ronald Fraser. page 287

This sort of thing is common to most revolutionary situations. When people begin to throw off the old ideas and start creating a new society their views on many things change. This is not inevitable though and does not negate the need for propaganda and activity against sexism, not only in society as a whole but also within the revolutionary movement itself.

Not all Roses . . .

This account of the collectivisation is, of necessity, brief. The main point is that given the right conditions mutual aid and co-operation will flourish. Problems did arise in Spain as is inevitable. The Anarchists made mistakes. In our opinion they hesitated in carrying out their programme. Instead of seizing power and making a direct appeal to the workers to take control of economic and social affairs, they collaborated with the Popular Front and ended up joining the government.

They were also attacked by the Communist Party who preferred defeat by the fascists than the victory of anarchism. The Communists were tied to the needs of Stalin's foreign policy which meant not upsetting the Western powers. To them the restoration of the capitalist order was preferable to seeing the working class take power. And that should come as no surprise as the stalinist system in Russia is no more than another form of capitalism.

The Lessons

History is not neutral. What we learn in school is the necessity for government, rulers and capitalism. What we do not learn is that many times it has been shown that this government is not necessary. People are not inherently bad. Given the right conditions a spirit of mutual aid and co-operation can grow. People are not naturally evil and greedy. We only have to look at the response from ordinary people to the appeal for aid for Ethiopia to see this.

Economic conditions determine peoples' behaviour. How we act is related to the structure of society and the dominant value system within it. When structures are changed and oppression and exploitation is done away with the "goodness" that is in most of us come through and flourishes as it did when the workers-held the reigns in Russia and Spain. The experience of self-management is not limited to these countries but is something that has been seen in most countries at some stage. In the early 1920's creameries, farms, Cork Harbour and Kilkenny gasworks were taken over and run as Soviets (the Russian word for workers councils).

What Anarchists are saying are not *just* nice ideas. History shows us that these ideas can work. A new society can be created with the workers in control. But it won't happen spontaneously. We must organise for it.

That is why we need revolutionary organisation. An organisation that draws together all those fighting for workers control. An organisation that gives us the chance to exchange ideas and experiences, and to learn from the lessons of history. An organisation that allows us to struggle together for a new society.

We do *not* need a group of leaders and their passive followers. We do need an organisation working towards mobilising the mass of ordinary people in the process of making the revolution. The Workers Solidarity Movement is such an organisation. If you like what you have just read, you should join us.



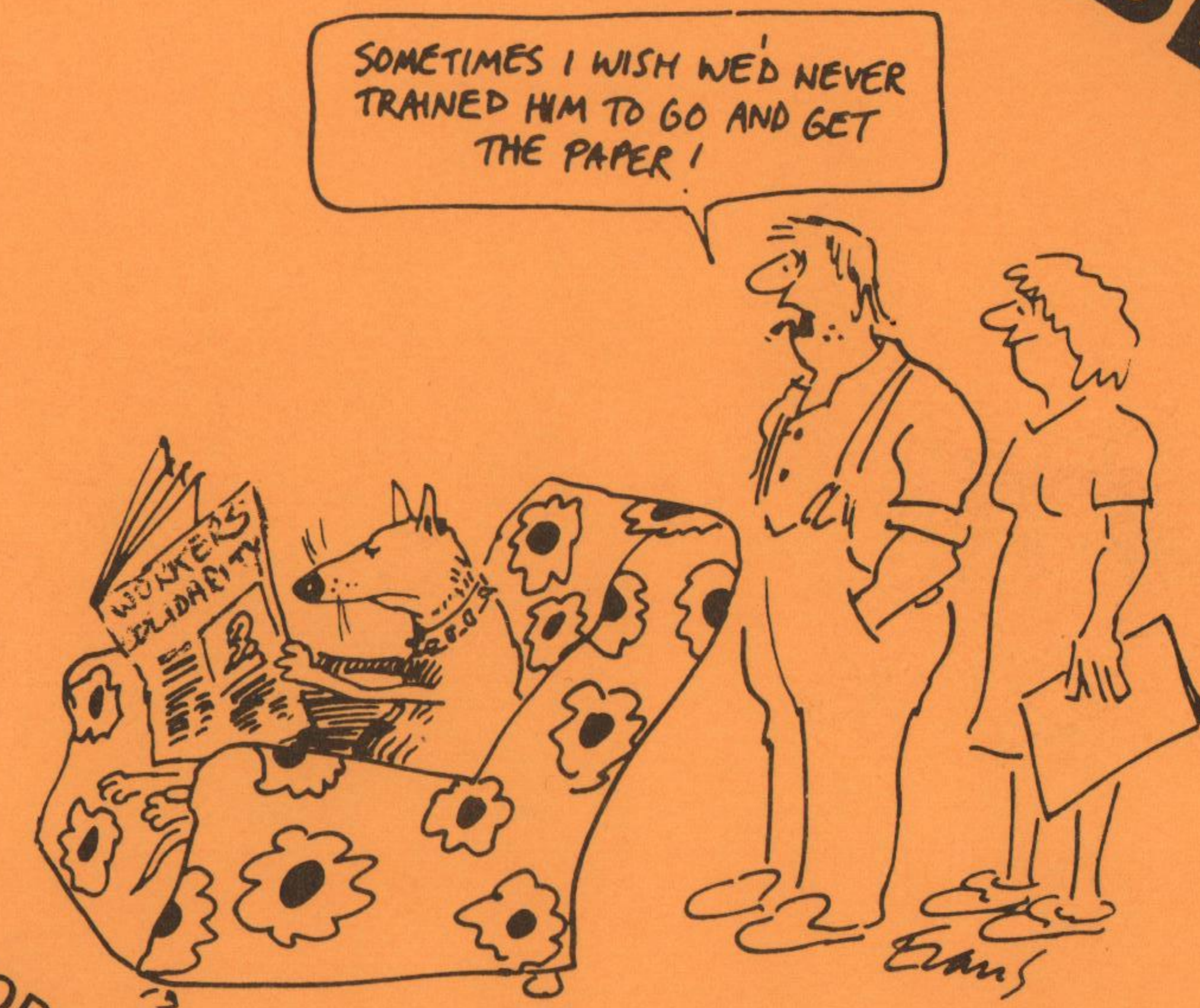
ANARCHIST BOOK SERVICE

For further information the following are worth reading:

ABC of Anarchism	Alexander Berkman (£1.50)
Anarchism	Daniel Guerin (£4.50)
The Bolsheviks and Workers Control	Maurice Brinton (£2.50)
The Russian Tragedy	Alexander Berkman (£2.20)
History of the Makhnovist Movement	Peter Archinov (£4.00)
The Kronstadt Commune	Ida Met (£1.90)
Lessons of the Spanish Revolution	Vernon Richards (£3.50)
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