

Revolutionary portraits

Iosif Solomonovich Bleikhman

Iosif Solomonovich Bleikhman was born within Russia in 1868, at Vidzy is what is now Belarus.

From a Jewish background, he took up the occupation of tinsmith. Emigrating to the United States, he became an anarchist communist in 1904.

Returning to Russia, he was arrested by the Tsarist regime and deported to Siberia. The appalling conditions there meant he contracted TB. Liberated by the February 1917 Revolution, he ended up in Petrograd, becoming a leading member of the Petrograd Anarchist Communist Federation and became popular among Petrograd workers and the sailors of Kronstadt, making speeches and writing many articles under the name of N. Solntsev in the pages of *Kommuna* and *Burevestnik* (Stormy Petrel), the publications of the Anarchist Communist Federation. He was elected to the Petrograd Soviet in July, and his activities meant he was hounded by the Kerensky government.

The July Days

Discontent with the Kerensky government increased in July 1917. Workers, sailors and soldiers gathered in large meetings in Moscow. Bleikhman exhorted a delegation from the First Machine-Gun Regiment to take action. No assistance from political organisations was needed, he said, to perform their revolutionary mission, as "the February revolution also took place without the leadership of a party." He urged the masses to seize all available supplies, the factories and mines, and to destroy the government and the capitalist system at once. Later that day, the Machine-Gun Regiment revolted and were joined by crowds of soldiers, sailors and workers. The abortive insurrection that took place was known as the July Days, and the Kerensky government was in danger of being overthrown. The Bolshevik leadership considered any action to be premature and were worried that joint action by anarchists

We continue our series, on the lives of those women and men who have done so much over the last 120 years to build the anarchist movement.

and rank-and-file Bolsheviks would endanger their party. Trotsky refers to Bleikhman in his usual condescending way in his history of the Russian Revolution: "...the anarchist Bleikhman, a small but colourful figure on the background of 1917, with a very modest equipment of ideas but a certain feeling for the masses -sincere in his limited and ever inflammable intelligence - his shirt open at the breast and curly hair flying out on all sides....The soldiers smiled delightedly at his speeches, nudging each other with their elbows and egging the orator on with pithy comments. They plainly liked his eccentric looks, his unreasoning decisiveness, and his Jewish-American accent sharp as vinegar." The Menshevik leader Prince Tsereteli sneeringly refers to him as a comical figure, small in stature, with a thin, clean-shaven face, expressing "superficial" ideas in "ungrammatical" Russian he had gleaned from anarchist pamphlets.

Icons

The Bolshevik Ilyin-Zhenevsky gloats about the fate of Bleikhman in his memoirs. He deals with the first conference of the Red Army held in Petrograd in March 1918. He disapproves of the ideas of the Red Army men. "Here at the Red Army conference...the speakers took no account whatsoever of the state aspect of the matter, but simply cursed the Soviet power from the standpoint of their own selfish interests". Bleikhman attended this conference and was elected to the presidium. The Bolsheviks attempted to have an honorary presidium put in place,



consisting of Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and a number of other Party leaders. Bleikhman addressed the conference saying: "I categorically object to an honorary presidium.... We've elected them already. Why do we need an 'honorary' presidium for? They would be just icons that we made for ourselves. One lot of gods has been overthrown, only for a new lot to appear!" Despite this a small majority elected the honorary presidium. Ilyin-Zhenevsky was appalled by the attitude of the Bolshevik Party members at this conference, whom he considered shared the outlook of the anarchists. The conference elected a special executive bureau made up of Bolsheviks and anarchists, including Bleikhman, to supervise the work of the military commissariat of which Ilyin was a member. "Just you wait, we have yet to have a talk with you", Bleikhman "growled menacingly" to Ilyin. Ilyin goes on to say: "We 'had a talk' with him before he could do that".

Repression

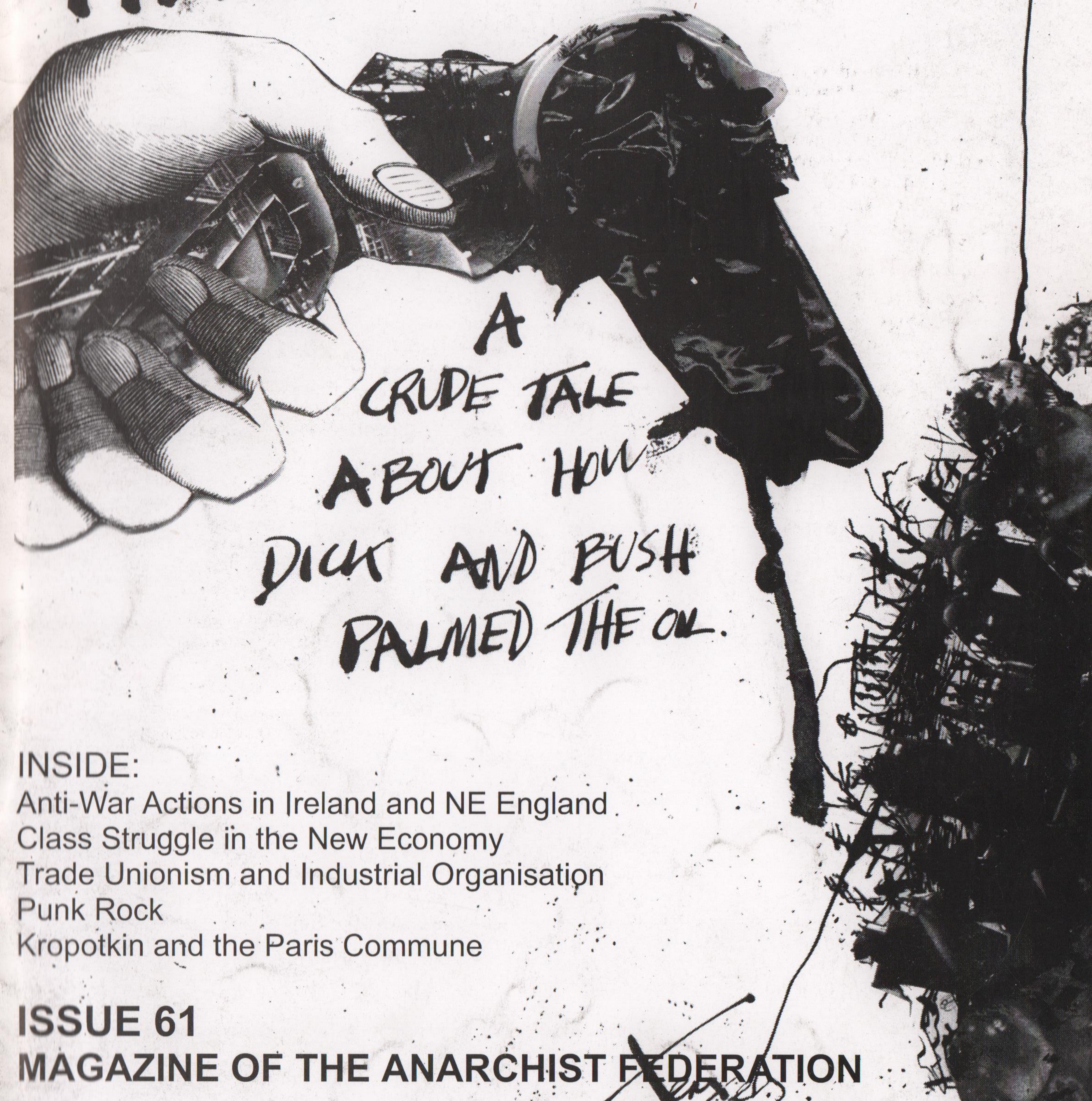
Not long after the attack by armed units of the Bolshevik government on the anarchist centres in Moscow in April 1918, in which 40 anarchists were shot and hundreds arrested, repression fell on the anarchists in Petrograd. As Ilyin notes: "One fine day Bleikhman and a number of his Anarchist comrades, who were concentrated in the Moscow Gate precinct....were surrounded by our units and after some resistance compelled to surrender. ...The most inveterate cut-throats among them were put in prison. After being kept under arrest for a short time, Bleikhman was released. Thenceforth he behaved somewhat less noisily". The facts go somewhat against this bland last sentence. Bleikhman was deported to a concentration camp and forced to carry out humiliating and painful labour, in mud and water up to his waist. Already frail as a result of his time in the Tsarist jails, his health was ruined and he died in 1921. He had indeed become less

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ORGANISE! FOR REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

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ISSUE 61

MAGAZINE OF THE ANARCHIST FEDERATION

Organise!

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). *Organise!* is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and initiate debate on ideas not normally covered by agitational papers.

We aim to produce *Organise!* twice a year. To meet this target we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first.

The article in this issue on Kropotkin, the Paris Commune and Free Communism is the second we have published by Brian Morris. To ensure it read as an article in itself, we edited it and removed some references. Issue 55 featured Kropotkin's theories on tribal society.

Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our Aims and Principles can leave much open to debate. As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from readers and spur the debate on.

The next issue of *Organise!* will be out in May 2004.

All contributions for *Organise!* Should be sent to: AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disc (PC or MAC format). Alternatively, articles can be emailed directly to the editors at: anarchist_federation@yahoo.co.uk.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the AF finds itself strapped for cash. We have had to make some economies with this issue. Our apologies. We will publish a list of donations made in the next issue.

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Back issues

BACK ISSUES OF *Organise!* are still available from the London address. They cost 20p each plus SAE.

Issue 50: GM Foods, Who owns the land, War in Kosovo, Ireland.

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Issue 59: The Sex Issue. Sexual freedom? Interview with a dominatrix, sex workers and industrial organisation, China, the Arditi del Popolo (anti-fascism in Italy), the Prison Industrial Complex, the Zazous (French youth against the Nazis)

Issue 60: At war with Iraq, the Firefighters, Fatherhood, Argentina, The Whitboys in Ireland, Senna Hoy.

Alternatively send us a fiver and we'll send you one of everything plus whatever else we can find lying around.

Confessions of a peace thug: Shannon and Direct Action

One year in the campaign to demilitarise Shannon, a civilian airport in the West of Ireland, now used by the U.S. military.

This is a personal report of my own participation and observations, so of necessity it is strong in some areas - the various demonstrations at Shannon, and weak in others - the peace camp, the surveillance. Most of what I have been doing in the campaign to demilitarise Shannon has been helping to organise meetings, leafleting, organising buses, sticking up posters, and running another bus, and sticking up posters, and sticking up posters, and sticking up posters and oh yeah did I mention sticking up posters? Needless to say this report has been a bit "sexed up", with little emphasis on humdrum work and more on the those rare moments of adrenalin rush, with special reference to that one glorious piece of mass destruction on October 12th.

I was first down in Shannon in mid August last year. We were only about 70 strong, yet we defied police orders to stay outside the airport, and by entering caused a warplane to leave without refuelling. On August 31st there was a 24 hour women's peace camp outside the airport, with an information stall in Shannon town itself which got a good reception. On September 1st there was a small picket outside the main terminal. Also at this time two American warships carrying ammunition to the Middle East were due to stop over in Cork, but this visit was cancelled because of planned protests. On the night of September 3rd Eoin Dubsky went into the airport grounds and re-decorated a warplane. I am normally critical of "ploughshares" type action but it led to serious anti-war mobilisation - a month the numbers protesting at the airport increased tenfold. Shannon became a public issue. On October 12th hundreds of people turned up to demonstrate and after a fence was surgically struck and decommissioned, one woman darted across the runway grounds pursued by Keystone Cops. She was followed by well over a hundred, who soon faced water cannon and police dogs. Ten people were arrested but released after the people occupying the runway grounds refused to move until they were released. After the airport road was blocked we all went down to the cop shop to make sure they would get out.

Shortly after this the Third Grassroots Gathering took place in Belfast. This brought together over one hundred environmentalists, anarchists, and other assorted troublemakers from across the island and beyond. There were almost 20 different workshops on a wide variety of topics including Gender, Direct Action, Social Centres, Reclaim the Streets, Sectarianism, and Forest Gardens. Long and laborious meetings at this event sought to co-ordinate an autonomous strand within the peace movement with an orientation towards direct democracy and action. We announced a 'day of action' on December 8th. That day a diverse throng of around 400 demonstrators gathered in Shannon, accompanied by 200

Garda (on two shifts), the Garda canine unit, undercover police, Special Branch, a police helicopter and Aer Rianta's own security. Well we must be doing something right. We set off on a long trek to the airport, complete with music from a shopping trolley sound system and fiddle player. Strangely absent were mass produced placards bearing the same slogan, so people had to make do with D-I-Y banners, homemade T-Shirts, one coffin with 'Irish Neutrality' written on it, various Uncle Sam/Dubya impersonators, and a bunch of kids chucking flour about the place. A team of graphic design artists went to work on the truly crass 1970s tail fin monument near the terminal



FEATURE

building - a piece of public "art" that seems to plead 'paint me!', 'paint me!', in a whimpering despair filled voice every time you pass it. It was briefly transformed into a memorial to the recently deceased anti-war activist Philip Berrigan and to the Iraqi children slain by UN sanctions and the US war machine. Despite names being taken there were no arrests.

After a wee bit of a hibernation over the hols the new year saw an avalanche of escalation. A permanent peace camp was set up. On January 18th thousands travelled to the airport.

The best thing about that day was the spontaneity, which was also perhaps the worst thing! I'm a great believer in the power of chaos but after you occupy the rooftop of a derelict building before breaking into ... a hanger? No a cafeteria stockroom! Yes that's the day you know throwing a dash of organisation into the pot just might improve the taste. Just a dash mind.

But it was all great craic. Although people have dissed the rooftop occupation as a bit pointless, we had dodged police dogs to get on to the roof so the disgruntled look of disgust as we gazed down upon the bacon, was a pleasure to behold. No one was nicked on this occasion. The demonstration and peace camp had a sizable impact. World Airways - one of the charter companies ferrying U.S. troops through Shannon - took the decision to re-route 17 of their flights to Frankfurt in Germany. A posse of peaceniks permanently camped on the doorstep were not a reassuring sight to the suits in the corporate boardrooms. And as a result, the government had to make Shannon safe for Washington. Injunctions were brought against peace



campers. One answer came when Mary Kelly did a bit of D-I-Y on a military plane and a few days later the Pitstop Ploughshares Five had a go at the same plane after it had been repaired. World Airways pulled out and repression from the police and media went up well more than a notch. The terms of Mary Kelly's bail was to ban her from Clare, and the five were to spend several weeks in prison, only being released with punitive bail conditions - including having to sign on every day with the police. The media smear campaign - which is basically the psychological warfare wing of the police - also went into action. Sections of the anti-war movement - such as the NGO peace alliance (who had just organised a 800 strong demo in Shannon) and the Green Party - who were pro-smashing warplanes one minute and not the next, sought to distance themselves from these actions.

And the troops went in with armoured cars and guns; they would have had tanks only the Irish army doesn't have any. This was half a publicity stunt, half a cost-cutting exercise as soldiers don't have the power of arrest but are paid much less

than cops. The Star's headline "Will They Shoot on Sight" must have given hard-ons to many in the US Embassy. That was the point: intimidate the 'citizens', reassure those whom the 'public servants' really serve. Two weeks later we were to get a lesson in the reality of "democracy". F15: over 100,000 on the streets of Dublin, opinion polls showed massive opposition to the Government's support for the Anglo-American war effort. Many of us had argued that marches around city centres had no impact on state policy. We pointed out that the really huge demonstrations which had taken place in London and Glasgow had not changed British Government policy which was still dictated from Washington and were accused of being negative. Well here was the proof in Ireland that we were right - we marched, but nothing changed. Demonstrations like this can be useful, as a morale boost, as a way of getting more people involved. I helped organise four buses to F15 and two local protests around that time. But a strategy of marching and marching alone will do nothing. You couldn't miss the truth of that when in the face of the biggest demo in Dublin in years the state didn't change it's actions one iota. Unfortunately this truth missed self professed "revolutionary Marxists" (like why have a revolution if lobbying works!?!?) and republicans (hey couldn't you have had a protest march instead of '800 years of struggle'?) by a couple of hundred miles.

It would be nice to have a real positive article but how can we write about the March 1st action without mentioning the massive hostility shown by the Left towards it? March 1st was first discussed during the January 18th demo, developed in local meetings after soon after was put forward to the



leadership of the Irish Anti-War Movement (IAWM) as a day on non-violent direct action. We emphasise the word leadership because much of the membership of the IAWM had no awareness of our approach. That leadership's reaction was to call a protest march for the same date, then to claim that nasty anarchos were hijacking their event. In the week running up to the March 1st Action, two charter companies carrying American troops through Shannon pulled out, citing "security threats". World Airways having already pulled out, according to media reports, this left one charter company hired by the American military still using Shannon airport, as well as direct military flights. One big push might have done it.

Instead, the Labour Party, the Green Party and Sinn Fein all pulled out of the day without consulting the rank and file, though to their credit, individual Labour Party and Green Party people refused to follow the diktat of their leaders. The Socialist Party and Socialist Worker's Party marched in a separate contingent which ignored the attempted direct action and meandered up to the terminal. The Green Party had their national conference 30 minutes up the road where Shannon was high on the agenda for discussion!!!! Some people had genuine problems with a 'day of action' but when a political party which (still!) has an armed wing starts waffling about the need for 'peaceful protest', y'know this is for party political reasons not a matter of principle. These parties want to appear radical to Hoover up radical youth, yet respectable enough to win votes, forge electoral alliances or earn union funding. They invented reasons not to support the March 1st action and denounced it in the mass media. For example: 'it won't be a family day out'. Aye, and Trotsky went down in history for running a crèche during the storming of the Winter Palace. Or: 'It's premature'. Sure, after the fall of Baghdad would have been a better time. There is no evidence that public opinion and protest marches altered the situation and clear-cut evidence that direct action at Shannon changed things. If you don't believe me, ask the airlines why they pulled out of Shannon or Jane Fort, acting head of the U.S. embassy in Dublin. In the Sunday papers following March 1st, she

admitted that direct action had caused "difficulty", had prompted the airlines to review their position and the movement's tactics had been "really threatening". This from the representative of a regime guilty of mass murder, stating clearly that we had got them over a barrel and on the run. You could play by the system's rules, do only what you are permitted to do, and Jane Fort will probably love you, there will be no controversy, you'll have a nice media image, no political backlash.....and you'll get absolutely nowhere. Imagine what a unified mass non-violent direct action mobilisation in Shannon on March 1st could have done. Following March 1st, the movement went into reverse. Day X reaction didn't keep the pressure on Shannon and two of the further demos there either massively policed by the boys in blue or kept under control by the political parties.

Direct Action is not another way of saying militancy, it means going and sorting a problem yourself, as opposed to indirect action - asking someone else to do it by lobbying or voting or whatever. Direct action's purpose is to have an effect, to directly sort out the problem. The diverse actions at Shannon, by creating a 'security threat', led to the charter companies pulling out. Shannon was being demilitarised as a result of direct action. Now there's all kinds of 'direct action'. The successful penetration of security at Hillsborough during the Bush-Blair summit? The blockade of the Dail? Here in Galway we marched into a Fianna Fail office, and likewise in many other places the focus was on the politicians. But where was the end product? Many of these events had the form of direct action but the content of

protest lobbying. 'Put pressure on the politicians', start with letter writing, get progressively frustrated through protest marching until you're throwing paint at the pricks. But in the end the focus is still on politicians who will not listen. After Day X, the dominant form of action was.... wait for it...marching. This can be a cul de sac. You come to a march in Dublin, then another and another. As they have no noticeable effect do you keep coming? Or do you just become more cynical and disillusioned? We need an effective strategy. We need to fight where we can win because that builds confidence and overcomes apathy. The point of direct action is to build up a general climate of confidence and culture of resistance through winning and most importantly through winning by our own efforts.

The conservative left's campaign against direct action served to facilitate state repression. People arrested in October started to get their summons and more people were arrested and charged on March 1st. House raids, arrests and riots cops appeared on the horizon. Blanket policing prevented a march from even getting into the airport grounds. The numbers of cops at Shannon station increased massively: last year there were 234 cops in Clare with only 30 in Shannon. Now there are 140 in Shannon alone. Many activists have been banned from Clare despite it being unconstitutional according to a High Court judge. Even so, the state has not thrown a ring of steel around an impenetrable citadel: on Good Friday last, the Catholic Worker spud-planting division went walkabout through the airport grounds and built a shrine. The state has mobilised sufficient numbers

The pictures included in this feature come from the Workers Solidarity Movement - <http://struggle.ws/wsm.html>



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of police to match the numbers those networks up for mass direct action can produce. They have also know that the only mass direct action they were going to see from large sections of the anti-war movement will be rhetorical. Charter companies have returned, and others have come to replace the ones that haven't. To prevent further demobilisation, defendant/prisoner support is crucial. Its effectiveness (or lack of it) will inhibit or facilitate further action or further repression. All of the fines and legal costs arising out of the March 1st action, and most of the costs from October 1st, have been met by support networks.

From a libertarian perspective the point of direct action is that people winning small victories through direct action are empowered - a culture of resistance is built up. This is an essential short term goal for all who dream of a free society without hierarchy and bureaucracy. You cannot change social relationships by legislation but only through a mass movement of people shaping their own destinies. Only an empowered people can do this. We need to create and support forms of direct action that are most accessible to all people. We don't need a specialised activist elite - unless we wish to reproduce the hierarchy and alienation of capitalist society. We need mass participation.

We are faced with a conundrum. Direct action (which only a small minority can/will take part in) or ineffective protesting? Are those our only options? It looks like it, if it is currently beyond our capacities to mobilise sufficient numbers for mass direct action. However there is a way out. That way out leads through the

soft underbelly of USAF Shannon, the corporations which operate the airport. Top Oil re-fuels the warplanes but it may also have put the petrol in your car or the oil in your central heating. As a pretty small indigenous company, with just over a hundred filling stations and some local distributors in a very competitive market, it is susceptible to a consumer boycott, which would have an immediate and direct effect.

We can establish a spectrum of resistance ranging from boycotts to mass trespasses to hammering planes, in which everyone can play a direct part in the de-militarisation process. All of us can participate directly, on our own initiative, at whatever suits us. This strategy also applies to other issues and arenas of struggle. Our main goal should be on seeking ways to have an impact and empower people through mass participation. In regard to Shannon, obviously the heady days of the spring of 2003 are over. Time to pack up and go home? I think not. The planespotter down at the airport report no appreciable reduction in military traffic - hardly surprising when you consider that troop numbers in Iraq have not be reduced. The war may not continue on Sky News but it does on the ground. Similar arguments were heard in the aftermath of Afghanistan, that is: no war equals no anti-war movement. But the war is still going on and it is being waged as much by local businesses like Top Oil as it is by the US Marines and *fedayeen*. Something like the Top Oil Boycott Campaign can incorporate action - hurting the company's sales figures and propaganda - keeping Shannon and the war in the popular consciousness by being out there on the forecourt.



The Anti-War Movement in the North East

Though the war in Iraq is still being conducted at a low level, memories of the anti-war movement seem very faint.

Yet, for a few brief weeks in spring, a highly significant movement helped send perhaps two million people to demonstrate in London and a further 100,00 in Glasgow. The opposition to Blair's invasion of Iraq also appeared in towns and cities all over the country and was sustained for several weeks before the war was finally declared ended. As everywhere else, the north east of England experienced some incredible moments in this campaign and the anti-war movement there, like elsewhere, provides both inspiration and lessons for anarchists.

The Tyne and Wear Stop the War Coalition was set up in the aftermath of the September 11 destruction of the World Trade Centre, it being obvious from early-on that the US would respond with aggression and violence, and that Britain would support this stance. But things did not really take off until relatively recently: the attack on Afghanistan stepped up the tempo, which reached fever pitch with the build-up to the attack on Iraq; an attack everyone instinctively knew had been decided on months before.

Before the war started, one of the best things that happened was an occupation of the Labour Party national recruitment office in North Shields on 7 February. Two people pretended to want to join the party and the rest covered the camera on the door and ran in. A group went upstairs to try and get a banner out of the window while others stayed on the ground floor. A third group stayed outside. The staff were a bit radgy at first but they calmed down and a few occupiers ended up talking to them about why they were doing it. Many of the staff seemed to think that they were 'non-political', and that the target was not legitimate (odd as it was national Labour Party office and most of the workers there were Labour Party members). The cops came but realised they could do nothing to remove the occupiers, so they stayed until the media turned up. After about two hours inside the occupiers agreed to leave, to a paparazzi-like reception from the media. All in all it went pretty well. Though it would have been better if the occupiers had made a bit more of a nuisance of themselves, it got some good media coverage (both ITV and BBC cameras showed up, as did three radio station and two newspapers) and there was a national Labour organiser up from London there at the time, so presumably the message got back to London as well...

But this was a relatively small group of people. Though there were others demos and stunts, the really interesting stuff happened on the day the war started. This is a report written at the time:

The first day of war in Iraq saw some of the largest and most militant activity that Newcastle has experienced in recent times. Events began at 8 am at the Haymarket. A crowd of eighty-odd that had gathered moved into the road and blocked traffic for forty-five minutes. Some gave out leaflets but most sat and chanted in the road. A banner was hung off a nearby church. There weren't as many of the usual suspects, due to some uncertainty regarding when the war had actually started. Fortunately there was a large group of school kids and sixth-formers from Heaton. Identified by their pink sashes, they were the most 'up for it' and they made it happen in the morning.

Eventually, some went to work, but the kids weren't finished yet. They marched to the Monument and spent half an hour chalking anti-war slogans all over the area. Dissatisfied with that, the kids moved off again... to the Metro. The cops had heard where they were going and accompanied them to the Metro doors. For some reason they didn't follow the group to Gateshead, where they made straight for the Tyne Bridge. Stopping traffic on the Tyne Bridge was child's play. No coppers showed for ages. Initially sat on the Gateshead side, people decided to take the middle of the bridge. As they moved off, a copper finally caught up. He drove past, stopped and tried to



make people stop, but everyone just walked past him. Nonplussed by this, he got out and grabbed the first person he saw. Then things started getting a bit hairy. Whilst the copper was tussling with his arrestee, several radgies had got out of their cars and were looking like they were gonna kick off. Then several cops vans showed and the fun was over.

The group then marched back into Newcastle, accompanied by police vans the whole way. At lunchtime, it met up with the main march and again stopped traffic at the Haymarket. The final event of the day came at a 6pm anti-war vigil. Addressed by the usual (and far too many) suspects, it looked like the crowd of perhaps 1,000 was going to end up bored to death. Despite this, a large group (several hundred) hung about till the bitter end and then marched up to the Haymarket and again stopped traffic by sitting in the road. Just when the cops had diverted the traffic (again), the crowd ran across the park by the church and sat in the road back where they'd just been; the cops didn't have a clue what to do.

With ten years of political activity in the city, I had never seen anything like it. A large crowd, mostly of people eighteen or under, were intent on causing disruption and testing the

Resistance

Resistance is our monthly news sheet. Our widespread distribution of Resistance means more and more people are coming into contact with revolutionary anarchist ideas. This is at a time when the Labour Party, the Trotskyist and Stalinist left are spiralling rapidly downwards into decline. There is a real chance of building a credible anarchist movement in this country - with consistent and dogged hard work. If you would like the next 12 issues of Resistance, then send POs, cheques for £4 payable to 'AF' to: AF, PO Box 375, Knaphill, Woking, Surrey GU21 2XL.

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state's means of control. It seemed like the cops would never shift people, but then the church stepped in. A vicar appointed himself police liaison and informed the crowd that the police had identified ringleaders and would be making arrests if they didn't move. Instantly, a few people stood up saying 'I'm a ringleader, arrest me'... and there followed one of those incredible 'I am Spartacus' moments as everyone stood up shouting the same thing. Yet, it was clear that something had been killed. Maybe most weren't up for risking arrest, but there is absolutely no excuse for doing the police's dirty work for them, regardless of your motives. (The clergyman in question had been heard to say in the morning demo that people shouldn't sit in the road as they'd look like a bunch of anarchists, so it was clear, and predictable, where his sentiments lay).

The coup de grace was delivered by a representative of a similar organisation as the SWP regional organiser then announced that the demo was over and everyone should go to the next one. The way in which such a high level of solidarity, spontaneity and militancy was effectively killed by people who were meant to be supporters of the cause was nothing short of a disgrace. It definitely did not need to end that way.

Yet, this incredible day, did not herald the start of an even larger and more militant campaign of direct action. There was another rally-cum-march on the Saturday after war started but the police refused to let the crowd march up Northumberland street as it was busy with shoppers. They cordoned it off but people went through various shops and the march kind of happened anyway. It dispersed after a 'vigil' at the war memorial and there weren't enough people to do a sit-down on the road again. Most of the kids weren't there, and they were the ones who had made it so successful the previous Thursday. An attempt by a few people to sit in the road ended in predictable failure as angry taxi drivers jumped out of their cars. It was also a Newcastle home match and a lot of the fans were pretty abusive. Since the war actually started a polarisation had occurred, as might have been expected.

After that relative failure I still thought that the success of the first day's action could be repeated or even bettered but, unfortunately, I was

mistaken. The subsequent Thursday and Saturday meetings began to decline in size and militancy. By May Day things had reached a real low. It was the most depressing May Day march I can remember (no mean feat given previous marches' ability to induce feelings of total despair). It was pathetic and embarrassing marching through town. Did the shite way the first night's actions were killed-off put people off doing anything similar? What is certain is we didn't see that same level of militancy again. The experience of that night left a bitter taste in my mouth and, I imagine, in that of many others.

For an all-too-brief moment we had glimpsed something special in Newcastle. The political impact on those who became politically engaged for the first time is something that can and will last. In the north east one of the most important features of the anti-war actions was that they were supported and often inspired by people who had not taken direct action before. It was great to see, for example, a load of kids running onto the 'blinking eye' bridge and locking-on, when we'd heard that a naval training vessel was due on the Tyne (and consequently needed the bridge to be raised). It was the kids of Heaton that took the Tyne Bridge and the youth of all Tyneside seemed to be at the mass road blockade that first evening of war. The youth gave the demos a lot of energy and inspiration, and they were up for a lot more than just marching and chanting slogans. Another positive development has been a lot of young people coming into contact with anarchist ideas and setting up groups. Now there are Anarchist Youth Network people in places like rural and very Tory Hexham, and other groups elsewhere who are now interested in anarchist ideas. (e-mail northeast@anarchistyouth.net, see website: www.anarchistyouth.net).

The internal politics of the Stop the War Coalition was predictably messy. A coalition of peace activists, liberals, Greens, lefties of almost all 57 varieties, anarchists, some old Labour people (I think), hippies and other assorted ne'er-do-wells, it was always likely to end in tears. It often did. And when push came to shove it almost always seemed to be the SWP and a few hangers-on versus the rest. A group outside of the STWC did the

Labour Party occupation and it got slagged by some at the following STWC meeting. The SWPers accused the occupiers of being "super heroes", "elitist", and "petit bourgeois" etc. (the same old unoriginal and frankly meaningless platitudes you'd expect). The SWP didn't like it but it was being left out that really rankled especially as the occupation appeared to be one of the more effective things done in the region.

Then there was the repeated SWP attempts to push through their re-organisation idea. The effect of this would have been to create a 'committee' with a handful of 'elected' (read SWP-appointed) people who would make all the decisions and co-ordinate the whole regional campaign. It seems that it's more democratic to have this committee then it is for anyone who wants to get involved just coming along and having their input. One of the most hilarious aspects of it all was the SWP claim to represent more people and therefore deserve more voting power/influence over what went on. If an SWP member is a trade union branch secretary, ergo he or she represents all the people who are in that branch in whatever meeting they happen to be taking part in. The truth is, like the rest of us, they represent themselves, their party and no one else. Anyway, they argued that at present the STWC was not working efficiently in the region and that it needed co-ordination by this committee. Bar one or two others, like a student who thought that a 'command structure' [!] was an essential part of any

organisation, the rest argued that it worked well enough as it was: the problems that did arise could be sorted out as and when necessary; the committee idea meant putting control into the hands of a few people at the expense of everyone who wasn't on the committee; specific events could, as was already happening, be organised by sub-groups of those interested. The first time the committee idea came up, it was not decisively dealt with, though it was obviously unpopular outside the ranks of the SWP.

Failing to get what they wanted inside the STWC, the SWP attempted to establish another organisation they could control; a north east 'people's parliament' briefly found its way into an uncaring world. It soon vanished and another attempt at getting the

I'D RATHER BE KILLING CAPITALISTS...

another war is possible

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committee adopted was made. The same arguments were had, that it was about control not democracy or organisation, that we should be doing things, not wasting time arguing about how we should be doing things. After heated and at times very comic debate, it was voted down. The STWC was operating in a relatively 'anarchist' manner. With no formal hierarchy, it was characterised by openness, equality and democracy. Of course, it could have been better, but most of the problems were down to people not using some initiative and not communicating. Most of the complaints came from SWP members, as if they were deliberately trying to show that the structure didn't work. The SWP fervently believes you can't organise without people telling you what to do.

They were going to try and impose their 'top-down' model and show us (a) we needed leaders and (b) they were the best people for the job. Though a committee would stifle initiative and creativity and disempower people who were wanting to do stuff, it would have given control to the SWP. There are many lessons that need to be understood or things that require thinking about by anarchists, arising from the anti-war campaign and its activities:

(1) Spontaneity, often from people new to 'political activity', can be a very effective tool if you want to keep the police on their toes and cause maximum disruption. There is no need for marshalling, corralling and generally being controlled *a la* SWP.

Continues over

What goes in *ORGANISE!*

Organise! hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in *Organise!* reflect the views of the person who has written the articles and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!

(2) If the SWP or other authoritarian groups try and control direct action, then ways are needed to prevent what happened to end the demo on the first day of war. In the immediate aftermath of that debacle, some argued that loud-hailers should not be allowed on marches. But it's not really the loud-hailers, but the people using them who cause the problem. Ways and means need to be found of stopping would-be leaders from attempting to assert a dubious authority on proceedings, but without appearing like other would-be leaders. Someone getting up and using the loudhailer to say 'sit tight and ignore the guy telling you to go home' is in some ways guilty of the same thing. We need to find ways of combating those who elect themselves to sell us out. Maybe the kids, who were the main inspiration of the days' events, will learn to deal with this in the future... Answers on a postcard, please.

(3) It was clear that the old formula of 'big public meeting, with twenty-five different speakers' is of very limited use. Once everyone who likes the sound of their own voice too much has had a go, there often seemed

less people left in the crowd than on the platform. Those remaining invariably wore the expression of people who had lost the will to live. Events in Newcastle showed people wanted to do something, and we should think about ways in which we can make all this stuff more participatory for the people involved and more disruptive to the powers that be. They'll happily have people boring other people at the Monument for as long as we can bear it.

(4) Though the STWC has people in it who we'd never normally choose to work with, it is important that anarchists involve themselves in such organisations: to get anarchist arguments about organisation across and to attempt to frustrate authoritarian ideas. Some people will come across anarchist ideas for the first time and many will be influenced by them rather than go with the SWP. Sadly, even after having seen how the SWP operated at close hand, some still chose to join them in the aftermath of war. Due to all the Stop the War activity, some people had shelved a pre-war idea for a conference to establish a new direct action group. The new group eventually emerged too late to prevent at least some of the anti-war people getting mopped-up by the SWP. Learn from our mistakes.

(5) Having people you know and trust with hand-held video cameras when doing some kinds of activity is very useful. A lad was arrested on the Tyne Bridge for obstructing and was also charged with assaulting a police officer. He didn't do it, needless-to-say, and we have a video of the whole arrest that shows quite clearly that he didn't. The case was recently adjourned and apparently the copper started saying he

was ill and couldn't attend court when told we had a video as part of the defence. The case was adjourned and it is likely that the assault charges will be dropped thanks to the video (which the copper incidentally tried to illegally snatch off the lad operating it on the day). Another good aspect of the presence of 'youth' at these demos was the police's obvious uncertainty about whether to arrest them or not. The cops would obviously have preferred some ageing hippies to rough-up instead.

(6) The lad in the Tyne Bridge arrest had support with his case. This did not happen in an earlier case when a lad was arrested and manhandled by a load of coppers for writing 'Justice Not Vengeance' on the Monument. A lot of the people said they'd not go to any more rallies as he'd been 'violent' etc. He subsequently got very little support from coalition members and was found guilty of criminal damage and fined £50, the cost, apparently, of removing the chalk. Though the STWC did pay his costs (it needed to do something with all the money it'd been accumulating, after all), he didn't want to involve himself in it further; understandable, given his treatment. You have to be prepared for this kind of thing when working in such a wide and diverse kind of coalition.

To sum up, anarchists should be in STWCs and arguing an anarchist case. Fight the authoritarians as much as possible and try to show by practical example that anarchist methods are the most effective way of organising. Those new to political activity will hopefully learn something from anarchists, and we, in turn, will definitely learn from and be inspired by, them.

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Interview with *Neka*

On June 19th we had the opportunity to interview Neka, a representative of the Argentinian autonomous movement. She is a member of the piqueteros, the movement of the unemployed, so called from the Argentinian word for blockade.

Though they are best known for direct action, they carry out much wider projects, developing neighbourhood networks, education and health initiatives and microcompanies, self organised workshops in which the unemployed make first what they need then products for sale to get some income. This is especially important since there has been no dole or benefits in Argentina until recently. Even the very limited dole came as a result of the direct action of the piqueteros.

Argentina made headlines a year and a half ago, due to the collapse of the economy and political institutions. Millions of Argentinians lost their savings and money in December 2001 when the economic policies implemented at the orders of the IMF and World Bank and others crashed; this certainly increased resistance. But the struggle of those affected by harsh living conditions has been a constant for a long time. The state continues to decline due to a lack of legitimacy and resources, abandoning responsibility for health and social services for instance. This makes self-organisation a necessity for most Argentinians, who need to build their own structures so they can go on with their every day lives.

This has provoked a debate about the role of the state. Though most of the time services are delegated to it, there's no need to do so. Self-organised workers can do the work, providing health, education and other services to higher standards. After all it's us, the workers, who do the real work and not state bureaucrats. But while the state collapses and retreats from a lot of its supposed duties, it has never had any problem to keep up, or even increase, the level of repression, thus disclosing its real nature and priorities. Even in the days of December 2001, when governments were made and unmade in a matter of days, if not hours, the only fully working state organisation was the riot police, which killed many demonstrators.

It's difficult to think of any possible solution for the Argentinian crisis in the foreseeable future, especially via capitalism. The fact that international organisations such as the World Bank or the WTO are demanding more of the same policies that led to the crash, and that international banks are pressing for debts to be repaid, is not helping at all. Through these last years, only the will of the people to resist, finding new ways of social organisation, has allowed them to keep their lives going on. Even if it had a lot of problems and set-backs, as we would expect when someone is exploring new ways, it was a very important and kept hospitals, schools and factories open. Now the bosses and the state are coming back, as if nothing had happened, to reclaim the companies or areas that they left when the crisis struck. Their only argument for this is coming from the barrel of a gun. There's still a future of struggle for the Argentinian people ahead. We can only hope that we can support and help them.

Interview with Neka, representative of the Autonomous Argentinian Movement.

Could you explain to us who are the piqueteros, how they are organised and how they first appeared?

Let me introduce myself. I'm Neka and I am a member of the MTD Solano. We are part of a coordination of different movements called MTD Aníbal Verón. We began to get organised at the end of 1997, mainly out of meetings and assemblies in the neighbourhoods, as we began to be badly hit by unemployment. That was our starting point.

These assemblies and meetings, did they begin spontaneously, or were they an initiative taken by some existing political group?

No. Most of us had met each other through the every day reality of the neighbourhood, as we were engaged in different projects. For example, I was part of a team working on health issues in our barrio. We had been in touch, there was a bond between us. And there were also some compañeros who had been involved in other projects in the area. When we first decided to get together and discuss the problems brought by unemployment, most of us had a deep and sound

knowledge of our barrio.

So there was a previous experience of organising at a local level?

Yes. The area where I come from, San Francisco Solano, is a town of 80,000 people. All the barrios are the products of asentamientos, the squatting of land to solve the housing problem. That started in the 80s, so there is a history of struggle, very strong and hard in this area. We had already been doing together different actions, assessing different ways of getting organised and of solving the main problems in life.

The piqueteros are represented all over Argentina...

Yes. It's a very diverse movement. This word, piquetero, we never branded ourselves like that. It started being used by the media, that is the state, in a disrespectful and pejorative way, to imply that we were criminals, subversive elements. When we began to get organised there was still a middle class, which doesn't exist today any more, and it was really hopeful, waiting to see what capitalism and neoliberalism had to offer. So when we began to blockade roads and occupy public buildings, it was a very shocking thing. Since then the social and political situation in the country has affected wider sections of the population. They have deeply felt the consequences and awakened from the golden dream of capitalism, the dream of progress for some through the wage labour, the exploitation of the rest; comfort, consumerism...

Was there a particular time at which you decide to start with these actions, road blockades, etc? Was it from the start, or was there first a process of radicalisation that you went through?

There's not a single unified movement, there are lots of different ones and each one of them has its own way of organising. For some, the piquete, the blockade on the road, is the most important stuff. They look for a more media-focused way of building up the movement or the political party. For us the main thing is behind the blockade. As the MTD Solano we say that the road blockade or squatting a public building is only a means, and the most important things are happening in the barrio, at the assemblies, through the collective way of making decisions. Before we do any action we discuss a lot in the meetings why we are going to

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do it. What is the meaning, for example, of blockading a factory or a mill, places where the raw materials that we need to produce or to feed ourselves are kept. Before we squat a Carrefour, the multinational supermarket, we discuss the meaning of this capital concentration, as well as why the food is concentrated there, and not where it should be. Direct action and project construction in our barrio come together; we construct every day in our neighbourhood what we demand in the street.

What's the impact of all these projects in the lives of those taking part in them? Has it come together with an evolution in political ideas, in the nature of demands made?

I think there was a very important break with traditional politics and political issues, and it is precisely related to all this. We've been through a lot of different organisational practices, lots of experiences and what we've finally learnt is that we can build up better projects without leaders. We don't need any one speaking on our behalf, we all can be voices and express every single thing. They're our problems and it's our decisions to solve them. The fact that we have education, popular education, as a central axis of our project, allowed us to open space for discussion and thought, to start building up new social relations, to deeply know each other, so we could feel we are all part of everything we are building. Getting back our dignity depends only on ourselves and not on a boss or anyone else imposing on us a way to live.

What you have said about popular education, is there any practical project on that, or do you mean more like sharing the experience of social construction?

No. As we understand society it is based upon domination relationships, so anything coming from its institutions will be based on this same principle of domination. Education is education for

domination. Same as the family. So when we propose social change we have to begin at the beginning and devise new relationships. I think this is the challenge. When we decided that we had to produce our own foods, to struggle against the monopoly of food production we understood that new relationships are born of this practice, through discussing all these issues. And also horizontality and autonomy, and all the things that are not abstract ideas or theories, but a practical issue and a process. Popular education, the dynamics of the meetings and assemblies, are all part of the effort to change these relationships.

What are the relations of the movement with more traditional forms of the left? Have they tried to use you to achieve their goals?

I don't know how it is in other places, but that's a usual thing in Argentina. When there is something interesting happening anywhere, the parties first either criticise or try to manipulate it. So there's not only the need to fight against the right, but also against attitudes and deformations from the left. We understand that there are areas in which we can work together, like against the debt or repression. This causes problems for those of us who believe we need to build the movement up from autonomy as much as for those who believe in a more classical way. But we think from a very different logic and the new society we can think of is very different from theirs. I think they'll have to learn. They've gone through a lot of setbacks and they'll finally learn that there are ways that don't work out, as they became as authoritarian as all that they criticise.

Have you ever had any problems to keep the assemblies independent?

A lot. We are all the time being criticised, and there are always attempts to manipulate and infiltrate us. We are all the time discussing how to take care, not only on a personal level, but also of the construction of our projects.

Could you tell us a bit of how all this is practically implemented, how the assemblies work and how they are co-ordinated between each other?

There are different levels of co-ordination. There are seven barrios in the MTD Solano and on certain projects they work together, like on health, education, productivity or economic projects. Through delegates we put together initiatives in these

areas but also plans for the struggle and more. These delegates meet once a week, from different places and areas and they represent the decisions made in their assemblies. Also the MTD Solano itself has its own delegates, who meet with others and coordinate all this effort and all this experience through the MTD Anibal Verón. Some times they may be leaders or decision makers. In our case the delegations are taken in turns and can be recalled. If they don't voice the decision made by the assembly they can be recalled.

Was all this co-ordination at a wider level this way from a start or has it evolved and gone through changes? Was there a discussion on how to have it put in place?

I think it was the needs of the movement at different times which made us say to ourselves: OK, let's stop discussing political differences and strategies and let's co-ordinate a bit of struggle against the issues hitting us hard, such as the repression. In less than a year we've had three compañeros killed in the MTD Anibal Verón. This week makes a year since the Avellaneda massacre, in which two of them were assassinated. This repression made us stop and think that we had to coordinate a struggle against it. Also the affair of the corralito, the expropriation by the state of the savings of the people, we could see it was not only affecting those deprived of their savings but also the every day life of the whole country. I think that reality itself has imposed different levels of coordination on us.

Has there been an evolution in the level of the repression that you've had to confront?

I think that the repression in Argentina has never ended, the dictatorship has never ended. There's been a change in the nature of repression, which is now much more subtle and much more dangerous, such as different ways of social control and the means they employ to control the social movements. I think that the state is repression, that the essence of the system is criminal. When the state leaves millions homeless, without any benefits or health service, that is repression. When kids are starving to death every day, dying of malnutrition or bad health, that is repression. These policies are repression, economics is repression. Of course this comes along with batoning and shooting those

demanding in the streets an end to it, asking for what we have right to. An interesting side of repression lately, is trying to have all the popular struggles become part of the institutional process, searching for every mean to buy the leaders. That's why we don't have leaders, because in the end they always agree to something the people doesn't want, something the assemblies don't want. This is the more subtle way, and through propaganda, criminalisation, through new laws and organised groups. They are taking advantage of the situation to organise alternative groups in the barrios, paying youngsters from the area to work with the police and the state, killing militants, chasing people down. There have been more than 300 different cases of faked robberies involving shootings where some militant is killed. This is organised by the police itself. For us it's all part of the same military dictatorship that ruled in the 70s, only in a different fashion, with the mask of democracy.

So we can say that every state, either a dictatorship or a democracy, always follows the same pattern, that of repressing social movements. There's a change in the form, in the shape, but the essence remains the same. It's a matter of detail.

It seems to be a situation of class exploitation in both forms of government, and the role of the state is to ensure and protect the privileges of the rulers, the rich and powerful. Of course. As I see it the true democracy is when we all have a possibility of saying what we want, of choosing how we want to live, without it being imposed on us. As long as these domination relationships exist, as long as there is an imposition of how

to do things, there cannot be any democracy, no matter how popular a government is.

Do you also keep in touch with other types of social movement, like the workers running the factories, or any other?

Yeah. The network of squatted factories is very diverse as well. There are about 200 of these and a lot of different proposals on how to run and defend them. But there is also a network of co-ordination between them the squatted factories, the assemblies and the piqueteros. Recently there's a strong co-ordination with other squatting groups as well, such as teachers, doctors, etc. It's a very interesting process.

Do you think that your movement served as a model for other groups that began to get organised after the December 2001 crisis?

I think so, I think it's been useful even though we don't believe it's right to become a model or create a dogma, nothing like that. But I think there are experiences that multiply themselves and get diversified, which is very interesting. We're always having comrades from other places coming along to visit, to stay with us for a while, work and see, and they're very happy with it.

Do you co-ordinate with anarchist groups? Are they simply organised as members of the assemblies?

No, there were moments in Argentina of a very strong anarchist struggle, such as those of the so-called tragic week or the Patagonia Rebelde, when the first unions in the Patagonia were established. This influence is very strong in areas of the movement such as education, organisation. We are also

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interested in the Spanish Civil War and its different experiences. There are some compañeros at the MTD Solano who come from the anarchist struggle. We have big similarities with the historical way of building up an organisation. But nowadays in Argentina we don't keep any big relationship. We do with individuals, but not with any anarchist organisation.

What do you think the role of globalisation, and international capitalism, has been in the crisis that

"I think that the state is repression, that the essence of the system is criminal. When the state leaves millions homeless, without any benefits or health service, that is repression."

Argentina is going through?

I think that even though national economic institutions and the state have responsibility for everything happening, I still think that the pressure has been on a global basis, that the interests of big capital have out this pressure on. They have effects in countries like Argentina but also on everything happening in Africa, in Asia, and on some countries of Europe itself. It's a conscious policy, planned and executed by the likes of the International Monetary Fund, the big corporations.

How do you see the attempts to create an opposition to this neoliberalist project by building up an international antiglobalisation movement?

We take part in a lot of forums, for instance the Porte Alegre summit, meeting people from all over the world. But we also meet many others at a regional or continental level. We find them very interesting spaces, but we also think that there's a point in stressing the issue of co-ordinating only that which can be constructed or practised. There's a risk of having only

speeches, agreements, theories and when we come back home, nothing happens. The system is preying on and living in our spaces, in our every day life. It gives us an education to make us obey, it imposes the way our clothes are, and where we have to live. You and I cannot choose the place, the house or the barrio where we want to live. I think that the struggle against this taming, this domestication or discipline that we all receive so make us obey the system, that's what we have to co-ordinate afterwards.

Try to get back the decision making on our own lives.

I think so, yeah.

Talking about practical stuff, what do you think we could do from here, Europe, to support the struggling people of Argentina?

Where we get strength and hope is from meeting other struggling people, or those who are doing things in their areas, proposing a new way of life. There's also the sharing of resources. Usually here, as well as in Spain or Italy, there's more resources, things that we lack. Support, and sharing things as much as we can, I think that's a very important issue. There's also the repression. I think it's been reduced thanks to world wide demonstrations, even when it was very strong. Though we don't expect much from international organisations, protests and demonstrations in front of them, of embassies and so on does call attention to our situation.

If we look into the future, do you think there's any solution for the crisis in Argentina within capitalism or would any solution have to go through a radical redefinition of everything?

At the moment in Argentina we have a big void due to the lack of legitimacy that the state has had lately. But at the same time the system is very enduring and goes on creating conditions for it to survive and thrive. This is happening with the new government but it doesn't mean that the right solution is being applied, for us. There's no valid answer from any reform or reproduction of what we had before.

Can this void of power that state crisis has brought along be filled by a network of all the struggling sectors? Do you think that such a coordination could be the embryo of a new society, organised in a different way?

We, at least, are not thinking with the same logic that we are used to. I

believe it is possible to imagine a different kind of society. We at MTD Solano don't have any faith in a revolution employing the same methods of the bourgeoisie to govern. There must be a different logic.

Yeah, could spreading this way of organising, according to these different logics, could it take over the state, so at the end you get a network of assemblies managing the every day life of the workers?

Yeah, I think that would be the logical way, wouldn't it? Because that's the only way every one can take a decision on what affects them.

Finally, how do you think that this is going to evolve? The movement itself, also the social and economic situation in Argentina, what do you think is going to happen, and what would you like to happen?

I don't think the conditions are ripe for a popular government, no matter how much they want it. I think that, for a while, they'll use some mechanism to create some social consensus, to gain the support they need to stay in power. But at some point it's going to kick off again. They are using a lot of tools to create hope in the people, as they did

"...there were moments in Argentina of a very strong anarchist struggle when the first unions in the Patagonia were established"

when they brought Lula, Chavez, Castro. But all this, at least as we see it in the MTD Solano, is simply a mask to fool us. In fact, I think that this government is already having a lot of problems carrying on. We don't expect any important change, any radical one, of any good for the people. The challenges, at least for us, are to go on getting strong in the barrios, making a sound organisation, analysing the new situations in depth and fighting creatively the situations that arise, and don't let ourselves become dogmatic, either.

So a future of struggle.

Yeah, the struggle goes on.

Class Struggle in the New Economy

You might have noticed if you've read any of the bosses' own publications (The Economist, Financial Times, Business Week etc) that they are pushing the idea of a 'New Economy'.

An economy based on the latest technology and IT, which has somehow overcome all the contradictions of the 'old economy' and developed a fundamentally harmonious basis; workers and bosses co-operating for the common good, the end of workplace struggle.

It's the same self-serving myth the bosses have always dished out when they want to make changes that benefit them and harm us, right from the start of the Industrial Revolution. Marx said 150 years ago that "It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt", which is essentially what is happening today. The bosses are trying to use work-place technology against us, whilst simultaneously claiming it's for our benefit. A look at what is actually happening in the 'new economy' will dispel some of these myths. You have to look at call-centres and similar workplaces and the production and assembly plants that make the components for this new technology, not just information workers or high-paid software designers.

The first thing to emphasise is that the development of the New Economy is *deliberate*. It is the logical result of mostly US state-funded development programs that explicitly sought to create a pro-management environment through the use of technology. The early electronic plants in the 1950s were used as laboratories for road-testing new management plans to deal with the collective strength of what became known as "the mass worker" - a workplace community that had gained strength from the sheer numbers of people concentrated in one plant. The concept of 'team-management' grew from this experiment and was exported to other industries most notably the Detroit car factories and steel industries. It's not only the advertised product that the 'new economy' is selling - it also sells plans to minimise worker resistance and new ways of making us work harder for longer for less pay whilst watching us every second. We should keep a very careful eye on what is happening in the 'new economy' as it may very well be happening close to home before too long - as the spread of just-in-time production, toyotism, self-management, work circles and other management ploys have demonstrated. So how have workers been responding to all this?

Worker Resistance

Despite the myths of a peaceful workplace there have been numerous examples of class struggle taking place in the hi-tech sector - practically from its origins. There's a number of struggles that seem to be of particular significance because of the areas in which they took place, how they were organised, and the opportunities for spreading struggle among other parts of the working. The 1993 strike by workers at the Versatronex circuit board assembly plant in Sunnyvale, Silicon Valley was of great significance as it was the first to take place among production workers (mainly female Mexican immigrants) who are the basis of the 'new economy' but who remain



**WORK RATE TOO FAST
(APPLY RESISTANCE)**

hidden behind the scenes in favour of stories about dot-com entrepreneurs. These workers were employed in a sweat-shop: forced to work damagingly long hours, with the usual problems that this causes in the family, at very high line speeds, in unhealthy conditions with no medical plan and with very little pay or job security. This is life at the most basic of levels of the 'new economy' - looks very much like life in the 'old economy' doesn't it? No stock options here! The workers eventually struck and managed to spread the struggle to other factories in Silicon Valley and to other immigrant workers in unskilled jobs, janitors in these hi-tech factories being a prime example. The *reality* of conditions in the 'new economy' met with a worker response straight out of the old days of class struggle, of the boss and the worker having nothing in common. The work conditions allowed the workers to socialise and talk of their problems together and then come up with collective solutions. There was recognition of the common problems felt by the women and the social solidarity to do something about them. This contrasts with the better paid end of the hi-tech sector where one of the most common complaints is the social isolation felt by workers who no longer have to turn up at a definite place for a definite time and who consequently feel they have to battle the boss alone or even that there is no point in struggling at all.

Microserfs

Moving up the scale (so to speak) we have the programmers - the people satirised as ‘micro serfs’ in Douglas Coupland’s novel of the same name. A recent study by the University of California made the claim that these jobs are the modern equivalent of the 19th Century factory. These workers are a clear example of how the bosses myths of “modern flexible working, untied by geographical office boundaries, able to work on their own initiative and offered stock options in their firms.” has been used against the workforce. The reality is that these people are often forced into working 16 hours a day to meet deadlines (in some states overtime legislation has been abolished), and are forced to constantly update their skills (not paid for by the company) in order to stay in work. Resentment came to a head in the last



few years with the bursting of the dot.com bubble, the transfer of jobs to 'developing' countries and the mass immigration of IT workers prepared to work for lower wages from those same countries. But "when the economic crisis hit, they found themselves with few collective guarantees, they were cast to their individual fates". There have now been a number of initiatives by these workers to form some form of collective organisation - trade unions or interest-based associations - to defend their interests and the lessons of social solidarity that the Versatronex workers learned are now being taken up by other sections of the 'new economy'. However much of this still aims to protect individual careers rather than improve conditions for workers as a whole. One thing that this group has become aware of is that it has unique skills which management takes for granted - assuming that people can be easily replaced - but which they can use when deadlines loom. It's a fact that is increasingly being used to gain concessions; these workers have not yet had their skills appropriated by the bosses. Whether this leads to 19th Century-style craft unions and guild organisations or whether they are going to recognise that their disputes are part of a wider network of struggles is going to be a key question over the coming years.

Telecommunications

Call centres stand somewhere in the middle ground: neither production work nor designing and developing original plans, they are (along with data-entry clerks and similar) stuck in boring repetitive factory-like jobs but their tools are no longer the lathe but the pc. They are probably the most monitored workforce going, with constant intrusive supervision, almost every single task broken down into timed actions and compulsory

overtime. Unsurprisingly this has led to well above average workforce turnover, sometimes a high as 80%, as stress levels become just too high. August 2000 saw 87,000 telecommunications workers strike against Verizon Communications in the US over forced overtime, job stress and job security. Forced overtime was the key issue: in some states management can force people to work 15 hours a week overtime, more in certain months, while another (New Jersey) has *no limits* on the amount of overtime that can be forced on workers. As one striking technician put it, "Management can come up to you as you are getting ready to leave and require you to work another two hours, or before your day off they can require you to work four hours of it." This is now the norm throughout the industry - not an exceptional case at all. Other complaints were the *speed* of work and the *supervision* - a striker wrote : "For every call that comes in we have to 'assume the sale.' If we do not try to find a need and sell the customer a new service then we are disciplined. Depending on the supervisor, you could get a suspension. All of this and completing the repair or customer service order has to be done within specified time constraints. For a customer repair the calls have to be down to 300 seconds. *Five seconds over and we are reprimanded... Mostly everyone in the business office is on Prozac.* Many people are also out on sick leave due to the stress. I transferred out after two years. On Sunday nights I couldn't sleep because I was thinking about going back to work on Monday. That job was hell."

The strike which seemed so solid after two weeks out was brought to a halt by another throwback from the 'old economy' - a union sell out. The Communication Workers of America (CWA) split the workforce and all but ran a strike-breaking operation in areas where they met with determined opposition, imposing a deal that actually made the workers job even more stressful. The lesson in the 'new economy' remains the same as in the old: don't trust union bureaucrats, rely on your own autonomous strength and solidarity in collective action. In the last years or so there have been strikes in call-centres all over the world (and a possibly quite large one looming at BT)

as workers come to realise that many companies are now almost totally reliant on these modern day sweatshops. They are in fact a weakness that can be exploited, a point where capital is particularly vulnerable.

Common to all the above sectors is stress. A recent TUC study has shown that: "Workers with stressful jobs are more than twice as likely to die from heart disease. An individuals mental health deteriorates when a change in workload results in higher demands, less control and reduced support. Poor management planning and organisation can lead to heart disease. Working for unreasonable and unfair bosses leads to dangerously high blood pressure. Workers are smoking, drinking and 'slobbering out' to deal with workplace stress. Long-term work-related stress is worse for the heart than aging 30 years or gaining 40lbs in weight." This is the 'new economy', eating up the working class just as surely as did the 'old economy'

The boss talk of class harmony and co-operation is being used to deny all of this. But the fact is that a society that is organised around the capital-labour relation can never escape class struggle, can never escape from bosses vs workers. It may be old but its still true:

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth."

Stickers

The Anarchist Federation has produced a new run of stickers. If you'd like to receive a few, drop us a line. For large quantities, we'd appreciate a donation.

Manchester AF have produced a set of their own stickers in tasteful black and red. They are available by emailing Manchester AF. To have a look both sets of stickers, visit the Manchester AF website: www.af-north.org

pundits say, September 11th, the SARS outbreak, and the war in Iraq. Well, let's look at these each in turn.

First of all, September 11th. That's September 11th 2001, folks. Now, if you bother to take a look at Bombardier's website, you'll discover that: *Its (Bombardier Aerospace) revenues for the fiscal year ended Jan. 31, 2002*

What's Going On At *Bombardier*?

On August 8th 2003, Maurice Nell, business correspondent with the Belfast Telegraph wrote:

“The airline industry in the United States is moving back into profit, according to the latest figures from the seven major carriers.

The data is good news for aircraft manufacturers including Bombardier Aerospace in Northern Ireland where 1,050 are facing redundancy".

Three days later, the same correspondent, in the same newspaper, wrote:

"Bombardier is to sell its business jet financing business for £212m to a subsidiary of United States industrial giant General Electric. The move is a key part of the aerospace company's 'action plan' to get back into profit after recording a loss of £280m last year."

So, the airline industry in North America is 'moving back into profit' and this is reported as 'good news' for Bombardier workers in the north. But in order 'to get back into profit', Bombardier are prepared to throw 1,050 workers onto the scrap-heap. Aye, great news! These losses can be added to the 2000 jobs (or 6% of its workforce in its aerospace division) lost in September 2002 and the further 1200 lost in March this year.

Now, of course, none of this is Bombardier's fault. They are, like everyone else, merely suffering the same downturn in the airline industry worldwide caused by, the media

stood at CAN \$21.6 billion. So, only four months after 9/11, Bombardier's profit margins are, as usual, going through the roof.

But what about SARS? Well, if memory serves, the SARS outbreak affected people, and hence consumers, in two major urban centres, Toronto and Hong Kong. If Bombardier's business focussed on commercial flights between North America and South-East Asia, I could see how profits could be affected. But Bombardier, according to their website are:

...a diversified manufacturing and services company, and a world leading manufacturer of business jets, regional aircraft, rail transportation equipment and motorized recreational products. Bombardier Inc. also provides financial services and asset management in business areas aligned with its core expertise. Headquartered in Montréal, the Corporation has a workforce of some 80,000 people in 24 countries throughout the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

To put it simply, Bombardier Inc. are prepared for any eventuality in the vagaries of global capitalism. A temporary, minor fluctuation in profits in two countries is not going to do them much economic damage.

And so, the war in Iraq and the war against terror. The truth is that Bombardier are profiting from defence contracts handed out by the U.S. military to willing recipients. Recently, the Aerospace Industries of America (which includes Bombardier) joined the Canadian Council of Chief Executives that supports Canadian participation in continental anti-ballistic missile programmes.

Bombardier also got the deal with the US army TACOM to build transportable bridges for the next time the U.S. Army needs to cross the Rubicon (1).

Add to this the fact that the Bombardier 415 is the world's leader in putting out forest and mountain fires (think blazing oil wells) and you realise how much the company has fallen on hard times.

But to return to the workers facing the sack. In June, Bombardier in the north called for 'new working practices' (more mumbo-jumbo from our friend at the 'Telegraph') and a 'pay restraint' (re: pay cut, or no pay) for workers at its three manufacturing plants. This, in spite of the fact that, according to Nell: *demand has grown steadily in the last three months and July produced profits for most US airlines, according to analysts.*

So, in the middle of those three months of profits, Bombardier decides to downsize the lives of over 1000 workers. This a month after they secured a contract worth more than \$2.2bn with US Airways for a mixture of its 50 and 75 seat regional jets. So again, four months after 9/11, Bombardier reported greatly increased profits yet is blaming that event on the need to get rid of 1000 workers today. Just how dumb do they think we are?

5500 workers at Bombardier rejected a proposed four-year agreement which would have resulted in a pay freeze in the first year in return for employment assurances and subsequent talks between the manufacturing, science and finance union, Amicus, broke down because union management refused to Bombardier's decision to scrap apprenticeships and the payment of holiday entitlements.

Anarchists throughout the north of Ireland believe that the workers at Bombardier's three plants should be supported in their struggle against the bosses. We believe there is no need for ANY redundancies given the fact that Bombardier is NOT losing profits in the north, but simply wants to create MORE profits by relocating elsewhere. We hope to be participating in a campaign to raise awareness of the plight of these workers. Contact us for more information.

1. From Meet Canada the Global Arms Dealer by Stephen James Kerr

The Anarchist Federation now has a discussion board at the following address:

**<http://flag.blackened.net/wwwthreads>
Log on if you fancy a chat.**

Trade Unionism and Industrial Organisation

Anarchist Federation (Ireland) and Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation Statement on Trade Unionism and Industrial Organisation

The Role of Trade Unions

The Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF) and Anarchist Federation (AF), as organisations of class-struggle anarchists, agree that trade unions cannot be used, in the long term, as vehicles of revolutionary activity in Ireland.

Here, as elsewhere, trade unions are top-down organisations of bureaucrats and workers where those at the top (the bureaucrats and trade union elite) stifle the hopes of those at the bottom (the workers) and impede their natural desire for an improvement in working conditions. This elite is nothing but a management board of full-time, permanent officials motivated by self-interest alone, with even less interest in rocking the industrial boat. Trade union officialdom will not, for example, involve workers in long-term strike action that would interrupt the flow of precious union dues. In short, trade unions are not controlled by their members; it is they who control. The fact that trade unions like SIPTU have scrapped notions of one-man, one vote, and will not even countenance changes in the ways they are organised, is testament to the stranglehold union bureaucracies have over workers.

As capitalism is an exploitative system where workers produce the wealth, but do not receive it, trade unions, by promoting collective bargaining, are also promoting and legitimising exploitation. In recent times, the 'social partnership' entered into by trade union leaders and bosses has made this even more self-evident,

while Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) are paving the way for private investment in the public sector. In the meantime, trade unions are overseeing the run down of our public services which will be ultimately paid for by an increase in our rates and by the introduction of water charges in the north.

However, the AF and ASF do not believe that its members should not join trade unions. While we realise that they will never be able to step onto the revolutionary stage, we also acknowledge the benefits to be gained by union membership in the short term. Trade unions are places where workers can gather together, and where progressive ideas can be discussed. Trade unions can also offer better Health and Safety conditions, legal protection, and support over minor quibbles with management.

Shop-Stewards and Union Reps

The ASF and AF accept that in some cases - for example in militant workplaces - it may be worthwhile for its members to become shop-stewards or union reps. (Having said this, in periods of industrial calm, there is nothing to bar our members becoming shop-stewards if they feel that by doing so they can make a contribution to the struggle against the boss class.) An AF or ASF member who becomes a shop-steward will do so as a delegate, and not as a mouthpiece for management. The role of the shop-steward/union rep will be seen not as a means to advance the interests of our organisations specifically, but as an opportunity to advance anarchist ideas generally. However, the ASF and AF realise that becoming a shop-steward/union rep is a

lesser tactic in the ongoing struggle against capital, and would argue more for autonomous working class organisation (see below).

Rank-and-Filism

The AF and ASF are supportive of rank-and-file initiatives, while remaining aware of how these initiatives are often used as Leninist fronts whose sole object is to force through a particular party line. Rank-and-filism can provide us with the experience and confidence we need to become better militants and can help us in our fight against bosses. Ultimately though, it will never be able, by itself, to break the trade unions' tie to so-called Labour parties, old or new, to radicalise enough workers to affect any major change to how trade unions function now or will function in the future. We agree that trade unions cannot be reformed, or democratised from within. Rank-and-filism is a strategy that can prove useful, but only if used in conjunction with other strategies that will move workers away from the confines of 'trade union consciousness' alone.

Workplace Organising

The ASF and AF believe that workers must begin the process of thinking of themselves not as mute subscribers to decisions made behind their backs, and over which they have no control, but as individuals with the confidence and self-belief to organise beyond the manacled grip of trade unions, which, until now, have served to channel their energies down the road to nowhere.

To this end, the AF and ASF advocate the establishment of workplace and community groups that will act as hotbeds of militancy in times of increased struggle on the shop-floor (pushing ideas of resistance and direct action in the form of go-slows, sabotage, wildcat strikes...) while maintaining and strengthening links with the community outside the workplace during quieter periods. We believe these groups ultimately will federate both at local/regional and

eventually at national level, and, in the workplace, across sectors of skilled and non-skilled labour. They will form a network of resistance which will involve as many people as possible: both unionised and non-unionised labour, the unemployed, single parents etc... In short, an organisation which will provide a method of autonomous working class activity where our class will decide for itself the means at its own disposal to overthrow capitalism. An example of this type of workers' self-activity can be seen in the work of 'McDonalds Workers Resistance' (MWR) who*:

"emerged as a determined response to the idiocy of our working lives... an angry rebellion against boredom, exploitation, poverty and discipline, ... a rebellion against the idiocy of McDonalds and capitalism."

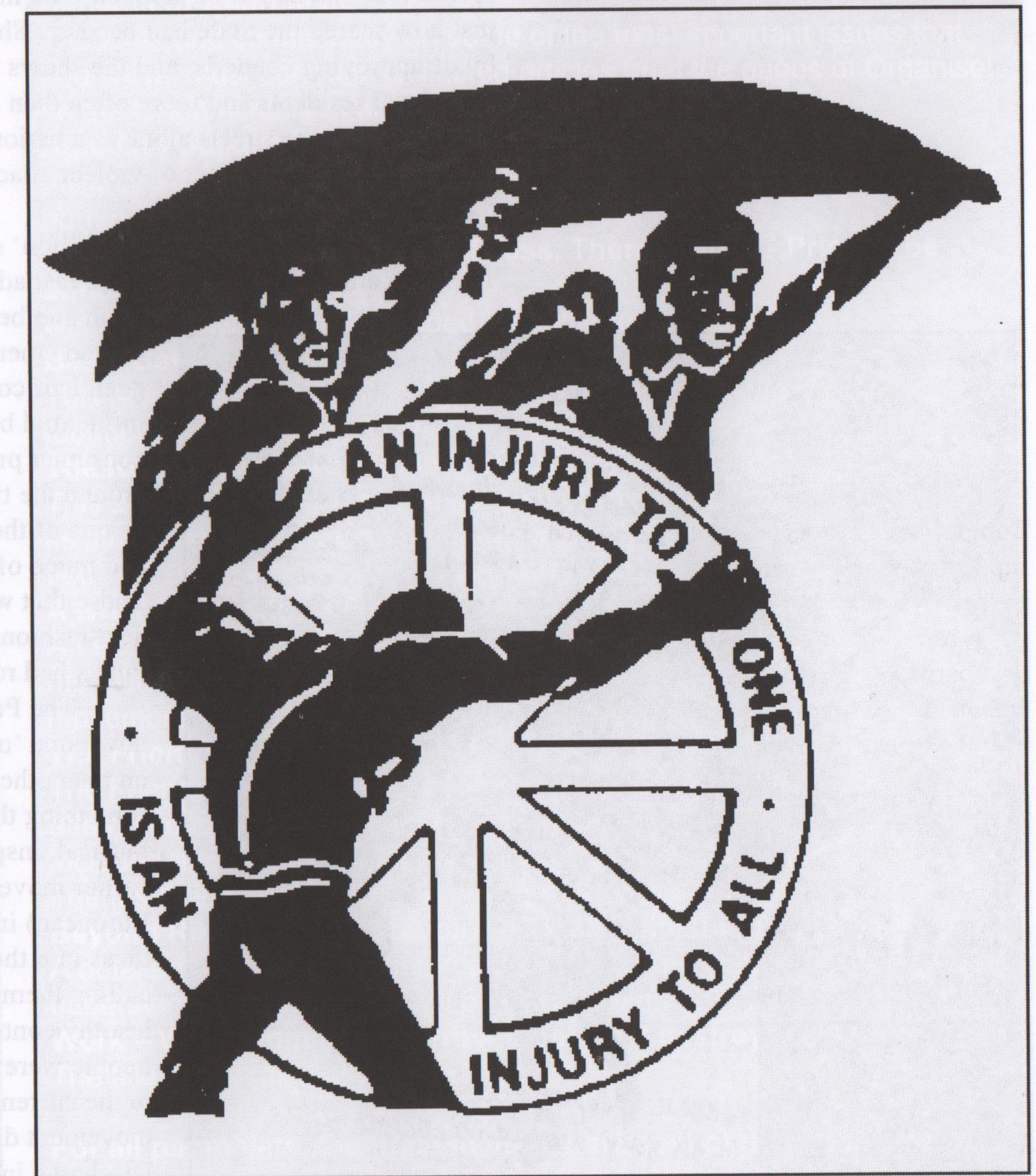
Remove the word 'McDonald' with the name of the company you work for, and you have a fair idea of what we mean.

Conclusion

The working class in Ireland today are as downtrodden as ever before. Casualisation, a run down health service, a service sector on its knees to capital, harassment of unemployed and employed alike, pervasive privatisation, mass redundancies, inflation, squalid housing, sectarianism, rampant racism... are the yoke we bear in the system we need to change. The AF and ASF don't have all the answers, but we think our ideas give us a base from which to start to do our bit to affect change, and work for the society we all of us deserve.

Contact AF (Ireland)!

The Anarchist Federation in Ireland can be contacted at:
PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ.
Or by emailing:
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Tel: 07951 079719



Anarchy in the UK

Over the years the anarchist and radical political movements have had huge, mostly positive, effect upon punk scenes around the world.

Punk Rock (an aggressive raw rock musical style) has since its birth in the mid 70's, declared its rejection of and deep hatred for authority. It was also the lack of emotion and variation in the music of the time that helped shape the Punk sound. The 5 minute guitar solos, and unoriginal sound plus the complete falseness and macho posing that was 70's prog-rock led groups like The Ramones in the US to revert back to something simpler. Something that was more expressive of the feelings of youth.

It is a much-debated topic whether Punk started in the UK or the US. However, as the American Punk scene seemed to be active before the British, it makes sense to call the Americans the pioneers. Nevertheless, the harsh new style of rock spread to UK soon after and was taken up by bands like the Sex Pistols and The Clash. Punks had by now started to form their own style of dress too. The stereotypical safety pins and ripped clothes were as much down to poverty as it was a desire to look different. Many, if not all, Punks came from working class backgrounds and weren't able to afford all the fancy clothes bearing designer labels that were fashionable at the time. So when clothes wore out it was a case of fixing them or finding replacements the best you could, which inevitably meant that you could end up looking extremely 'distinctive'.

By now the Punk phenomenon had spread like wildfire. Bands were popping up everywhere, especially in London where a huge scene was in full swing. A vast movement of rebellious Punks were now the new arch-enemy of the Establishment and showed deep suspicions to anyone claiming to rule them – most notably, the Royals. The growing youth movement was, to some, a genuine revolution, that had to be stopped. The infamous 'Anarchy in the UK' tour proved just how scared the State had become. Show after show was cancelled nationally by disapproving councils, and the shows that did go ahead were met with protests from local residents and more often than not, the Church. It was no longer safe for Punks to walk the streets alone as a national hate campaign by the press, amongst others, meant that the fear of violent attacks by members of the public was very real.

Within the movement, 'rebellion' soon became exploited beyond all belief. The once alternative 'trends' were fast adopted by the fashion industry, capitalised upon and became mainstream fashion. Punk shops started emerging in most big cities selling bondage gear, hair colours, badges etc. Many of the most influential bands were also being signed up as a consumer product by the major record labels. It was around the time the Sex Pistols split that proved to be one of the final blows to Punk, with the fashion and much of the movement dying out soon after. Those that were 'Punks' had now moved onto the next fashion, Two Tone, albeit a style of music many Punks had roots in.

The Punk movement, far from being dead, had now gone 'underground'. Those who hadn't moved on to another fashion, had stayed behind to create something that was as much political as it was musical, inspired by the rebellious attitude of the earlier movement. The new Punk bands (mainly European) injected radical political, often anarchist, ideas into the music. This resulted in many youths calling themselves 'anarchists' and showing a healthy contempt towards the governing order. People were now questioning and giving alternatives to the current regimes in a way that the early punk movement didn't. Bands such as Crass and Discharge in the UK, The Ex and BGK in Holland,

and MDC and Dead Kennedys in America, turned many punks into rebellious thinkers rather than just rock 'n' rollers. Conflict were one of the most notable anarchist bands of the time (still going strong to this day). Their gigs attracted some of the most fiercely political crowds from all around the country, many of which ended in riots with police with hundreds of arrests. Conflict were active in both the anarchist and animal rights movement and continually supported direct action. In an interview in May 2001, Colin Jerwood, the bands singer noted that they measured their success in not how many records were sold but in the level of direct action taking place. Conflict as a band were banned from performing in the UK, forcing them underground and overseas.

The current Punk scene is still very much alive and kicking and underground. The movement is now, theoretically, self-sufficient. Whether bands choose to use the resources within the movement is a different matter.

There now exists a high level of inter-movement communication, in the way of fanzines (primarily) originally inspired by Sniffin' Glue. The two most notable in Britain being Fracture and Reason To Believe and a flick through either ones fanzine review pages reveals a whole load more. It is fair to say that at least one fanzine exists in almost every city in the UK, many of which take the standard cut and paste, A5, photocopied small



pamphlet style. Many of which are inspiring and a good read. Fanzines such as Reason To Believe (who published an interview about the Anarchist Federation between two AF members) are also very political, focusing on prisons and war to name but a few issues covered.

Beyond the photocopier, there exist a small number of independent, not for profit record distributors and record labels. And when the record is finished, there are people that will press the record for only the bare minimum costs. There are even social centres popping up, like Emmaz in London (inspired by the 1 in 12, Bradford) for Punks to put gigs on without having to play at corporate venues.

The politics behind Punk are simple – anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and co-operative. It's an example of a cultural movement working along anarchist lines, regardless of whether the participants openly call themselves 'anarchist' or not. Punks have done a lot over the years to help a variety of courses and organisations (including the AF), by putting on benefit gigs, selling benefit CDs and promoting the aims of various groups. Far from being chaotic, punk has actually done a vast amount over its 25 years to promote the ideas and practices of anarchism to a section of society that many anarchist organisations pay little attention to.

Other Anarchist Federation Publications

Anarchism As We See It - £1

Describes the basic ideas of anarchist communism in easy to read form.

The Anarchist Movement In Japan - £1.50

A fascinating account of Japanese anarchism in the 20th Century. Japan had an anarchist movement of tens of thousands. This pamphlet tells their story.

Aspects of Anarchism - £1

Thoughts and commentary on some of the most important issues that anarchists must confront. Collected articles from the pages of Organise! on the fundamentals of anarchist communism.

Against Parliament, for Anarchism - £1

Insights into the political parties of Britain and why anarchists oppose all parties.

Coming Soon: Where There's Brass, There's Muck - Price to be announced

Our newly-revised and extended pamphlet on ecology.

Basic Bakunin - £1

This revised edition outlines the ideas of one of the 19th century founders of class struggle anarchism.

The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation - £1

This 2003 reprint explains the concept of revolutionary organisation and its structure. All libertarian revolutionaries should read this fundamental text.

A Brief Flowering of Freedom - £1

An exciting account of the Hungarian uprising against the Stalinist monolith in 1956. Also includes a history of the Hungarian anarchist movement.

The Friends of Durruti - £1

The Friends of Durruti were a much misunderstood group who attempted to defend and extend the Spanish Revolution of 1936. Included are an historical introduction and two political statements by the Friends themselves.

Beyond Resistance – A revolutionary manifesto - £2

A detailed analysis of modern capitalism and the state and our understanding of how they will be overthrown.

Work – Why it must be destroyed before it destroys us - £1

The title says it all really.

For all pamphlets, the price includes the cost of postage



The Paris Commune and Free Communism

Kropotkin clearly felt, like many of his socialist contemporaries, that he was living on the "eve of great events", and that a social revolution was imminent.

The political institutions on which people had put their trust in the early part of the 19th Century were, he thought, increasingly being questioned, and that "faith in parliamentary rule, in suffrage, be it limited or universal, is disappearing". The Paris Commune of 1871 had made a tremendous impact on Kropotkin and his socialist contemporaries, and it had generated intense theoretical debate on possible new forms of political organization. For Marxists this meant the "dictatorship of the proletariat", a "worker's state"; for the anarchists the complete abolition of governments and their replacement by a federation of free communes. Although Kropotkin was in no sense a historical determinist he nevertheless interpreted the emergence of mutual aid societies and voluntary associations at the end of the 19th century, as heralding the demise of the nation state, which he felt had "served its time". Such free associations, he thought, would supplant both the state and the capitalist economy, taking over many of their functions. Education, social order, leisure activities, health, as well as economic life could all be organized and would come to be organized through communes and voluntary associations. His reflections on the Paris Commune and on societies of "free co operation" are scattered throughout his writings.

The Paris Commune of 1871 has been described as one of the most important urban insurrections of the 19th Century. It has long been hailed as both inspiration and model for revolutionary socialists. In his well known address "The Civil War in France", written only a few days after the defeat of the Commune, Karl Marx wrote that it "will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society". Twenty years later Engels was to describe the Commune as exemplifying the "dictatorship of the proletariat", and wrote that the state, whether a democratic republic or a monarchy, was "nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another". Writing almost as a quasi anarchist Engels wrote of a time when people would be "able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap". Engels was only referring to the French Empire, for he applauds the Commune based on universal suffrage as a "new and truly democratic" state.

The Paris Commune lasted only seventy two days. It was formally established in the Hotel de Ville on March 28th 1871. It took over the administration of Paris in opposition to both the German occupation and the national government under the unscrupulous Adolphe Thiers. Its membership consisted of around eighty delegates, about half of whom were manual workers or had been involved in revolutionary politics, most of them members of the International Workingmen's Association. Their politics had an anarchist tinge, for they were largely followers of Proudhon and his economic theory of mutualism. About a dozen members of the Commune were Blanquists, advocates of a revolutionary party, although Blanqui himself had been imprisoned on the eve of the Commune, and was not released from prison until 1879. The Commune also included the veteran republican journalist Charles Delecluze who died on the barricades, as well as the anarchists Louise Michel, Elisee Reclus, and Gustav Courbet. After the bloody suppression of the Commune in May 1871, Reclus and Courbet were both forced to flee to Switzerland, along with Benoit Malon. Also a member of the International, Malon later wrote a history of the commune, and in the following year graphically described to Kropotkin his experiences of the Commune.

The Paris Commune came to an end after a week of bloody street fighting, many women participating both in the building of the barricades and bearing arms on behalf of the revolution. As Stewart Edwards wrote "Barricades and street fighting, the traditional warfare of the urban insurgent, were simply the last resort of the Commune's struggle for

revolutionary self government". Around twenty five thousand communards were killed during May 22-28th, compared to 877 government troops, and more than ten thousand were imprisoned. Many were deported to New Caledonia, a French colony in the Pacific. There many died under a brutal prison regime. Louise Michel was not released until 1880. More people were killed in the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune than during the terror of the French Revolution.

Although the Paris Commune allowed trade unions and workers' co operations to take over factories, and made a number of important reforms, it never questioned the rights of private property. But the very existence of the Commune aroused the fury and antipathy of the bourgeoisie throughout Europe. When the army of the French republic crushed the Commune, its chief executive, Thiers, declared that: "the cause of justice, of order, of humanity, and of civilization has triumphed". But for socialists throughout Europe, both Marxists and anarchists, the Paris Commune became a source of inspiration and a symbol of hope for a better future.

It is evident that Marx saw state power as an instrument of society rather than independent of it; it was a necessary institution, and he saw the Commune as a positive form of "social republic", one involving the "self government of the producers". Marxists, therefore, have always been critical of the idea of rejecting the centralized nation state and its replacement by a federation of autonomous communities. They advocated instead a "republic of labour" - or the "dictatorship of the proletariat". Lenin interpreted this as implying the rule of a revolutionary (Bolshevik) party - a form of politics that is more akin to Blanquism and it led Trotsky to be critical of the Paris Commune precisely because it lacked the central direction of a revolutionary party.

Bakunin, who took a crucial part in the revolutionary uprisings at Lyon and Marseilles in September/October 1870, was to claim, in contrast to Marx, that the Paris Commune demonstrated the bankruptcy of state socialism. It was, he wrote: "a bold, clearly formulated negation of the state", and though the majority of its members were Jacobins like Delecluze rather than socialists, the Paris Commune was seen as inaugurating a new era. It initiated, Bakunin wrote, a social rather than a political revolution. He concluded: "Contrary to the belief of

the authoritarian communists that a social revolution must be decreed and organized either by a dictatorship or by a constituent assembly emerging from a political revolution, our friends, the Paris Socialists, believed the revolution could neither be made nor brought to its full development except by the spontaneous and continuous action of the masses, the groups and associations of the people."

The Paris Commune was of central interest to Kropotkin. He had met and had engaged in long discussions with many of the communards particularly with Gustave Le Francais, Louise Michel, Elisee Reclus, Benoit Malon and Andre Bastelica. In 1879 Kropotkin established the anarchist paper *Le Révolté* and every March he wrote an anniversary article celebrating the Paris Commune. The three for 1880, 1881 and 1882 form a single chapter of *Paroles d'un Révolté* (Words of a Rebel), published in 1885.

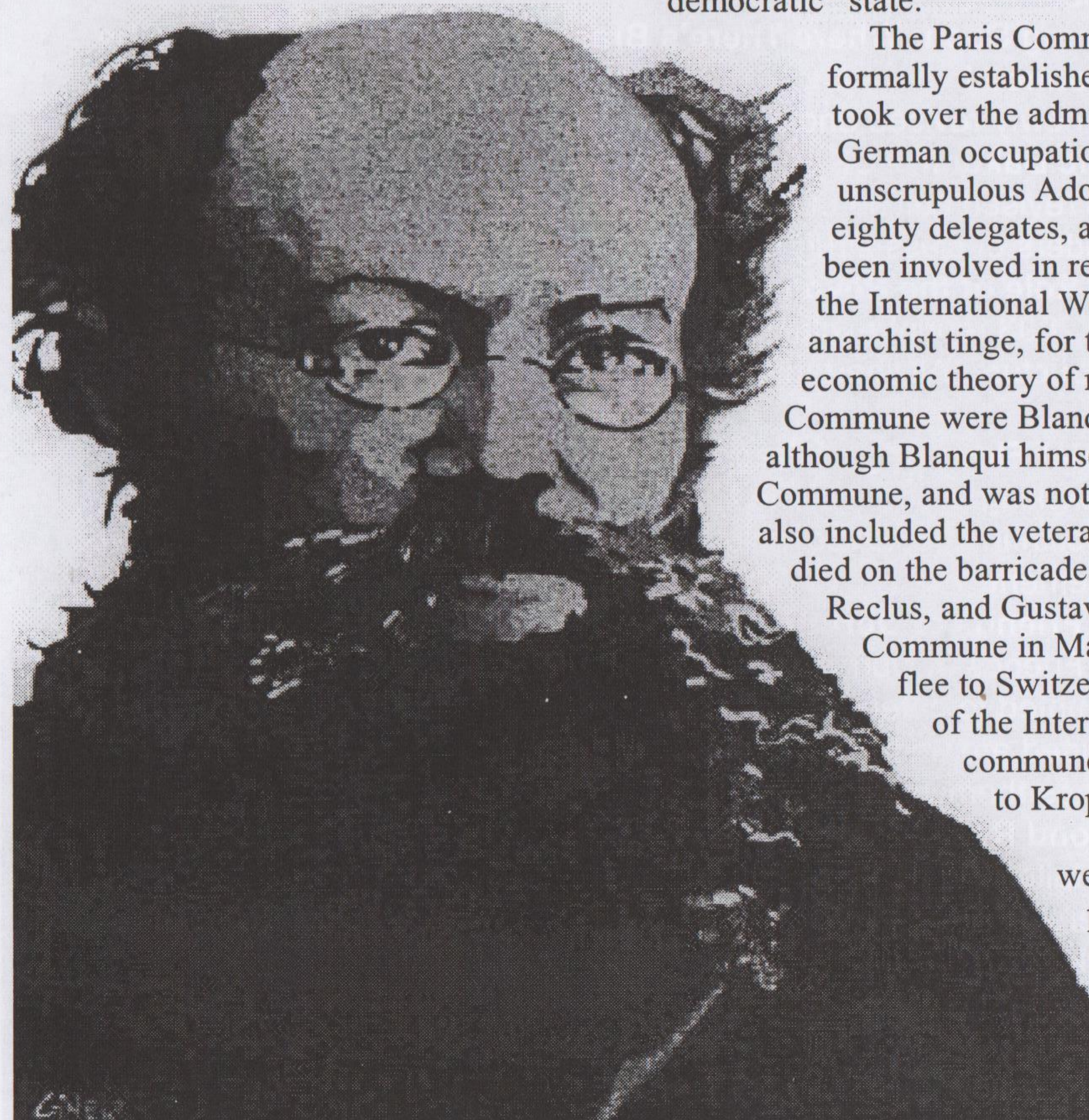
The revolution of 1871 was, for Kropotkin, above all a popular one, made by the people themselves. When the people of Paris rose against the despised government and proclaimed the city free and independent, "It sprang ... spontaneously from within the masses", he wrote. The overthrow of central power, Kropotkin continued, took place without the "usual scenes of a revolutionary uprising; on that day there were neither volleys of shot, nor floods of blood shed behind the barricades. The rulers were eclipsed by an armed people going out into the streets; the soldiers evacuated the city, the bureaucrats hastened towards Versailles, taking with them everything they could carry. The government evaporated like a pool of stagnant water in the spring breeze".

Kropotkin suggests that in the years prior to the Commune two currents of political thought emerged within the International Workingmen's Association. One advocated a people's state, the other anarchy, the free federation of worker's co operatives. Kropotkin misleadingly thought of these concept in ethnic terms, the German Socialists supporting state socialism, while socialists of the "Latin race" (Spanish, French) advocated the complete abolition of the state. The socialist state, Kropotkin suggested, was viewed by the majority of the French Socialists as the worst of all tyrannies. But unlike Bakunin, Kropotkin did not feel that the Paris Commune, in spite of its popular character and the heroic struggles of the communards, was in fact a form of anarchy. The Commune of 1871 he

wrote: "could not be any more than a first sketch. Born at the end of the war, surrounded by two armies ready to give a hand in invoking the people, it dared not declare itself openly socialist, and proceeded neither to the expropriation of capital, nor to the organization of work, nor even to a general inventory of the city's resources. Nor did it break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and (proclaim) the independence and free federation of communes".

But Kropotkin felt that had the Paris Commune survived, then these "two revolutions" might well have occurred, driven by the force of events. Kropotkin, like other socialists at the time, sensed that a revolution was imminent. For him a social revolution implied the abolition of both government (state) and private property (capitalism), as well as of religious ideology. This meant overcoming three "prejudices", sustained and advocated respectively by priests, proprietors and rulers: god, property, government.

Kropotkin thought there were two inter-related tendencies evident in the 19th Century, one an ever growing movement towards limiting the scope of government, the other a growing tendency towards free associations or "free communism". Overly optimistic at times, Kropotkin tended to over emphasize the social significance of both these tendencies. Of course, rather than seeing the demise of the nation state and the replacement of capitalism by voluntary associations, the power of these institutions - the states, business corporations and international agencies of capital - have continued to expand. "Capital" has become global and the modern state ever more powerful. Kropotkin was a perceptive observer of social life and graphically outlined the many forms of "free agreement" that emerged in the 19th Century. These included many forms of association established without the initiative of central governments: railway networks, lifeboat associations, voluntary organizations like the Red Cross, trade unions, professional and scientific societies and hospital associations. From this Kropotkin inferred there was a general social trend in which the free association of individuals was supplanting government agencies in the performance of many social functions. He noted that many of these societies or associations made decisions at conferences through delegates, but that they did not institute "laws" but only "agreements". Kropotkin also emphasized that many public services museums, libraries, parks, street



lighting were provided in the spirit of communism, focussed on personal and social needs without reference to the value of the services the person may have rendered society.

Although Kropotkin emphasizes the power and intrusive nature of the modern state, he puts equal emphasis on the fact that much of everyday social life and many social activities are independent of the state. Like other anarchists Kropotkin always made a clear distinction between capitalism and government (the state) and society, between what Habermans describes as "systems" and the human life world. Every day Kropotkin wrote, millions of social transactions occur without the slightest interference of government. Kropotkin's idea of revolution was the replacement of state institutions based on hierarchy and coercion with voluntary relationships. Gustav Landauer (1870-1919), an anarchist who was greatly influenced by Kropotkin, put it well when he wrote: "The state is a condition, a certain relationship among human beings, a mode of behaviour between men; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently towards one another ... we are the state ... until we have created institutions that form a real community and society of men". For Kropotkin this did not simply imply forming "temporary autonomous zones" for free spirits within a rampant capitalism, but creating real social institutions based on voluntary co operation that would supplant both capitalism and the state.

In his study "Mutual Aid", Kropotkin emphasized the "mutual aid tendency" that was still evident and, he thought, expanding among European peoples. In spite of the fact that throughout Europe the common lands of village communities had been plundered or expropriated by the landed aristocracy, communal institutions and habits of mutual support still existed, Kropotkin argued, throughout many parts of France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries. For example, two thirds of the forests and alpine meadows of Switzerland were still under communal control and village communities still maintained customs and institutions of mutual aid. He noted, too, that wherever the peasants had been able to resist the plunder of their lands and maintain a "spirit" of community, peasant associations had been formed, such as the Syndicates Agricoles in France, although such unions or syndicates had been forbidden by law in many European states until the end of the nineteenth

century. Contrary to the opinion of economists, Kropotkin maintained that communal ownership of land was not incompatible with intensive culture and agricultural improvement, for many peasant communities initiated the rotation of crops, drainage and irrigation without land having to be privatised.

Equally important, Kropotkin emphasises that outside the rural setting, mutual aid associations continued to flourish and expand throughout the 19th Century, with the emergence of varied forms of association: trade unions, friendly societies, trading guilds (in Russia, artels), lifeboat association, various clubs that catered for leisure activities such as alpine climbing and cycling, neighbourhood associations, scientific, literary and education societies. All these exemplified enduring social institutions of mutual aid and support. They also indicated the spontaneous initiative of ordinary people and, for Kropotkin, the fact that voluntary associations and local communes or municipalities could and should supplant state institutions and the market economy.

Kropotkin envisaged a society of "free communism", a society without a state, where all essential social activities were organized through voluntary associations and a network of autonomous federated communes. Kropotkin was not politically naive and believed that no social life was possible without some forms of control and authority; it was nonsensical to think of anarchy as implying the complete absence of power. What he envisaged was the creation of a society where power was dispersed, where "repression" was kept to a minimum and where there were no institutionalised forms of hierarchy or coercive authority. From his observation and studies of tribal and kin based societies Kropotkin recognized that social customs and economic inter dependence spontaneously generated mechanisms for controlling violent and anti social behaviour. Like Tolstoy, he disavowed the use of coercion, or that it should be minimized, suggesting that "society possesses a thousand other means of preventing anti social acts".

He suggested that there were three main ways in which human societies dealt with anti social behaviour. The first was by repression or coercion, which Kropotkin repudiated as ineffective in the long term and contrary to human well being. He wrote: "Not only has a coercive system contributed and powerfully

aided to create all the present economic, political and social evils, but it has given proof of its absolute impotence to raise the moral level of societies". Secondly, there was moral teaching, but this was often ineffective, Kropotkin felt, because of the influence of immoral teachings stemming from institutional religion. Christianity, he emphasized, was always in close alliance with state power. Finally, there were non-institutional controls on anti social behaviour, customary norms and the practice of mutual aid, a concept central to Kropotkin's social philosophy.

But in contemporary Western society face to face communication, mutual aid and voluntary association tended to be restricted and marginalized by the state: "We live side by side without knowing one another. We come together at meetings on an election day: we listen to the lying or fanciful professions of faith in a candidate, and we return home. The state has the care of all questions of public interest; the state alone has the function of seeing that we do not harm the interests of our neighbour. Our neighbour may die of hunger or murder his children it is no business of ours; it is the business of the policeman. You hardly know one another, nothing unites you, everything tends to alienate you from one another...". Prophetic words!

But throughout human history human societies have developed various institutional forms and diffuse sanctions ranging from simple expressions of disapproval to excommunication and ostracism that have been utilized to counter anti social acts. Kropotkin thought these diffuse sanctions, along with public opinion and formative habits, would tend, often unconsciously, to prevent anti social behaviour. But he also recognized that in certain circumstances extreme sanctions would have to be applied to curb unwarranted behaviour in any human community.

It is important to recognize that Kropotkin did not give priority to the community over that of the individual. He said: "Anarchist communism maintains that most valuable of all conquests, individual liberty..... it does not ask the individual who has rejected god the universal tyrant, god the king, and god the parliament, to give himself a god more terrible than any of the preceding god the community - or to abdicate upon its altar this independence..... It says to him, on the contrary, "No society is free so long as the individual is not so".

Human rights inside? Forget about it!

Prisoners live in the strange world of rules. Rules exist and are designed to control, coerce, intimidate, humiliate and frustrate prisoners.

Paradoxically they can also be used to fight the system of control, creating small areas of greater freedom from oppression. But how can you fight back if you don't know the rules? Ray Gilbert and Glen Wright are two long-term victims of this kafkaesque situation. Their statement of protest follows:

Standing Order 3A(a) of the Home Office prison regulations gives the governor responsibility to ensure that information affecting prisoners - Standing Orders and Circular instructions - are brought to the attention of those they concern. No other guidance is provided and governors interpret the guidance their own way; procedures followed in each establishment vary, but generally the methods are as follows:

The governor of a jail, sometimes with the assistance of the Senior Managers, reviews new regulations and decides who should be informed. Department heads are delegated to inform those who need to know about any changes to policy. This system should include prisoners held in Close Supervision Centres (CSCs) under Rule 46 (segregation as a form of punishment) but doesn't. Despite it being law, why are particular prisoners consistently denied access to Standing Orders, Circular instructions and the Privileges Incentive list? It can only be seen as an abuse of the system by vindictive screws. Who in authority states Rule 46 CSC prisoners can or cannot have this information? We'd like the CSC committee to explain in writing who implements these unfair decisions as we are fed up being

exploited Rule 46 inmates.

Penal reform groups have always been concerned about large sections of administrative regulations that apply to people in custody. Some of the material denied to us, for example about specific rights and privileges allowed by the prison rules, are so complex that even specialists in legal analysis cannot interpret their precise meaning. How much more difficult is it for working class prisoners subject to Rule 46 isolation? When rules govern our entire lives behind bars, it is fundamentally important that we know what they are.

In its report on 'Justice in Prison', the organisation *Justice* made important recommendations that should have been acted on but weren't. Prison rules should:

Specify the rights that the imprisoned must forfeit. State precisely the restrictions that are, or may be imposed on the exercise of rights that the prisoner retains. Prescribe in detail the duties of the authorities in the matter of housing the prisoner and providing them with the necessities for a tolerable life, alongside facilities for work, education and recreation. Provide adequate means by which prisoners can seek redress if their rights are ever contravened, giving them access to an independent tribunal. Define with the precision of a criminal statute, the offences for which a prisoner can be punished, the procedures for enquiring into his guilt if charged, and the subsequent punishment(s) that can be lawfully imposed.

Provide for his being properly informed of all rights, privileges, duties and liabilities under the prison rules.

Prison rules as we experience them fall far short of these requirements. The standards of open and impartial justice deemed necessary by the rule of law are especially important to Rule 46 CSC inmates because of their vulnerability to abuses of power, humiliation and degradation. The system manifestly fails to ensure

satisfactory procedures and this failure increases the tensions of prison life for Rule 46 'Superseg' (enhanced segregation) inmates, for whom conditions are practically inhuman. It creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, arbitrariness, unfairness and resentment: a recipe for volatility, leading to inmate unrest. This has to be unacceptable, beyond reasonable expectations of endurance.

Article 3, the Human Rights Act of 1998 states: *No one shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or to degrading treatment or punishment.* In particular we draw attention to the "inhuman and degrading treatment" aspects of Article 3, which is what we feel we are being put through. The treatment of prisoners, which creates fear, anguish and inferiority, results in mental scars which many prisoners, especially poorly educated ones, never overcome.

It is for those prisoners especially that we speak out, risking further victimization. The emotions punishment provokes debase us, and often lead to physical and mental breakdown, self-mutilation, and the demolishing of resistance, which is, after all, their point. We're in prison, yes, and some of us have broken society's rules. But we too are human and have rights and entitlements as well as a duty to pay our debt. We argue, on behalf of all parties within the prison system, especially the working class, for independence and openness in the formal procedures employed for the resolution of disputes. In doing so we urge people on the outside to put pen to paper to protest the treatment of prisoners currently as ill-defined and arbitrary. Before a new society is brought into being there will be many more working class victims of state oppression. It is essential to challenge the oppressors before things get infinitely worse for those already there. **Ray Gilbert and Glen Wright,** H10111/Hu6A, CSC, HMP WOODHILL, TATTENHOE STREET, MILTON KEYNES, MK4 4DA

Endpiece
Ray's struggle against wrongful imprisonment continues after 22 years (eight years beyond the mandatory term for his alleged offence). Write to him at the above address. The prison governor can be reached at the same address, though in somewhat better circumstances!



Letters

Dear Organise!

Last issue's article on fatherhood was thought-provoking but had little to do with anarchism or, more particularly, anarcho-communism. The article starts by proclaiming the 'inequality' of adults compared to children and goes on to urge us to "totally give ourselves to our kids", subordinating our will and needs to theirs. No Gods, No (Little) Masters indeed! Must the biological parents of the future give up everything they want to do for two, five, seven or however many years 'parenting' is meant to last? Or should we be free to be who we want to be, no matter what?

The article seems to suggest that biological parenthood is some universally transformative event, good for adult and child, ignoring the diversity of humanity for whom either condition may be inimical. Sure we will need and win a radical change in consciousness before, during and after the revolution but it will come from the transformation of social relations not procreation. Of course men can be carers, they can nurture. But that is a human condition

Continued from page 28

"noisy" as his health had been broken by the harsh treatment he had received in the Bolshevik labour camp. Nevertheless he and other Moscow anarchist-communists united with anarcho-syndicalists to set up the Moscow Union of Anarcho-Syndicalists-Communists in early 1919. It published a paper *Trud i Volya* (Labour and Liberty) which issued calls for direct action "to destroy every authoritarian or bureaucratic system". After its sixth number, the Bolsheviks closed it down in May 1919. "Why would we have need of money, all Petrograd is in the hands of the workers; all the apartments, all the clothes stores, all the factories and workshops, all the textile mills, the food shops, all are in the hands of the social organisations. The working class has no need of money". I.S. Bleikhman



not restricted to parents alone. Full socialisation as free human beings comes not from the family but from the free society, through our relations with all other humans we encounter. Patriarchy and the nuclear family, where so much abuse occurs and which are so destructive, will have to be destroyed and deserve to be destroyed by their victims, those "apathetic, crushed, damaged, sore people" the author speaks of. But what of all the other victims? Must we wait until a 'revolutionary parenthood' has created the fully-formed and imagined free people of tomorrow? Must we accept a decades-long 'holocaust of the innocents' while waiting for the waves of love and compassion emanating from the last sane people on the planet to cure all sickness and usher in the jubilee? Is the author a secret supporter of Natural Law?

In choosing anarchism I have endorsed myself. I demand no unconditional love from other anarchists - I'm not a fascist after all - but expect to share in their comradeship, solidarity and mutual aid to whatever extent they choose. This isn't lunacy. It's not competitive egotism. It's not dominance games. It's freedom.

At the end of the day this article was about spirituality and faith, a strange position for someone who obviously rejects the tired dogmas of religion. It

ignores all the basic principles of freedom in favour of notions of unconditional love that are as much creations of capitalism (to bind us with bonds of blood to a social relationship that serves the ruling class far better than it does us - or where do the slaves of tomorrow come from?). We're not on Walton Mountain, after all. It ignores all science in favour of the quack nostrums of a few feminist thinkers. And it turns its back on the need to transform social relations not individual ones. Once more we're back on the individualist terrain of ripples in the pond or butterfly wings causing hurricanes around the world. Jesus couldn't do it, and nor did Gandhi. Only the millions of people of the oppressed, if necessary with guns in hand, can. What is the use of love if I can still see the bars around me? I cannot carry my child on my shoulders while fighting for freedom. I'm an anarchist and my life is struggle, not games by the fireside.

Odessa Steps

A letter for ORGANISE?

Send your letters to:
Anarchist Federation, 84b
Whitechapel High Street,
London, E1 7QX
Or email
anarchistfederation@bigfoot.com

Aims and Principles

1. The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3. We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-Communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women, lesbians and gays, and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The

union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

Want to join the AF? Want to find out more?

I agree with the AF's Aims and Principles and I would like to join the organisation.
I would like more information about the Anarchist Federation.

Please put me on the AF's mailing list.

Name

Address

Please tick/fill in as appropriate and return to:
AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX.

Anarchist Federation (Ireland), PO Box 505,
Belfast BT12 6BQ.