

# Red & Black Revolution

## THE EZLN!

The name of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rebels is taken from the Emiliano Zapata who played a major role in the Mexican Revolution (1910 - 1921). 73 years has passed since the Mexican Revolution. The memory of Zapata had faded onto the worn pages of history.

Indeed the heirs of the betrayers of Zapata, headed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party and President Carlos Salinas, are in power today in Mexico. They have remained in power for the last 75 years. But the Zapatistas have come back to haunt them.

### A New Year a New Dawn.

On New Year's Day of 1994 people awoke to the news that four towns in the south-eastern state of Chiapas had been taken over by a group calling itself the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Militarily they had timed

their strike against the Mexican army well and thus even managed to capture General Absalon Castellanos (former Chiapas Governor). Initially they took San Cristobal de Las Casas then Oxchuc a town 36km away. They ransacked 10 government offices. They freed 179 prisoners from the prison in San Cristobal and attacked the army garrison on January 2nd.

They stated: "We have nothing to lose, absolutely nothing, no decent roof over our heads, no land, no work, poor health, no food, no education, no right to freely and democrati-

*"We say  
Enough is  
Enough"*

cally choose our leaders, no independence from foreign interests, and no justice for ourselves or our children. But we say enough is enough! We are the descendants of those who truly built this nation, we are millions of dispossessed, and we call upon all our brethren to join our crusade, the only option to avoid dying of starvation!"

On January 4th the big guns hit back. Ten towns in the surrounding area of San Cristobal were bombed. Reports came in of at least 400 killed in the bombing. Five reported EZLN rebels were found dead in Ocosingo. In another town, the Zapatistas shot down a helicopter, burned down the city hall and then left. The bodies of 38 people who had been killed by the federal army were found. The next day 70 tanks arrived in the conflict zone and the army attacked a van killing 5 civilians including one 8 year old girl. Various government ministries circulated black propaganda about the group labelling them radical with a professional foreign leadership. The authorities also stated that the presence of human rights organisations "hinders the dismantling of such a movement".

### Why Chiapas?

The EZLN is based amongst the indigenous people who live in and around the jungle of Lacandona, east of the high plains of Chiapas. Chiapas is an atrociously poor area. 41% of the population have no running water. 34.9% are without electricity. 63% of the people live in accommodation of only one room. 19% of the labour force has no possible income and 67% of the labour force live on or below the minimum wage - in Mexico you can take this as being very little. Despite Article 27 which promises Land Reform in the constitution nothing has happened in this area. President Salinas recently changed Article 27 further wiping out any hopes for agrarian reform. Northern Mexico has developed factories to cater for companies making use of cheap labour. The southern part of Mexico has been left to become a wilderness. The EZLN fears that NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) will keep Chiapas further isolated and underdeveloped.

After the first initial days of hostilities the EZLN withdrew to the Lacandona jungle where they now are involved in negotiations. A cease-fire which began on January 17th has held despite the army breaking on a number of occasions. In February negotiations took place inside a belt composing of



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## TIME FOR A NEW LEFT?



- The left, a phoenix awakes?
- Mexico & Russia, revolutionary lessons.
- Alternatives to 'traditional' unions.



# Comment

Over the last two decades anarchism has returned from the edge of extinction. At a time when the rest of the left has been in decline anarchism has grown, re-establishing itself in country after country. However anarchism as a movement has never had a significant foothold in any of the English speaking countries (ES). There were movements in the USA and London around the turn of the century but both of these were limited to the immigrant community and failed to survive after World War I. Now that the authoritarian left has collapsed, the alternative that anarchism offers should be more attractive than ever. However because of the perceived weakness of anarchist theory, and the fact that in the ES those using the label 'anarchist' are commonly anti-organisational and counter-cultural in outlook, anarchism is not yet looked at seriously by those seeking alternative politics.

In addition many of the small anarchist groups that exist are going through a mini-crisis. For too long they have seen themselves solely as an opposition to the rest of the left, a voice in the wilderness. There has been no real thought of how to become the major organising force for revolution. This has generated a lack of seriousness reflected in sloppy politics and the absence of co-ordinated intervention in struggles.

These are the audiences we are seeking to address in this new publication, Red & Black Revolution. We will be talking about the sort of politics the left needs in order to succeed in changing the world. We will be arguing for anarchism with those looking for a new direction for the left. We will be advocating a particular tendency in anarchism, most commonly called 'Platformism' after the 1926 publication *"The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists"*. We will be discussing our concrete experience of campaigns in Ireland, experiences we feel have lessons for activists everywhere. We will be bringing in-depth features on the international movement, that will attempt to give a flavour of the broader picture of the anarchist movement. Through the combination of this work we hope to encourage a new direction not only in left politics in the ES but also of anarchist politics.

**In this issue we look at the state of the left today, why it is in this state and how to get out of it. Describing the crisis of the left is the easy part and has been done elsewhere by ourselves and others. Uprooting the causes beyond the superficial ones is more difficult. We identify the cause in the authoritarian practise and theory of the left. Freedom is identified as a key concept much neglected by the left but one that is central to change. The right has managed to appropriate the buzzwords of freedom, choice, and democracy despite the fact that these are things few of us encounter in our day-to-day lives. For the left to reclaim them it is first necessary to demolish the 'free world' edifice constructed by the right. We start this process by examining the role of parliamentary 'democracy' in the developing world.**

**A movement capable of overthrowing capitalism is yet to be built. But there are movements arising or continuing that incorporate some of the necessary features. These are powerful indicators of the possible. Anarcho-syndicalism represents perhaps the oldest surviving example available. The rebellion in southern Mexico would seem to represent the most recent. We also look at an attempt to challenge the domination of Irish trade unions by bureaucratic deals. It is by understanding the potential and also the problems of such movements that we can begin to see what is required.**

So welcome to a new publication. We hope you find our work useful, we don't claim to know all the answers, rather we are exploring with you the possibilities of change. Change is our goal, not just of the left but of the world.

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It has become something of a cliché to say the left is dead. But few have explained this supposed death. New organisations have arisen in recent years that claim to be avoiding the mistakes of the past. How true is this claim? **Andrew Flood** examines the evidence and comes up with some disturbing conclusions.

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## The left... The way forward

The left to-day, demoralised by its collapse is without focus or direction. Anarchism given its anti-authoritarian tradition should be able to offer a way forward. But many are reluctant to take up anarchism, **Andrew Flood** looks at some of the reasons why this is so and suggests the key organisational ideas needed for a new anarchist movement.

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Following the vote on the Programme for Competitiveness and Work at the end of March, the Trade Union Fightback (TUF) campaign was wound up. Here **Gregor Kerr**, an INTO member who was secretary of TUF, looks at the history and lessons of the campaign.

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Does the end justify the means? Many on the left believe so. **Aileen O'Carroll** argues that the means used play a part in creating the end that is achieved. The best example of this is the Russian Revolution of 1917.

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Some Marxists claim Marx was a libertarian, and Leninism and social democracy are not really Marxist. But in doing so they ignore the anarchist critique of Marx's political ideas on the state, the party and the organisation of a socialist revolution. **Conor Mc Loughlin** looks at the contradictions within Marx's political writings.

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The main organisational form in libertarian politics today is syndicalism. **Alan MacSimon**, a delegate to Dublin Council of Trade Unions who has also attended a European gathering of revolutionary unions looks at the potential, and limits, of syndicalism.

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Democracy has broken out in a range of countries in recent years - Guatemala, S. Korea and Argentina to name but a few. But, what is the reality? **Kevin Doyle** looks at a book that takes a more critical eye.

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On New Years Day of '94 people awoke to the news that four towns in the south-eastern state of Chiapas had been taken over by a group calling itself the Zapatista National Liberation Army. **Dermot Sreenan**, who recently presented a talk on the EZLN and organised a picket of the Mexican embassy in January '94, looks at the politics and history of the EZLN.

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## The left (part 1)

# Ashes to Phoenix?

It has become something of a cliché to refer to the death or collapse of the left. What's still missing however is an analysis of what went wrong with the left. One that goes beyond surface manifestations, and reaches into its core politics. This lack of analysis means that much of the 'new left' is not that new at all, merely a repackaging of old ideas in new wrappers.

Major changes have occurred in the left throughout its short history. In both numbers and politics there have been wide swings from times of hope and mass numbers to times of despair and collapse. In the late 60's and early 70's the left grew internationally, attracting huge numbers and leading real battles. Today this growth has collapsed almost totally, many of the organisations that led it no longer exist and the ideas of those that survive, have been for the most part so discredited, that it is unlikely they can ever recover.

### The collapse of the left

Since the Russian revolution the left has been divided into two great camps. There were those who followed the Bolshevik model of a revolutionary seizure of state power and those who followed the more traditional Marxist model of social democracy, seeking to gain state power electorally where possible. Although there were other significant movements, including the anarchists, what shaped the left today were the splits within those two camps and the perimeter of debate laid down around them.

The Communist parties built real mass parties in many countries, and expanded their influence from Russia to a host of other nations. Along with all those who claimed the Bolshevik legacy, they rode a carpet of triumphalism for many years, one that limited debate around revolution to variations on the Leninist model. Even in countries

like Ireland where they never reached significant numbers, the prestige of Russia and the other revolutions enabled them to wield an influence far out of proportion with their numbers, among intellectuals and in the unions. But towards the end of the 1980's the whole edifice crashed to the ground almost overnight. In the east the parties were overthrown, in the west they split into competing and mostly irrelevant factions.

The social-democrats in the years after the First World War expanded on the earlier success of the German SDP and came to power in country after country. Most of the western democracies have had social democratic governments in the intervening period. But the left social-democrats had always looked to the USSR as a guide, while their policies were very much based on ability to control and direct national capital. In the 80's the changed nature of capital, from a national form to an increasingly transnational one made social democratic economic programs redundant. The control of the national economy needed by the nation state for even the limited reforms of social-democracy is beginning to vanish. Witness how even the threatened election of a Labour government in Britain resulted in rapid capital transfers out of the country. The left within the social democratic parties collapsed due to the increasing impotence of their program and the emerging crisis in the USSR. Their mass membership first dwindled and then collapsed. Today in rhetoric<sup>2</sup> as well as deed they are indistinguishable from the liberal parties.

This twin collapse was international and resulted in the vast bulk of those who called themselves socialist abandoning left politics and activism. As a related consequence the 1980's also saw the 'left' leaning national liberation organisations like the ANC or FMLN come to a compromise with imperialism and reach a settlement. This had a demoralising effect on those whose primary focus was solidarity work for these organisations, one that is still to reach its full consequences as events unfold in South Africa and Palestine.

There were many who saw themselves as outside the Communist parties and the social democrats. Sometimes the differences were real, as with anarchists. Sometimes they were not so real but appeared so because of the very narrowness of debate, as with most Trotskyists. Even with this perceived gap the very fact that huge numbers abandoned politics had a knock on effect. This was demoralising but it also meant that effective action became increasingly impossible. Even if the arguments were won, the networks that could have carried them through no longer existed.

### It's not just the party!

All those bodies which could be described as 'left' have seen a collapse in involvement. This effect is seen not just in political organisations but more importantly in all campaigning bodies. The effect is seen in the unions where the number of activists has dwindled to the point where most unpaid positions are uncontested. This has led to the outwardly positive 'election' of revolutionaries to trades councils and branch committees. The reality behind this is more to do with nobody else being willing to take the job. In no sense has the broad layer of activists (who might once have seen far left politics as loony) been won over, rather most have dropped out or come to see revolutionary politics as irrelevant rather than dangerous.

The ability of the left to explain what is happening around it, to intervene in events and to change the course of them has vanished. Although illusions in the state were always the major problem of the left, today the activity of what remains is little more than attempts to get the state to police society for the better. For example the far-right is to be countered by trying to get the Fascists banned by the state at national and local level. In fact much of the left today see people themselves as the problem and see more police, more intrusive management, more control over what can be said and seen, as the solution. Most notably this has arisen in the focus on censorship as not just a method but almost the only way of fighting both racism and sexism.

The death of the left is also reflected in its lack of hope. Where once the left was all about an exciting vision of a future society now it is pre-occupied with a fear of the future and a longing for the past. New scientific discoveries instead of being seen as part of the process of liberating man from

nature, are instead seen as part of a plan to create a Huxley type 'Brave New World'. Hence recent articles in surviving Trotskyist journals argue against Chaos Theory and the Human Genome project as being anti-Marxist. Science once seen as the solution to many of humanity's problems is now seen as a major problem in itself.

This is what is meant by saying the left is dead. Its numbers have collapsed, it has no vision or direction and instead of looking to the future it worships the past.

From one point of view anarchists can in part welcome this collapse, as it is the collapse of authoritarian socialism. Most of the left organisations were social-democratic or Leninist in character and so their ideas were incapable of constructing socialism. The nature of the collapse re-enforces the anarchist rejection of the authoritarian methods of these organisations as it was these methods that destroyed the potential for socialism. After years of being told that compromises and deceit were the fastest (if not only) way to create socialism, anarchists feel entitled to repeat the response of Voline to Trotsky in 1919 at the height of the Russian Civil war:

Trotsky: "One can't make an omelette without breaking eggs"

Voline: "I see the broken eggs now where's this omelette of yours?"

In the English speaking countries<sup>3</sup> and in particular Ireland, the anarchist movement is much too small to replace the numbers and influence once held by the left. So the collapse of authoritarian socialism is widely seen as the collapse of socialism and a demonstration that capitalism, whatever its flaws is the best that can be hoped for. Even in the countries where the anarchist movement is substantial (and in many countries it is the main force on the revolutionary left) it is as yet inadequate for its basic task (i.e. revolution). In terms of ideas, the anarchists may have the best ones but as yet they are not capable of winning the masses to overthrowing capitalism and creating anarchism.

In the English speaking countries there is not and has not been a significant anarchist movement with the possible exception of the period up to World War I in the USA. Anarchists have operated as a small section of a larger left. Because of the small size of the anarchist movement the collapse of this larger left has had profound effects on it, both due to the general climate of demoralisation and also because it is no longer possible to exist purely as an opposition to

Leninism and social democracy. This is a good thing because some anarchist organisations had come to limit themselves to explaining 'Why the left is wrong' on a whole number of issues rather than trying to construct an alternative themselves.

### A new left?

It might be hoped that with the twin collapse of Leninism and authoritarian socialism people would flock to the banner of anarchism. For the most part this has not happened. Instead over the last decade we have seen the emergence of a number of 'new' left organisations which claim to represent a decisive break with the past. Sometimes this represents little more than a change of names. In other cases these new organisations arose as splits by members unhappy with the direction of existing organisations, their initial politics coming from ex-members of that organisation. The Committees



of Correspondence in the USA was formed by members of the Communist Party USA who lost an internal argument over the direction ('reforming') of that party.

Many members of the old left organisations recognised that their ideas were discredited and no longer relevant, and voted with their feet, leaving not only left organisations but oppositional politics in general. But not all vanished, some have made efforts to remain active. Some of these have refused to learn anything, or admit that mistakes were made, instead they carry on activity in a parody of yesteryear. Some of the Communist parties for instance reacted by returning to worshipping the period of Stalin or Brezhnev

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and blame the 'reformers' for all their current woes. The Irish Communist Party responded to the collapse of the USSR by hiring a skip and throwing most of the Gorbachev material from their Dublin bookshop into it. In most Communist parties however the majority came to the conclusion that revolution itself was no longer possible and instead became social democrats or abandoned left politics for 'progressive' politics where the working class is seen as just one more pressure group in a rainbow coalition.

Some organisations did become aware of their own death and sensibly dissolved themselves rather than causing damage as they thrashed around in their death agonies. But they were wrong to imagine that just because they could conceive no future relevance for revolutionary politics that revolution was no longer relevant. Instead they were faced with a jump that they were incapable of seeing the other side of. Indeed the upturn in industrial disputes over the last year in Europe, most notably around Air France, indicate that the class conflict goes on and may even be picking up some of its lost momentum. Unemployment and poverty have again become obvious features of capitalism. To this extent the crisis on the left is mirrored by a crisis in capitalism, its hope of the early 80's of an eternal boom now dashed on the rocks of recession.

### What went wrong?

That the left has collapsed is contested by only the most irrelevant sects. But the attempts to explain why it happened are poor, focusing on the surface manifestations; the economic crisis of the USSR in the 80's, or conspiracy theories about the CIA. The right and many on the left went for the simplest explanation of all, socialism cannot work and revolutions have to end in dictatorship. But the failure is not with the idea of socialism but rather with what those who called themselves socialists became. It was not socialism that failed but the socialists! Above all, this failure arose from the left ideologies that looked to good leaders to liberate the rest of us. To these ideologies the role of 'ordinary people' differed, from the tickers of ballot papers to the stormers of barricades. The role of decision makers however was denied, it was to be placed in trust with an intellectual elite until the far off day when this power could be returned.

The tragic part about this is that the warnings about where the statist path would lead have been around since the working class first became a formidable force at the time of the Paris Commune (1871). The debate between the anarchists and Marxists that split the 1st International was fought around this issue. But for various reasons those issuing the warning, the anarchists, failed



to convince the rest of the left<sup>4</sup>.

The two major trends of the 20th Century socialist movement, the Leninists and the social-democrats, were not as radically different as it may have seemed but rather represented two sides of the same coin. The actual structure of rule in the Soviet Union was never really a major problem for either of these groupings, their disagreements were over whether such a society had to be established through revolution, or could be 're-formed' into being. Both currents sought to create socialism through the actions of a few, wielding state power, on behalf of the many. Left social-democrats like Tony Benn went further and were commonly happy enough to describe the USSR as actually existing socialism. In Ireland, organisations like the Workers Party held a similar (if quiet) position towards North Korea and, along with members of Labour Left went there on junkets.

The argument between Leninism and social-democracy was not about how a socialist society could be built, both aimed to use state power to do this. Rather it was whether sufficient control of the state could be gained through the parliamentary system. Many Leninists may have claimed to wish for more democracy<sup>5</sup> in the USSR but they all stood over the Bolshevik destruction of democracy, only moving to opposition when their particular hero was ousted. Organisations like the Socialist Workers Party that claim to stand for 'socialism from below' defend the actions of the Bolsheviks in imposing one man management, crushing workers councils and censoring, imprisoning and executing members of other left tendencies. This has to call into question any claimed commitment to democracy, or socialism from below.

### Aiding struggle?

Even in the short term the left commonly offered no way forward. It would be wrong to overstate the case but a large section of the left was not interested in helping workers win struggles except in the most abstract sense. Instead involvement in struggle had just one thing behind it: 'build the party'. This commonly took the form of setting up a party controlled 'front' which would campaign around an issue solely in order to recruit those who were motivated to fight on this issue. Once the potential re-

cruits dried up, then the campaign was quietly wound up. A common response to contacting someone about a new campaign was the question of 'whose front is it'. Anyone who has been involved with left activity for any period of time will have been through meetings and campaigns disrupted and possibly destroyed by different left factions wrestling for control.

The effect this had on activists was seen by the way membership of many left organisations operated like a revolving door, with people interested in socialism walking in one side, only to be thrown out the other, disillusioned and burnt out. 'Everything for the organisation' was the unofficial slogan of the left. This destroyed many peoples' belief in socialism as a source of inspiration as they got sucked into the methods of treachery and deceit that this involved.

Many of today's activists have either come through this mill, or have had bad experiences of the left using them. This has created a legacy of suspicion and even hostility which forms a real barrier in building solidarity today. It also means that many activists have no interest in building revolutionary organisations but instead limit themselves to building campaigns. Revolutionary organisations are seen as self-serving edifices rather than bodies with a positive and vital contribution to make to struggle. The attitude that characterises these activists' view of the revolutionary organisations is suspicion.

So in this way the left has actually played a substantial negative role. It has constructed a monstrous caricature of socialism and the methods of socialism. Rather than bringing people forward, it has sucked the spirit out of them. Not just those parts of the left who created and worshipped the USSR but also those whose methods have alienated tens of thousands of activists. In this context many activists see left organisations as useless barriers, interested only in selling papers and sectarian squabbles.

### The 'new left'

This crisis of the left has become increasingly apparent over the last decade and has resulted in the formation of many new groups, including ourselves. As the crisis became particularly obvious, the process of disintegration speeded up and the new

organisations if anything became more confused. Most of the more recent ones have no common vision of anything positive in the past but are united solely by a feeling of 'that's not the way to do it' towards the existing left. But consciously or unconsciously, various strategies have been adopted by some as the way forward. It is these strategies that must be examined to judge the potential of such new groups.

Groups whose aim is a new flavour of Leninism or social-democracy can be written off at the start. The record of their strategies for the last century speaks for itself. From the libertarian point of view the fault is in their core politics, that which makes them statist. However many have become aware of these flaws and so many of the groups that have arisen in the last decade would claim to be neither. It is these forces which are important in terms of the emergence of a new left.

Certain limitations have to be recognised from the start. It is inevitable that many of the newer left organisations have a blinkered vision, brought about by their youth and small size. Their memory extends back maybe a decade or so at most. They are unaware of events outside their own country except in the broadest terms, and force events to fit into an analysis generated from their immediate and narrow experience<sup>6</sup>. This is a real if unavoidable problem, but one that is greatly reduced when it is recognised and taken into account. It is also a reason why it is vital to convince many of the older layer of activists that there is still a point in revolutionary politics, but that a thorough re-examination of basic politics is necessary.

It is not intended to discuss organisations claiming to be in the anarchist tradition in this article. What will be discussed is organisations who believe that the wheel needs to be re-invented (i.e. that there is no historical tradition worth basing themselves on). These see the solution in junking the left to date, and re-building from scratch. This is the most common set of strategies to have emerged in the last few years. What has united these different strategies to date is that although it is pointed out repeatedly that mistakes were made and the old left is irrelevant, there is little analysis as to the cause of this irrelevancy. The assumption is that with the verbal break from the 'old politics', all the problems it

## A BIRD THAT LAYS SUCH ROTTEN EGGS IS LONG OVERDUE FOR EXTINCTION



created fade away.

This assumption is fundamentally flawed as it assumes that the reasons for the failure of the left to date are understood. In fact for the most part, instead of analysis, all that exists is a set of popular prejudices and some surface understanding of the problem. This approach also assumes that there is little need for newer members to re-discover the cause of the previous problems, that this information will somehow be transmitted down by the older members (leadership?). This in itself is a direct example of the re-appearance of one of the problems associated with the failure of the old left. The division into leaders and paper sellers.

Organisations adopting these strategies are often faced with an additional problem. They attract long time members of various other organisations who have brought a fair amount of political baggage with them. Although they can say 'yes we were wrong' they can't admit the possibility that some of their former critics were right, at least in part. One British group, Analysis<sup>7</sup>, decided that the Russian revolution was not so relevant after all. To them the turning point for the failure of socialism was the support the social democratic parties gave to their various ruling classes in voting for World War I. As they put it "Had the revolution never occurred, had Stalinism never existed, Marxism would still face the crisis it does today"<sup>8</sup>. This was a handy way for a bunch of 'ex'-Leninists to avoid facing why they had remained uncritical of the Bolsheviks for so many years.

This political baggage also surfaces in that although many can admit the Russian revolution was in part destroyed by the politics of Bolshevism, they can only do so after first making clear that their critique is not

with each other.

The adoption of such a strategy is often characterised by a tendency for the organisation to see itself as the only one capable of understanding what's going on. It's not hard to see how this mentality develops when all around seem to be intent on carrying on regardless on a sinking ship. Apart from this inherent elitism, this strategy carries its own problems.

Chief among these is that, if an organisation places itself in the role as saviour it must be able to provide answers to everything. The development of coherent ideas takes time. This time can be reduced considerably by picking what appear to be the best ideas around. While this approach is highly flawed it can perhaps be feasible if sufficient time is spent re-developing these ideas to fit into the core of the organisations existing politics. (There is also the wider question of 'is it necessary?') In practice however, temptation wins and one gets treated to a frantic supermarket spree as the group hurtles around quickly grabbing whatever has the best packaging off the shelves. Unfortunately at some later stage it's discovered all the bits don't quite go together. But by then everybody's got their pet piece and no one has much in common.

### The Ivory Tower

Another strategy that is emerging is for organisations to shun activity in favour of a retreat to academia, to re-examine the text books in order to emerge some time in the future with a shiny new theory. This is often the next stop for individuals who have been in a group where the shopping trolley fell apart. Activity or contact with the outside world is diagnosed as the problem, what's needed is temporary isolation, with your message just being aimed at others on the left who have realised something is wrong.

Their deliberate use of archaic language shows us that what we have is politics designed to impress the existing intellectual left<sup>9</sup>. There is no excuse for putting across simple ideas in complex terms unless you intend your material to be used as a sleeping aid. These may seem like irrelevant stylistic matters but actually they reflect an important point.

This is that the new left is repeating many of the mistakes of the old, in a re-packaged form. The idea that the answers are to be found in text books, that somewhere, there is a magic theory or theories which will show the way forward is just a re-working of the old Trotskyist idea of a 'crisis of leadership'<sup>10</sup>. Ideas are important and the right ideas are vital but it is people who are the life blood of the revolutionary process. Far more people are aware that the current system is offering an inadequate future for themselves and their children than are involved in revolutionary politics. Most people come into conflict with the system at one stage or another. What is lacking is the belief that there can be an alternative,

THE SITUATION DEMANDS  
A STRONG LEADER.

COME ON, I'M OFF FOR  
A DRINK.

THAT'S RIGHT.





that change is possible.

What's needed are arguments on why revolutions have failed in the past and how they can succeed in the future. But what is also needed is the development of a tradition of success. People must believe that they can win in order for them to start to fight back. This belief can be created by winning small victories. What's more it is only by real experience in struggle, that ideas can be tested, it is only by encountering real life that the ability to convince people can be honed. Those who would retreat to the libraries are like armchair tourists who imagine watching Holiday '95 is the same thing as walking down those far away streets.

### All action, no talk?

There is another side to this 'emphasis on theory' coin. Another strategy which has been adopted by some organisations is one in which theory is either discarded beyond rudimentary aims and principles, or left to a small elite. No need is perceived for politics developed beyond a 'we hate capitalism'. Nor is a need seen for politics to be developed within the whole organisation as opposed to a small elite, steering the ship. In many cases this last strategy is not adopted in a conscious fashion but rather is the end result of an anti-organisation attitude. It stems from an alienation from and rejection of the traditional methods of the left so that these methods themselves rather than just their implementation are rejected. It can perhaps be characterised as 'all action and no talk'!

Such a strategy frequently results in the organisation's activities being limited to cheerleading for others, unwilling and unable to influence the actual course of events. Blind activism is substituted for theoretical discussion. Most of such organisations are short lived, quickly becoming demoralised after finding themselves being used as foot soldiers by some more organised section of the left. Even for those who survive for some considerable period this is often as a result of hermetically sealing themselves off from the rest of the left. This is achieved by dismissing other groups through crude labels whose political content is zero or close to zero (such as 'students', 'trendies', 'sad', 'middle class', 'boring', the reader will probably be familiar with other examples).

This labelling is similar to the technique used by many Leninists and so demonstrates the unconscious vanguardism some of these organisations have assumed. Their publications cover their activities along with those whom they cheer on alone, they also present themselves as the 'only revolutionaries'. They reject attempts to involve wider forces if they are not going to dominate the resulting alliance. This vanguardism, along with the sectarian characterisation of others, in conditions of feared defeat or frustration, has even, with a number of organisations, resulted in poorly excused physical attacks on other leftists!

The last two strategies discussed, the 'Ivory Tower' and the 'all action, no talk' are in fact

twins. They share in common the idea that theory and practice can be separated, and perhaps need bear no relationship to one another at all. To believe that one can be developed without the other is a fallacy. So also is the idea that one is the work of intellectuals, the other the work of activists. The two go hand in hand. It may be possible to come up with fine ideas in your back room or carry out actions on the streets but it is only where these two combine that the potential for revolution gains space to emerge. In the development of ideas and the activity of struggle it is not just the results that matter. As important is the process, the development of the ability and confidence to make decisions and carry them through. This ability must be developed not just in the organisation but in every individual, if the division into leader and led is to be avoided.

This is an echo of the anarchist insistence that the end (the revolution) cannot be separated from the means (revolutionary organisation) used to obtain it. The surest safeguard against future hijacking of revolutionary movements by authoritarianism is not to have a golden rule book or a sub group to keep the movement pure<sup>11</sup> but a tradition of self-activity. This is a hint at the direction that needs to be taken.

We are coming through a time of cataclysmic change for the left. The old methods of organisation have failed, the new ones that are evolving are flawed and sometimes not even all that new. Some of the problems faced have been identified in this article, the more difficult question is how to go about constructing a new left? Part of the answer to this question is the realisation that the problems discussed above have a common solution. Is it necessary to re-invent the wheel? Or is there already a left tradition whose analysis is a starting point explaining the failure of the left in the past. Such a tradition does indeed exist and what's more it also provides from

its history a positive model of socialist organisation.

<sup>1</sup> It is intended here to avoid the practice of pretending to be somehow separate from the 'left' and share nothing in common with it. All those on the left operate in a common environment, despite their political differences in approaching this environment. Differences are in the politics held and the methods used, not in any mysterious force.

<sup>2</sup> And it was rhetoric along with their mass membership that gave them their only claim to be socialist. The record of social democrats in power has been dismal, with even the most favourable reading of history giving them few achievements and a multitude of sell outs.

<sup>3</sup> The situation in the English speaking countries is being addressed in particular.

<sup>4</sup> These reasons among others include the confused politics of part of the anarchist movement at the time, demonstrated by its turn to 'propaganda by deed' (assassinations) in the 1890's.

<sup>5</sup> Democracy is being used here as shorthand for a society under socialism where all decisions are made at the lowest possible level by those they affect, or by delegates who are mandated, recallable etc. Not what's called parliamentary 'democracy'.  
<sup>6</sup> So for instance because at the moment the unions in Britain or Ireland are weak and completely under the domination of the bureaucracy they presume no real struggle can emerge from them and that the bureaucracy is unbeatable.

<sup>7</sup> They produced three issues of a journal of the same name before disintegrating.

<sup>8</sup> *Analysis* No 2., page 3.

<sup>9</sup> Recently a letter in the science journal *Nature* accused researchers of writing papers in such a way so as to be impossible to understand unless you worked in the field. It is as if the use of obscure terms is how you prove your credentials. If this is true of mainstream science it is certainly true of many of the new left publications.

<sup>10</sup> Basically that the time is ripe for revolution and all that's needed is for the right leadership to come along, raise the correct slogans and break the working class from the current reformist/centrist misleaders.

<sup>11</sup> As with the FAI in the Spanish CNT, whose role was to combat reformist tendencies (as well as carrying out 'fund raising' and retaliation for attacks by the bosses hired guns on union organisers).

## The left (part 2)

# Time to get constructive!

**In part 1 "from Ashes to Phoenix" it was argued that the left as it had come to be known has collapsed. The new left that is arising from the ashes carries much of the baggage and many of the mistakes of its predecessors. It is without clear direction, knowing it wants to build something new, but not sure what this will be or how to do it. It bases itself on a hodgepodge of different traditions or on none. These criticisms are easy to make, what is more difficult is to pinpoint a way forwards.**

This article indicates the direction that needs to be taken. There is a current within the left that stands out in its opposition to the division of revolutionary organisations into leaders and led. This current is anarchism. However new organisation(s) should not be built on the basis of a turn to the past. Rather it must be recognised that previous anarchist movements have also failed, and not just for objective reasons. None of them are adequate as models, so it is not a question of constructing international versions of the CNT, the Friends of Durruti or any other group. Indeed any project that picks an organisation from history and says this is what we should be modelled on would seem to be more interested in historical re-enactment than revolution.

Anarchism put forward an accurate critique of the problems of Marxism as a whole. Anarchism also demonstrated methods of organisation based on mass democracy. This is its importance, as not only does it go some way to explaining why the left has failed but it also points the way to how it can succeed.

Anarchism crystallised around opposition to the idea that socialism could be introduced by a small elite on behalf of the minority. There are, were and probably will continue to be Marxists that claim Marx also opposed this idea but to do this is to deny the historical argument that took place at the end of the 1860's between the Marxists and the anarchists. It is also to ignore what Marxism has meant in the period since then.

To an extent the anarchist critique of Marxism can be portrayed as unsophisticated, not explaining where the authoritarian side of Marxism comes from in sufficient depth.

power sharing with the bourgeois republicans in Spain falls into insignificance when compared with the damage done by social democracy or Stalin.

The strength of anarchism has been its belief in the ability of the working class to take its destiny into its own hands free of intermediaries. This and its uncompromising rejection of the state and politics of manipulation has left a legacy that can be sharply contrasted with that of other left currents. This makes it very different from both Leninism and social democracy, whose basic ideas are quite closely connected. Many of the old debates and the style they were carried out in are now irrelevant, it will take time before new, more positive debates become the norm.

For the left today, in a period where many believe social democracy and the USSR have demonstrated that socialism cannot work, the demonstrations of self-management by anarchist inspired workers are of key importance. The Spanish revolution saw the democratic running of a large part of the economy and a sizeable military force by the working class<sup>2</sup>. This provides us with an actual example of the non-utopian nature of self-management. In practice such forms also arose spontaneously in revolutions where anarchist ideas played no major part, including that of Hungary in 1956<sup>3</sup>. In the future it is to these examples we should look to for inspiration.

### English speaking 'Anarchism'

What the anarchist movement needs today is not a historical re-enactment of past glories. What's more, in the English speaking countries at least, the anarchist movement, to be polite, leaves a lot to be desired. There is no real mass tradition of anarchism outside the pre-WWI USA. Even this was more of an example of anarchist ideas playing a major role within a wider movement than of an anarchist mass movement. There have been no real anarchist syndicalist<sup>4</sup> unions or

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mass organisations. Individual anarchists like Emma Goldman may have been important figures but they represented isolated examples rather than movements.

In the inter-war years anarchism was nearly destroyed internationally by dictatorship, fascism and Leninism. Those countries where the tradition was weak, in particular the English speaking ones, saw a complete death of any understanding of anarchism and its re-interpretation by academics, among these George Woodcock. This re-interpretation attempted to rob anarchism of its base in class struggle and instead reduce it to a radical liberalism. This had (and continues to have) disastrous consequences for the growth of anarchism from the 60's on in these countries.

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One of the most harmful ideas introduced by these academics was the idea of anarchism as a code of personal conduct rather than one of collective struggle. This occurred partially by their inclusion of all pacifists from Tolstoy to Gandhi as anarchists and partially from a completely false understanding of the anarchist movement in Spain. The Spanish example was particularly absurd, anarchists were presented as moralists who would not drink coffee rather than as members of an organisation based on class struggle, over one million strong. It's true that anarchists do have a different sense of what is 'right or wrong' than that instilled in us by capitalist culture but this flows from their politics rather than the reverse.

Anarchism is different from Leninism and social democracy in that it understands that the means used to achieve a socialist revolution will determine the success or failure of that revolution. This was not true for the revolutions that brought capitalism to power, there it was possible for the new elite to emerge regardless of how it had got its backing. Socialism requires mass participation. As such it will not be granted by an elite but will have to prevent the emergence of elites. This can only be done if the mass of society is already acting on the basis that no new centres of rule can be allowed to emerge, that they themselves must plan, create and administer the new society.

The identification of anarchism with counter cultural movements (like punk rock and increasingly the 'crusty/new age traveller' scene) arises from this 'liberal' interpretation. In turn this image of anarchism as a personal code of conduct encourages the counter culture to attach the label anarchist to itself. This 'anarchism' is an often bizarre set of rules ranging from not eating at McDonalds to not getting a job. If anything it represents a hopeless rebellion against, and alienation from, life under modern capitalism. It is a self-imposed ghetto, its adherents see no hope of changing society. In fact the counter culture is often hostile to any attempt to address anyone outside the ghetto<sup>5</sup>, seeing this as selling out. However the counter culture is not entirely apolitical. A significant minority in Britain for instance will turn out for demonstrations and where physical confrontation with the state occur they often become the cannon fodder.

There are also significant areas within this counter culture where work is done which can give a positive example. Perhaps the best example of this is the squatting movement of the last couple of decades which saw huge numbers of people using direct action to solve homelessness by taking over empty buildings. Of course the bulk of these people were outside the counter culture, immigrant workers, the young homeless and those including young married people whose jobs could not cover the high rent in London and for whom council accommodation was unavailable or inadequate.

However the fact that so many of today's anarchists came to anarchism through this counter culture has repercussions for building new movements. To an extent they find

it difficult to break with the anti-organisational parts of the counter culture. This response dovetails with that of activists who have had bad experience of revolutionary organisations. The counter culture also tends to see the way forward in winning over the ghetto rather than addressing mainstream society and getting involved in its institutions. Having identified the existing left as being only interested in theory and building the party organisation, they end up rejecting the need for both theory and organisation. In short, they attempt to create their own new ghetto to which they can win people.

### Anarchism today

Whatever about the poor state of the anarchist movement in English speaking countries, a different, much stronger tradition is found almost everywhere else. Language limitations restrict our ability to comment in depth on many of these but there are anarchist organisations in most if not all European, Central American and Southern American countries. There are also organisations in some Asian and African countries. In some of these countries they are the biggest or only force on the revolutionary left.

This is an area that is not just holding its own but is indeed growing. This year the IWA welcomed its first African section, in the form of the Awareness League of Nigeria and has entered into discussion with two unions in Asia. Since the mid-70's anarcho-syndicalist unions have been re-built in Spain and the Swedish SAC has moved from reformism back to anarchist-syndicalism. Anarchists were the first sections of the left to resume activity in Eastern Europe, the first opposition march in Moscow since the late 20's was staged by anarchists on 28th May 1988 under the banner "*Freedom without Socialism is Privilege and Injustice. Socialism without Freedom is Slavery and Brutality*", a quote from Bakunin. In the last year several anarchist groups have emerged in the republics of former Yugoslavia and some have started a process of co-operation against the war there. Central and Southern America have also seen groups re-emerge into public activity, in some countries, like Venezuela, the anarchists are the only national force on the left.

In a period where all other sections of the left have been in decline, anarchism has re-established itself and started to grow. This is all the more remarkable when you consider this growth has come about almost completely internally, no major resources were pumped in from the outside. Compare this with the Trotskyist groups who poured huge resources into Eastern Europe for relatively little return. This included sending members over to maintain a permanent presence in Moscow and the other capitals. Anyone reading the Trotskyist press would be aware of their constant appeals for funds to help in this work. This attempt to import Trotskyism in any of its varieties failed to make any significant impact. Anarchist groups, on the contrary, emerged from the countries of the East to make contact with us in the west. They were based on 'left dissi-

dents' rediscovering a banned history, their membership coming from sections of society as far apart as intellectuals<sup>6</sup> to punk fans and independent union activists.

So although the situation can seem very much isolated in any of the English speaking countries there is a very much larger and more together movement elsewhere. It is by no means perfect, it is dominated by syndicalism but it is a start. The question for us and the readers of this article is how to go about building mass anarchist movements in our countries. The beginnings of such a movement exist in almost all countries, anarchism has consistently attracted new blood and new influence.

Both the historical legacy of anarchism and the (related) fact that it is currently the only substantial anti-Leninist but revolutionary movement in existence lead to the conclusion that the best starting point for building a new left is anarchism. But what sort of anarchist movement is needed? The objective has to be kept in mind, to aid in the creation of a revolution that will found a future society without classes or the rule of a minority. It also has to be recognised that anarchism in the past has failed to fulfil this objective, most notably in Spain where it could have carried the revolution through, at least locally.

We must learn from the mistakes of the past. It is not enough to build large loose organisations formed on the basis of opposition to capitalism and an adherence to anarchism as an ideal. Experience has shown that these become paralysed when faced with an unforeseen set of circumstances as with the Spanish CNT, or effectively taken over by much smaller but more coherent forces as was the fate of many of the other syndicalist movements. At a key moment they are likely to falter and it at this point that authoritarians can step in and assume leadership over the revolution.

More importantly, the building of local groups with only with the intention of getting stuck in but no vision of becoming a mass movement, has little to offer when it comes to creating a libertarian revolution. Such groups and the networks that are constructed from time to time may start off vibrant but quickly lose a sense of purpose and cease to exist over time. In Britain in particular a large number of these have arisen over the last decade, and in Ireland we have had a few. They leave no real legacy, however; who can even remember the Dublin Anarchist Collective, Dundalk Libertarian Communist Group, Scottish Libertarian Federation or the Midlands Anarchist Network.

Some anarchists in Russia and Spain after the revolutions there attempted to identify why their movements were defeated by the authoritarian forces. Their conclusions were remarkably similar and apply to anarchism today in many countries.

Some of the Russian exiles formed a group in Paris that published a pamphlet<sup>7</sup> based on their experiences that argued:

*"This contradiction between the positive and incontestable substance of libertarian ideas, and the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates, has its explanation in a number of causes, of which the most important, the principal, is the absence of organisational principles and practices in the anarchist movement."*

*In all countries, the anarchist movement is represented by several local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them."*

A decade later in 1938 a second group, "the Friends of Durruti" composed of several thousand members of the Spanish CNT published a pamphlet<sup>8</sup> explaining why the CNT had failed to complete the Spanish revolution. It was part of an attempt even at that late stage to turn the situation around:

*"We [the CNT] did not have a concrete program. We had no idea where we were going. We had lyricism aplenty; but when all is said and done, we did not know what to do with our masses of workers or how to give substance to the popular effusion which erupted inside our organisation. By not knowing what to do we handed the revolution on a platter to the bourgeoisie and the Marxists who support the farce of yesteryear"*

Although the Friends of Durruti were talking of the problems faced during an actual revolution their criticism is also relevant to today's situation. Lack of organisation prevents many anarchist groups from being effective and in the event of a revolution in the future will prevent them from leading it to success.

What is needed is an organisation with coherent ideas and a practice of democratic



debate and decision making. One capable of dealing with crisis and making rapid decisions without relying on a 'leadership'. This is an easy statement to make, in practice it is not easy to create. All too often such attempts either succumb to authoritarianism or collapse into sectarianism and isolation. They become isolated in their own ghetto, interested in argument but no longer capable of or even interested in intervening in struggle.

Building an effective anarchist organisation is not something that can happen overnight. Even the initial formation of core politics takes a number of years. Then the process of winning people over to these politics and giving them the skills and knowledge required to play a full role in a revolutionary organisation takes a considerable amount of time. To maintain coherency and democracy the organisation can only grow slowly when small, even in ideal circumstances doubling perhaps every 6 months to a year. And in the course of that growth it is all too easy to lose sight of the goal and lapse into isolation, sectarianism and irrelevancy.

Even given the right theory, an organisation is dependant on the experience and commitment of its membership in order to put its ideas into practice and arrive at new sensible strategies. The commitment needed can only be maintained if the internal culture of an organisation is one in which debate is favoured and sectarianism is discouraged.



Obviously the political positions are also important but that discussion is beyond the scope of any one article. However it is possible to identify key areas of organisational practice that an anarchist organisation needs to be committed to in order to avoid the mistakes of the past, and grow in a consistent, coherent way. These are:

### Theoretical and tactical unity

An organisation is strong only because it represents the collective efforts of many individuals. To maximise on these efforts need to be completely collective, all members working towards a common goal with common tactics. This is not just in relation to revolution but in every area the organisation involves itself in. This has been called tactical unity.

Authoritarian organisations have tactical unity because commands are passed down from the leadership, unity only breaks down when disagreements arise within the leadership. These organisations may have a formal adherence to theoretical unity but usually this comprises of no more than the ability of the membership to repeat the utterings of the leadership<sup>1</sup>. This is not an option for anarchists, in order to achieve tactical unity there must be real theoretical unity. This requires unrelenting discussion, education and debate around all theoretical issues within the organisation with the goal of forging a set of clearly understood positions and the ability of all the membership to argue for and present new ones. Rather than parroting a party line there is needed an organisational understanding of how to see and interact with the rest of the world.

This practice not only gives the organisation real strength in its activities, but also gives it the ability to react in a crisis. The understanding developed and the experience of decision making are precisely the tools needed when it comes to aiding the creation of revolution and the establishment of a socialist society based on real democracy. The continuous interaction of the members with society brings the skills and practice of the organisation into the wider movement. We wish our ideas to lead, not because we have control of particular positions, but because of the superiority of our organisation's ideas.

### Involvement in everyday life.

Too often revolutionaries see themselves as separate from and above everyday life. The working class is often talked of as a separate, foreign entity rather than the place where we live and interact on a daily basis. Activity is seen as the cart to be placed behind the horse of revolutionary theory. Some Marxists refer to this as a cornerstone of their organisation. They have expressed it as "No revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory". Activity is thus seen at best, as the method by which new recruits are won<sup>2</sup>, at worst, something that is not as yet necessary.

If building a mass revolutionary organisation was simply a matter of having a good theory, perhaps there would be something

in this approach, at least for authoritarian socialists. A few learned types go up the mountain for some years to consult the written word of the gods of socialism. They interpret this as a creed for new times, carve it in stone and return to the assembled masses on the plains below, ready to lead them to the promised land. This is still a popular approach to revolutionary organisation at the moment.

But a quick look at the history of the left demonstrates that the mass organisations have not been those with the best theory but those most able to interact with the mass of the population. The strength of Maoism or the Sandanistas to name two once popular movements, was hardly in their theoretical clarity. Rather it was in their ability to interact with a sizeable section of the population, despite the weakness of their political understanding.

Anarchists need to root their politics firmly in actual struggle, at whatever level it is occurring. Through this involvement, as serious activists, respect can be gained and so an audience won among the real 'vanguard', those actually involved in fighting at some level against the system. Theory, as far as possible, must be taken from experiences of struggle and tested by that experience. It must be presented so that it gains a wider and wider influence within the major movement.

### Commitment

Too often anarchist groups are composed of a small core of people who do the vast bulk of the work and financing of the organisation and a much larger periphery who avoid this commitment. This is unacceptable and a recipe for disaster. Revolutionary organisations require a large commitment in both money and time if they are to grow. All individuals involved must be willing to make this commitment, there is little room for hobbyists.

The left is coming through a bleak time, one of defeat and retreat stretching back over a decade. It is all too easy to become demoralised. But it is part of a price that has to be paid for a century of following a variety of dead ends. The left may be largely comatose for the moment but the force that created it is as active as ever. Capitalism is incapable of fulfilling the needs of the people of the world, and so long as it exists it will throw up oppositional forces. In Ireland, issues such as the X-case and the service charges demonstrate how people will be forced to fight back, although these are not offensives and should not be portrayed as such. In Mexico the EZLN rising on New Years day exposes the same force.

The question for us is how to avoid the mistakes of those activists who went before us. Anarchism is weak at the moment, but the possibility remains open to build the organisations and confidence in the class that are required to win change. Revolutionary opportunities will arise, the task is to build the skills and confidence needed to seize them, and that work starts today.

<sup>1</sup> Indeed if volume and complexity of theory alone were the yardstick used Christianity or Islam! should be considered.

<sup>2</sup> by anarchists, these accounted for the failure of anarchism to create an alternative, however much it could point at the possibility of that alternative.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to recognise that none of these things were complete however, due to a situation of dual power with the state. However the period from after the revolution in 1936 to May 1937 saw most major decisions being made in a democratic fashion with the state only interfering at the national level.

<sup>4</sup> These examples should have ended the debate over whether the working class could collectively run the economy. To the idealists where the idea is more important than the reality however we still receive the mantra of 'trade union consciousness' and 'need for the state'.

<sup>5</sup> The IWW in the USA was indeed a real union but it was explicitly not anarchist. Its politics although having much in common with anarchism (and despite the fact many anarchists were members) was more probably described as revolutionary syndicalist.

<sup>6</sup> A fair part of this view originates with a single study by a right wing bourgeois scholar in Spain based on one village at the time of a minor uprising in 1932. His work has since been shown as completely inaccurate. See "The anarchists of Casas Viejas" by Jerome R. Mintz (1982) for a fuller discussion of this event and its subsequent falsification.

<sup>7</sup> An example of this was the recent beating up of one of the more political and successful punk singers, Jello Biafra the lead singer of the Dead Kennedy's for 'selling out'. His leg was broken so badly that it was so swollen it could not be put in a cast.

<sup>8</sup> There is an excellent interview with activists of KAS (Russian anarchists, using the name of the anarcho-syndicalist organisation suppressed by the Bolsheviks in 1918) in issue #5 of "Independent Politics", Winter 1994 that describes the origins of these groups in more detail. The following quote describes the formation of one of the groups that came together from 12 cities in the late 80's to reform KAS.

"In Moscow this was a student group called Obshchina, community or commune, which dates back to 1983. There was a group of people, friends, and in 1985-86 they had been the organising committee of the All Union Revolutionary Marxist Party. Later there was some evolution of ideas and by the time the Obshchina group was created in 1987 the main participants already knew that they stood for anarcho-syndicalism. This was mainly under the influence of Bakunin's critique of state socialism and Marxism. These people were mainly historians and had the possibility to read materials in the archives, which was closed to the general public."

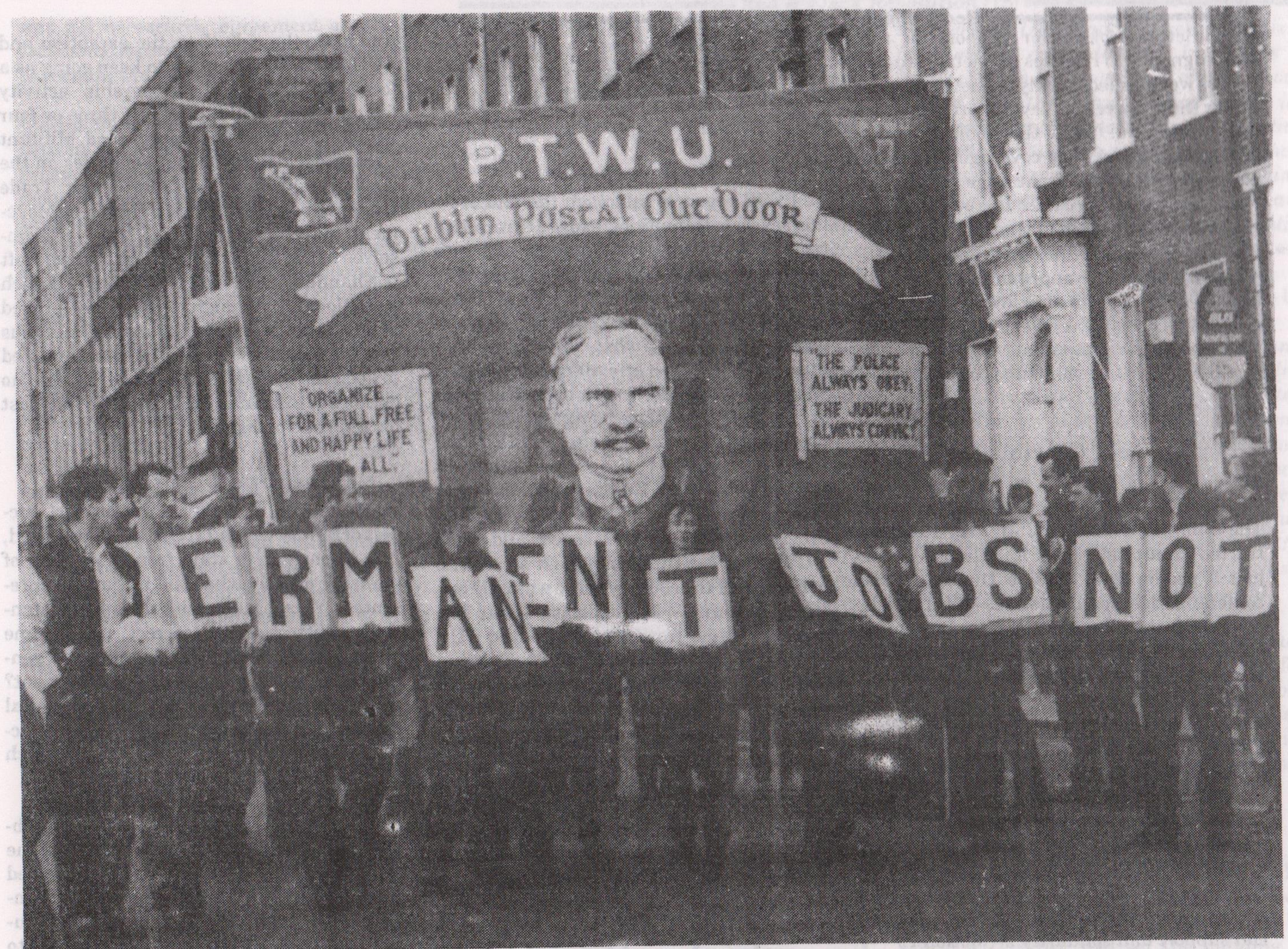
<sup>9</sup> Although defeat at the hands of Franco's better equipped army, or by even stronger international intervention would have remained a possibility. There was little international support that could be called on. Obviously without spreading internationally the revolution could not have survived long.

<sup>10</sup> Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists.

<sup>11</sup> Towards a Fresh Revolution.

<sup>12</sup> This is demonstrated by the frequent limitation to yes/no argument and the inability to discuss around issues that are claimed to be central to their politics.

<sup>13</sup> If this seems to be an overstatement consider how many of the leaders of revolutionary organisations engage in no practical activity at all, their valuable time instead being devoted to developing theory and supervising the memberships activities.



## Trade Union Fightback - the lessons to be learned

When the Programme for National Recovery (PNR) was proposed for ratification by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in October 1987, organised opposition was negligible. Most of the left appeared to be almost unaware of the long term consequences of the bureaucrats' adoption of "social partnership" and only about a dozen independent socialists, Trotskyists and anarchists got together to run a limited campaign, producing no more than a couple of thousand leaflets and posters.

At the beginning of the PNR's third and final year, ICTU held a special conference (February 8th 1990) to discuss its continued involvement in the Programme. To coincide with this conference, the Portobello Unemployed Action Group (PUAG) organised a public meeting under the title "Withdraw from the Programme; Fight the Cuts". This meeting attracted no more than twenty people - including most of those involved in the 1987 campaign. Yet from this small beginning, it was decided to establish a campaign to work for the rejection of a PNR Mark II.

Over the following months, Trade Unionists and Unemployed against the Programme (TUUAP) was established and managed to build a campaign which attracted the spon-

sorship of over 300 trade union activists across most unions - both public and private sector - with groups in over a dozen towns and cities. Although the number of campaign activists was considerably smaller than this, TUUAP organised two successful conferences (one of which was attended by over 130 people) and public meetings in at least 10 different venues. In the 3-week period before the vote on the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) almost 100,000 leaflets were distributed. In addition local TUUAP groups in several areas produced their own leaflets and sectoral leaflets were distributed among INTO, TUI, Public Sector and Building workers.

TUUAP brought together shop stewards and activists from SIPTU, ATGWU, IDATU, TUI, INTO, ASTI, MSF, CWU, CPSU, IMPACT, AEU, ETU, NEETU, NUSMW, AGEMOU, UCATT, GMBTU, BATU, EEPTU, NGA, PNA, PSEU, NUJ, BFAWU, UMTIE as well as unemployed activists from Dublin, Thurles, Clonmel and Portlaoise. Groups were established in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, Dungarvan, Shannon, Clonmel, Thurles, Portlaoise, Dundalk, Drogheda and Letterkenny. Public meetings were held around the country, factories were leafleted, motions brought to branch meetings and to trades councils. For the first time in years there was the genesis of a challenge to the leadership's thinking.

In Dublin, the TUUAP group met fortnightly - and weekly when required. Attendances varied somewhat but there was always a minimum of between 15 and 20, with an average attendance of 25 to 30. There was a constant buzz of activity and TUUAP activists formed the backbone of the Waterford Glass Strike Support Group. Trade union meetings, Trades Council meetings, etc. were



all leafletted looking for support for the campaign. Press releases and letters to the papers were issued weekly (sometimes even two or three a week) & several press conferences were held. While the media were not very generous in their coverage, the campaign did make the front page of the national dailies on more than one occasion. In the three week period of the vote on PESP, this activity reached its peak and over 40 people distributed approximately 50,000 leaflets in the Dublin area alone. There was therefore a consistent level of activity and a sense that the campaign was a real and serious attempt to challenge the concept of 'social partnership'.

### Less Glorious

The history of TUUAP in the post-PESP period is, however, somewhat less glorious. The Conference held on 25th May 1991 attracted an attendance of less than 60 with just 9 people from outside Dublin. This conference debated 19 motions - all of which envisaged the campaign continuing on in some form. Among the objectives which these motions set out for a supposedly renewed TUUAP were to

"...campaign against the [Industrial Relations] Act..." (Motion A)

"...constitute ...as an ongoing campaign..." (Motion B)

"...maintain and develop the network of shop stewards and trade union activists built up around TUUAP..." (Motion C)

"...intervene in all workers' struggles, initiating support groups for strikes, raising financial support and solidarity..." (Motion F)

"...raise in...public sector unions the need for action to defend the C&A scheme" (Motion I)

"...renew the struggle...to force a change in the policy of ICTU, as expressed through the PNR and the PESP, to the public sector..." (Motion J)

"...produce a regular newspaper/bulletin..." (Motion L)

"...provide practical and organisational support to strikes as they occur..." (Motion P)

"...stand/support candidates for Branch/Regional/National Executive Committees..." (Motion Q)

The reality however was somewhat different. Having begun life as a single-issue campaign, much of the energy around TUUAP was already dissipated by the time of the conference. The core group of activists had dwindled to less than ten and nothing that was said at the conference indicated that this core group was likely to increase in size.

In fact in the post-conference scenario, the number of activists dwindled even further and nothing more than the rather irregular production of a newsletter was possible. In early 1992, it was decided to attempt to expand this newsletter to a more regular tabloid-size publication. However after just two issues (April/May 1992 and Autumn 1992) this had to be abandoned due to a lack of resources and personnel. While the response to "Trade Union Fightback" (as the paper was titled) was generally positive, the number of people willing to take out

subscriptions, take copies for sale or indeed write articles for publication was disappointingly small and meant that the venture was unsustainable.

### Poor response

As PESP began to approach the end of its life, several attempts were made to reconstitute TUUAP as a campaigning group with some real base. The name was changed to "Trade Union Fightback" (TUF) at a 'national' meeting held on 22nd May 1993. It was an indication of what was to come that this meeting had an attendance of less than 30 people - with just one from outside Dublin. Despite several mailouts to almost 300 contacts in the months between May 1993 and February 1994, the response was almost non-existent. Dublin meetings - even during the vote on PESP's successor, the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW) - had less than ten regular attenders. In the rest of the country there was only one formal meeting - in Portlaoise where the initiative came from an unemployed TUF supporter. In the end, the campaign amounted to just 5,000 leaflets, most of which were posted to contacts in the hope that they would be distributed.

It is difficult to explain exactly why a cam-

## ...a campaign which attracted the sponsorship of over 300 trade union activists across most unions

paign which had put up one hell of a fight in 1990/1991 was hardly able to raise even a whimper of protest in late 1993. I think, however, that the writing was on the wall since the conference of May 1991. In hindsight we can see that the attendance at that conference (or rather those who did not attend) was evidence of a huge demoralisation following the ballot. To a certain extent TUUAP had become a victim of its own success. A campaign which had begun as an attempt to maximise the 'No' vote had drawn in such a layer of supporters that some people began to feel that we could actually deliver a rejection of the PESP. When we failed to achieve the result, demoralisation set in. If at that conference in May '91, we had taken stock of the situation, and taken this into account, perhaps we would have adopted a more realistic set of motions.

The subsequent period of time (i.e. 1991, '92, '93) saw an even greater fall-off in general trade union and political activity than had been the case in the previous number of years. Disillusionment with trade unions

was more the rule than the exception and TUUAP/TUF's attempts to keep going as a focus for anti-'social partnership' activity fell onto the shoulders of just three or four activists. As the PCW approached, Militant Labour decided to focus its energies on the newly-established Militant Labour Trade Union Group, the Socialist Workers Movement made no attempt to involve themselves in the campaign and again it was left to a handful of activists to attempt to launch a 'national' campaign. It simply proved unsustainable and, following a disastrous campaign, the few people who had attempted to keep the initiative alive were left with no option but to formally wind up TUF - at least for the time being.

### Untapped Potential?

In attempting to analyse the level of success or failure which TUUAP/TUF achieved, it is important to start from a position of realising exactly what the initiative represented. Was it laden with untapped potential? With a more 'correct' programme could TUUAP/TUF have become the genesis of a mass rank-and-file movement? Or did it simply tap into an anti-'social partnership' feeling among a layer of activists and provide a forum through which their activity could be co-ordinated?

As already mentioned, TUUAP was established as a single-issue campaign. It had one objective - to defeat the ICTU's planned successor to the PNR (or at least to maximise the vote against). In a document circulated to TUUAP activists in the lead-up to the Conference of 25th May 1991, Des Derwin (TUUAP Chairperson) stated "It need not have been a shop stewards campaign. It was never explicitly so and the level of participation indicates that it was hardly a spontaneous initiative from the shop stewards of Ireland! The aim was to defeat or at least oppose the Programme and it could have been an organisation of concerned individuals like most single-issue campaigns. And, let's face it, as regards its core and activities it was like that, with little participation from the shop stewards on the ground and, of course, no structural participation from union committees etc." (1)

Further on, he continued "At base TUUAP committed many stewards and union activists to opposing the Programmes and to a modestly comprehensive 'fightback' alternative programme. For many this was their first embracing of alternative ideas for the labour movement and they may not even be aware of the many other practical and comprehensive proposals for change and advance." (2)

So TUUAP achieved the endorsement of a relatively broad layer of trade union activists united on the specific issue of fighting PNR/PESP. It never attempted to present a radical alternative strategy for democracy and change in the trade union movement. While the 300 or so sponsors of the campaign were united in their criticism of the state of the movement and the direction in which trade union leaders were taking it, there

was not necessarily agreement on all the tactics and strategies which would be needed to reclaim the movement.

Indeed, there was always a considerable gap between the level of formal support (as expressed by endorsement of the TUUAP statement) and the level of active support. As Des Derwin put it:

"While TUUAP could present itself now and again as an alliance of shop stewards (the Dublin press conferences, the National Conference, the founding meetings of the main groups, its literature), these were exceptional occasions, requiring great organising efforts (and even then only a small minority of the signatories were involved) and the active nuclei in the groups were very small and did not retain the participation of many 'ordinary decent' stewards and reps." (3)

Nevertheless the campaign could justifiably claim to be the biggest and most representative gathering of shop stewards and activists since the national federation of shop stewards and rank and file committees of the 1970's. As already mentioned, fortnightly meetings in Dublin in the months leading up to the PESP ballot were very well attended (20-30 attended regularly). Many

groups outside the capital produced and distributed local leaflets. The distribution of almost 100,000 leaflets in the 3 weeks immediately before the ballot indicated a high level of activism - albeit for a limited period.

Following the ballot however the unifying factor of campaigning for a No vote was gone. Having provided a co-ordinating structure for trade unionists who wished to oppose the PESP, TUUAP now had to look to the future and attempt to discover a way to use what had been achieved as a base for building a more long-term focus for opposition to the rightward stampede of the leadership.

### Narrow Focus

While the majority consensus in TUUAP had been that the campaign should - in the run up to the ballot - confine itself to the maximisation of the No vote, there had been a school of thought - mainly represented by Irish Workers Group (IWG) members active in the campaign - that this focus was too narrow. The IWG paper "Class Struggle" argued

"...lodged within the singleness of purpose

with which TUUAP approaches its goal is a fundamental contradiction. Insofar as it limits itself to the single issue of getting out the 'no' vote, the campaign has turned its back on the vital need to build an alternative to the Plan. This is a fatal flaw - for when faced with a barrage of propaganda coming from the union tops, many workers who are thoroughly sickened by the programme still see no real alternative to it." (4)

IWG argued that TUUAP should aim to be more than a 'vote no' campaign:

"Its branches and sectoral groups can and must become the basis, not only for mobilising a No vote, but for taking up related issues. The key to this is to develop beyond limited anti-PNR bulletins and begin to organise rank and file bulletins in each sector.... They must be constituted as a permanent network of militant activists that will remain in existence long after the battle over the PNR is fought, to co-ordinate a class-wide response to the bosses' attacks." (5)

Looking back on the history of TUUAP after the PESP ballot, this is still the question for debate - would TUUAP have been any more of a 'viable entity' in May 1991 if it had twelve months previously set as one of its main objectives the building of a rank-and-file movement?

### Rhetorical Gesture

There were very few TUUAP activists who were - and are - not fully aware of the need for a mass rank-and-file movement. If, however, TUUAP had set the building of such a movement as an immediate objective, it is likely that differences would have arisen as to the tactics, strategies and indeed structures needed. In any event, to have done so without first establishing a solid base among shop stewards and union activists would have been nothing more than a rhetorical gesture.

A rank-and-file movement cannot be willed into existence. It will not be the cause of on-the-ground activity but will come about as the result of such activity. TUUAP/TUF was never - at any stage of its existence - in a position to declare itself a shop stewards/rank-and-file movement:

"Although it may wish to adopt the aim of establishing a shop stewards movement, the proportion nationally of shop stewards involved in TUUAP, the input from workplaces (as opposed to individual activists) and committees, the level of participation beyond formal support, and the breadth of the basis of that support (opposition to the Programmes) are all insufficient to describe TUUAP or its immediate successor as a shop stewards movement...it would be a shell without any real substance." (6)

A genuine rank-and-file movement will only be built as a result of both experience of struggle and clearly worked-out ideas of what can be done within the unions. There is no evidence to suggest that had TUUAP from its outset set the building of such a movement as one of its main aims, it would have been one iota closer to the achievement

### What are the National Plans?

The Programme for National Recovery, launched in October 1987, was the culmination of almost a year of talks between the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the then Fianna Fail government led by Charlie Haughey. It was a three-year deal which committed the trade union movement to industrial peace in return for 'moderate' pay increases (i.e. less than inflation), tax reform, and government action on unemployment. Pointing to the situation in Britain where Thatcher had decimated trade union organisation, ICTU leaders claimed that the deal would protect the movement here from similar attacks from the right.

It was sold to workers on the basis that by accepting pay increases which were lower than inflation, this would help the government to get the public finances under control and that as a result of this jobs would be created. Despite the fact that within days of the Programme's launch (at a Press reception attended by the entire Fianna Fail cabinet and the leadership of ICTU) the government announced a massive round of public service cuts, and despite the fact that the Programme itself specifically endorsed job losses in the public sector, ICTU leaders heralded the PNR as a victory for the trade union movement.

What ICTU failed to point out was that the only side which had given specific commitments in the deal was the trade unions. While pay increases were specifically pegged at rates which were well below expected inflation - with no review for at least two years - commitments by government and employers were couched in vague and generalised terms. Indeed, it would be more correct to describe them as aspirations rather than commitments. The deal was opposed by some on the grounds that it was a poor deal, that more could have been achieved with stronger negotiators. Others - including the WSM - opposed the very notion of the trade union leadership doing centralised deals with government and employers over the heads of the members.

So began what was to become known as "social partnership", leading to The Programme for Economic and Social Progress (1991 - 1993) and the current deal the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (due to run until the end of 1996). Each successive deal has brought ICTU closer and closer to the government - to the extent that it is no exaggeration to describe them as being the third arm of the current Fianna Fail/Labour coalition government. All of the consequences pointed out by the deals' opponents back in 1987 have come to fruition.



of that aim by the time voting on the PESP had finished.

### Low ebb

Industrial and political struggle in the 1990-'91 period - and since - was at a low ebb. Workers' confidence is low and most industrial struggle which is taking place is of a defensive rather than an offensive nature. All trade union activists are aware of the growing sense of apathy and disillusionment and the fact that trade union consciousness can no longer be taken for granted. Attendance at union meetings is extremely low and even Phil Flynn (IMPACT general secretary and current President of ICTU) complained of the low level of participation in the ballot on the PCW. (7) For a whole layer of workers - both young and not so young - 'the union' is something abstract and this sense of alienation is deepened by the "New Realism" and "social partnership" of the leadership.

In a feature in "Industrial Relations News" (IRN) in early 1993, Norman Croke (SIPTU official and recent candidate for the vice-presidency of that union) admitted that centralised bargaining is eroding trade union democracy

*"When negotiations take place in camera through the aegis of the Social Partners, active trade union membership participation is severely curtailed. Trade union members and lay officials are relegated to the position of passive observer within their own organisation and workplace."* (8)

Croke noted that in a study of membership participation carried out in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) - forerunner to SIPTU - during a period of decentralised wage bargaining and reported in IRN 24/1989, 81% of trade union members studied had participated in votes on wage deals. However, the result of SIPTU's ballot on the PESP showed that out of a claimed membership at the time (1991) of 208,000 (he admits that the actual book membership was only approximately 180,000), only 90,805 members voted. In other words, only 50.5% of members cast a vote, showing that 30% more trade union members voted when the wage deal was negotiated locally through free collective bargaining. More recently, this conclusion has been reinforced by the vote on the PCW. Of SIPTU's claimed 1993 membership of 197,500, only 91,419 (46.3%) participated in the ballot. (It is interesting to note here that only 61,173 SIPTU members - 31% of the total membership - actually voted in favour of the PCW).

Croke himself carried out a study of the opinions of a sample of 91 lay activist and rank-and-file members within SIPTU - a study whose findings reiterated the fact that centralised bargaining has increasingly isolated ordinary trade unionists from the decision making process. Among the comments made by Croke in the course of his IRN article are

*"...rank-and-file participation at the central decision making forums is all but non-existent..."*

*"...trade union activists and members have a preference for decentralised bargaining and prefer such bargaining to be undertaken by their elected shop stewards and local full-time Branch officials."*

*"...the developing consensus or Social Partnership approach to industrial relations within the trade union movement is confined principally to the leadership..."*

*"The implications for the trade union leadership and movement in containing lay and rank-and-file activists in a passive role...carries with it the danger that the leadership and the movement may become less relevant to its members."* (9)

While we do not need Norman Croke or anybody else to tell us that 'social partnership' is anti-democratic, it is interesting to note that even among the bureaucrats there is a realisation that it is not safe for them to be too open about their duplicity. And while the bureaucracy will remain happy enough with a quiet, disillusioned membership (as long as that membership continues to fund their huge salaries and high-flying lifestyles), our challenge is to turn the apathy into anger and a demand for change.

### What's to be done?

The question for trade union activists is not whether rank-and-file activity is a good thing but how such activity can be motivated - in other words, what are the aims, structures and strategies needed to combat the apathy

## a rank-and-file movement cannot be willed into existence

and, in periods of low activity such as we are currently experiencing, where should our energies be directed? With over 55% of all Irish employees unionised, there is a great potential power in the trade union movement. The tapping of that potential poses a challenge for all those interested in building a free and democratic society. It is important that in discussing what can be achieved, we realistically assess the current position and avoid trotting out ritualistic slogans.

On the organised left, the main strategies put forward for trade union work could be summarised as 1. Building Broad Lefts, 2. Rank-and-file 3. Building a Solidarity Network (Laying the groundwork). It is crucial that we understand what each involves.

### 1. The Broad Left Strategy

The principal objective of the Broad Left Strategy is to elect a more 'radical' or 'left-wing' leadership. Those who advocate a Broad Left Strategy do of course usually argue for officials to be electable and re-

callable and for them to be paid at the average wage of the members they represent. The fundamental flaw in this strategy is however that it is presumed that by electing a new leadership the unions can be changed from the top down.

This strategy does not however address the basic problem. Just as society cannot be improved fundamentally by electing a 'left-wing' government, neither can the trade union movement be reformed in this way. Pursuit of the Broad Left Strategy means that the election of leaders becomes more important than fighting for changes in the very rules and structures of the movement which would allow for more democratic participation.

Just as Anarchists believe that workers do not need leaders to organise our society, so we contend that the potential power of the trade union movement is stymied by the current divisions between leaders and led. Real decision making is concentrated in the hands of a very small number of people. This situation has been compounded by the amalgamations and 'rationalisation of structures' which have occurred over the past number of years.

Within the current structures, a trade union official's role is that of arbitrator, conciliator and fixer. In order to fulfil this role, an official must have control of his/her members. If an employer cannot be sure that the official can deliver workers' compliance with a deal, why would that employer bother with negotiations at all? It is because of this that officials are so quick to condemn 'unofficial' action (i.e. action which hasn't been given their approval) and this is also the reason why the average official does not encourage a high level of debate and activity among the rank-and-file.

No matter how 'radical' the official might personally be, the structures of the movement dictate that he/she is not in a position to encourage members to fight for their demands. The Broad Left Strategy - while usually padded out by calls for a 'fighting leadership' (whatever that is!) and for internal democracy and accountability - is essentially aimed at the election of a new leadership who will supposedly bring about change from the top. It fails to address the crunch issue - it is not the individual leaders who are the real problem, rather it is the structures which give them all-encompassing power.

### 2. Rank-and-File

This strategy involves fighting within the trade unions for more democracy, more struggle and more involvement by 'ordinary' members. It is a strategy with which Anarchists would be in full agreement. As already mentioned, however, a rank-and-file movement cannot be willed into existence. Constant repetitious calls for the building of a rank-and-file movement do little or nothing to bring about such a movement. Where such groupings have existed in the past they have come about as a result of groups of

workers coming to the realisation that the union bureaucracy is an obstacle to them in their struggle. In circumstances where they are denied sanction for strikes or find themselves being dragged into endless rounds of mediation, conciliation, Labour Court hearings, Labour Relations Commissions etc., workers often come to the conclusion that it is necessary to bypass the union officials in order to fight. It is when workers are in conflict with bosses, when their confidence in the bureaucracy has been eroded and when they themselves are confident enough to take up the fight that they realise the need for independent organisation within the unions. The point is that - as I mentioned earlier - rank-and-file movements come about as a result of workers' confidence and experience of struggle - not the other way round. At a time of low struggle and confidence, any attempt to build such a movement will attract only a very small number of activists. That is not to say that such attempts (where they arise from a genuine anti-bureaucratic feeling) are wrong, just to counsel against unrealistic goals.



### 3. The Solidarity Network

Nothing is to be gained by constantly putting out calls for the ideal - a genuine mass rank-and-file movement which would take the power away from the bureaucrats. Indeed the constant issuing of such calls can often provide cover for those who do not wish to make a realistic assessment of the current position and apply themselves to what can be done in the here and now.

In a climate of widespread disillusionment/demoralisation, TUUAP/TUF's great strength was that it provided a forum for an admittedly small layer of activists to come together on a limited platform. It aimed - and to some extent at least succeeded - to break down the isolation felt by the most militant activists. It provided a network for efforts to be pooled against the concept of 'social partnership'. I believe that the correct decision was made at the outset when TUUAP confined itself to the maximisation of the 'No' vote on PESP II. This did not mean that all the other issues which confront the

trade union movement were ignored. It meant instead that these issues could be discussed in an open non-sectarian manner.

In periods of low struggle such as that which we are currently experiencing, it is important that trade unionists take stock of the possibilities for action, that we address and debate issues such as: - What is the best way to organise the reclamation of the trade union movement by rank-and-file activists? What tactics should be employed when an upturn in struggle does come? It is also important for socialists within the trade unions to continue to provide support for those struggles which do occur. (In fact such support is even more necessary in periods of low struggle in that those trade union battles which do take place are invariably of a defensive nature). Now is the time for those of us who wish to see wholesale change in the trade unions and their structures to be laying the groundwork, to be identifying key activists and discussing issues with them, to be building contacts within various sectors and various unions. This is work which can often be slow, tedious and unglamorous but it is work which is crucial if we are ever to take realistic steps along the road to building the oft-demanded 'mass rank-and-file movement'. This is what we mean when we talk about building a Solidarity Network, what is involved in reality is the laying of the foundation stones for our greater ambitions.

While TUUAP/TUF has now been formally laid to rest, such initiatives will inevitably arise again. Whether as strike support groups, action groups within individual unions or more long-term pro-democracy, anti-bureaucracy campaigns, workers will always be coming together and discussing the issues which confront us. Anarchists will be to the forefront of these discussions - not as self-appointed leaders but as a 'leadership of ideas' - arguing for change and working to bring about that change.

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# • The Bolshevik Experience •

## FREEDOM & REVOLUTION

In 1922 Emma Goldman complained "Soviet Russia, had become the modern socialist Lourdes, to which the blind and the lame, the deaf and the dumb were flocking for miraculous cures"<sup>1</sup>. The Russian Revolution was the first occasion where decades of revolutionary ideas could be applied to real life. What was theory was now practice. The struggle between the two concepts of revolution - the statist-centralist and the libertarian federalist - moved from the realm of the abstract to the concrete.

The question thrown up by the October revolution is fundamental. Once capitalism has been defeated, how is communism to be achieved? While there are certainly faults to be found with aspects of the anarchist movement, at least it cannot be criticised for getting the basics wrong. Anarchists have consistently argued that freedom and democracy are not optional extras. Rather they form part of the conditions necessary for the growth of communism.

### What is socialism?

How does one create a communist society? The answer lies in our conception of socialism. What is meant by 'socialism'? The classic definition is that of society run according to the dictum "from each according to his/her ability, to each according to his/her needs". To anarchists, material equality is one dimension to socialism, but there is another of equal importance, that of freedom.

The world has enough wealth to provide for all our material comforts. Socialism seeks to liberate people from the constant worries about mortgages or landlords, the rising cost of living and the numerous other issues, trivial yet vital that grind us down in our daily life. What's more, socialism must also give us the power to control our own lives, power to take control of our own destinies.

For our entire lives, from school to the workplace, we are forced to obey somebody else's order, treated like children or bits of machinery. Human beings have great potential but for most of us, only in a socialist society, will this potential be realised.

So though socialism is about material equality it is also about freedom. Furthermore it is impossible to maintain one without the other. As long as power is distributed unequally, a section of society will continue to have privileges leading to material advantage. Ultimately society will again be divided into classes, into those who have and those who have not. Furthermore the experience of those attempts to manage the economy through an undemocratic central-

ised state has also shown that it is unfeasible to manage and control a complex system without democracy and accountability.

The revolution must achieve a number of things. It must defeat the ruling class, removing from them their economic and political dominance. In place of the bosses, the working class must in every sphere of activity make the decisions that ultimately affect them; in factories, communities, schools, universities, newspapers, television and film studios.

This is the sort of society that is worth fighting for. However it not the sort of society that can be achieved through the dictatorship of a minority over the majority. Even some Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg recognised this. She said, "Socialist practice demands a total spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois class rule. Social instincts in place of egoistic ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which overcomes all suffering, etc. etc.... The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the broadest and the most unlimited democracy, and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demolishes."<sup>2</sup>

The questions that face us are: what does revolution mean? Once capitalism has been overthrown how is society to be run? Who will control the factories, how will production be managed? How will the population be fed, how will the economy be organised? And finally, how will the revolution be defended against opposition and its survival ensured? If communism is to become a reality, answers must be found.

### 1. Who's in charge?...running the revolution.

On midnight 25/26th of October, the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC), following the directions of the Petrograd Soviet (workers council), started the confused proc-

ess of seizing the Winter Palace where Kerensky's cabinet was in session. The October Revolution had taken place. In contrast to the dramatic portrayal of the storming of the winter place by the Soviet film maker Eisenstien, there was practically no opposition to the take-over and hardly any bloodshed. Sergei Mstislavskii, a leader of the Left SR's (peasant-based party which briefly entered a coalition with the Bolsheviks) describes being woken up on the morning of the 25th by the "cheerful tapping of rifles.... 'Gird up your loins boss. There's a smell of gunpowder in the city..'. Actually, the city did not smell of gunpowder; power lay in the gutter, anyone could pick it up. One did not have to gird one's loins, one needed only to stoop down and pick it up"<sup>3</sup>.

The Bolshevik Myth is that the Bolsheviks, under the logical and scientific leadership of Lenin, guided the revolution over hurdle after hurdle. They argue that objective circumstances forced them to make difficult but ultimately correct decisions. Descriptions of the revolution like the following passage are frequently found:

"the bolsheviks...in the hour of crisis put aside all their indignation at the governmental persecutions and concentrated on the task of saving the revolution. The victory before the gates of Petrograd set free the energies of the masses throughout the country. Peasants revolted against their landlords, and in far-away industrial centres Soviets took power. The decisive hour was approaching. Would there be a force capable of directing the chaotic mass movements into one channel towards the correct aim?"<sup>4</sup>

Here it is implied that without the Bolshevik leadership the revolution would not have happened. The masses are portrayed as incapable of running a new society. The creative ability of the working class to build a new society is not present in the Leninist conception of a working class capable of only 'trade union consciousness'. The October Revolution was "not really so much a bold stroke by the Bolsheviks under Lenin as it was a culmination of months of progressive social revolution throughout the country. The ubiquitous growth of peasants and workers' committees and soviets sapped the power from the hands of Kerensky and the bourgeois provincial government, which surrendered without a fight as its capacity to govern had completely dissolved"<sup>5</sup>.

### Bourgeois Democracy.

After the October Revolution, the Second Congress of Soviets, elected an interim government (the Sovnarkom), pending the holding of elections to the Constituent Assembly. This provisional government on the 3rd of March undertook in a solemn declaration to summon a Constituent Assembly. Following elections the SR's had an overall majority, with the Bolsheviks winning only 175

out of the 707 seats.

It is with the decision to call for elections to the Constituent Assembly that the anarchists first diverged from the Bolsheviks. What lead them to take this decision and why did anarchists oppose it?

The western model of parliamentary democracy could more accurately be characterised as a '4-year dictatorship'. The crucial difference between 'representative' democracy and 'direct' democracy is that under the former, voters have no part in deciding policy and are unable to recall their representatives. Instead they have nothing more than the illusion that by voting they are in some way able to control the political process.

Once power lay in the hands of the Soviets, the Constituent Assembly became a redundant institution. Here was a country where control had been finally wrenched from the ruling class and was organised in the hands of the workers. The Bolsheviks decision to call for new elections was a step backwards. In terms of fighting for socialism, it made no sense to be supporting the authority of the Constituent Assembly over that of the masses. As anarchists said shortly afterwards:

"To continue the Revolution and transform it into a social revolution, the Anarchists saw no utility in calling such an assembly, an institution essentially political and bourgeois, cumbersome and sterile, an institution which, by its very nature, placed itself 'above the social struggles' and concerned itself only, by means of dangerous compromises, with stopping the revolution, and even suppressing it if possible....so the Anarchists tried to make known to the masses the use-

**"Liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; Socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality."**

**Michael Bakunin**

lessness of the Constituent Assembly, and the necessity of going beyond it and replacing it at once with economic and social organisations, if they really wanted to begin a social revolution

.....We believe, in fact, that in a time of social revolution, what is important for the workers is for them to organise their new life themselves, from the bottom, and with the help of their immediate economic organisations, and not from above, by means of an authoritarian political centre"<sup>6</sup>

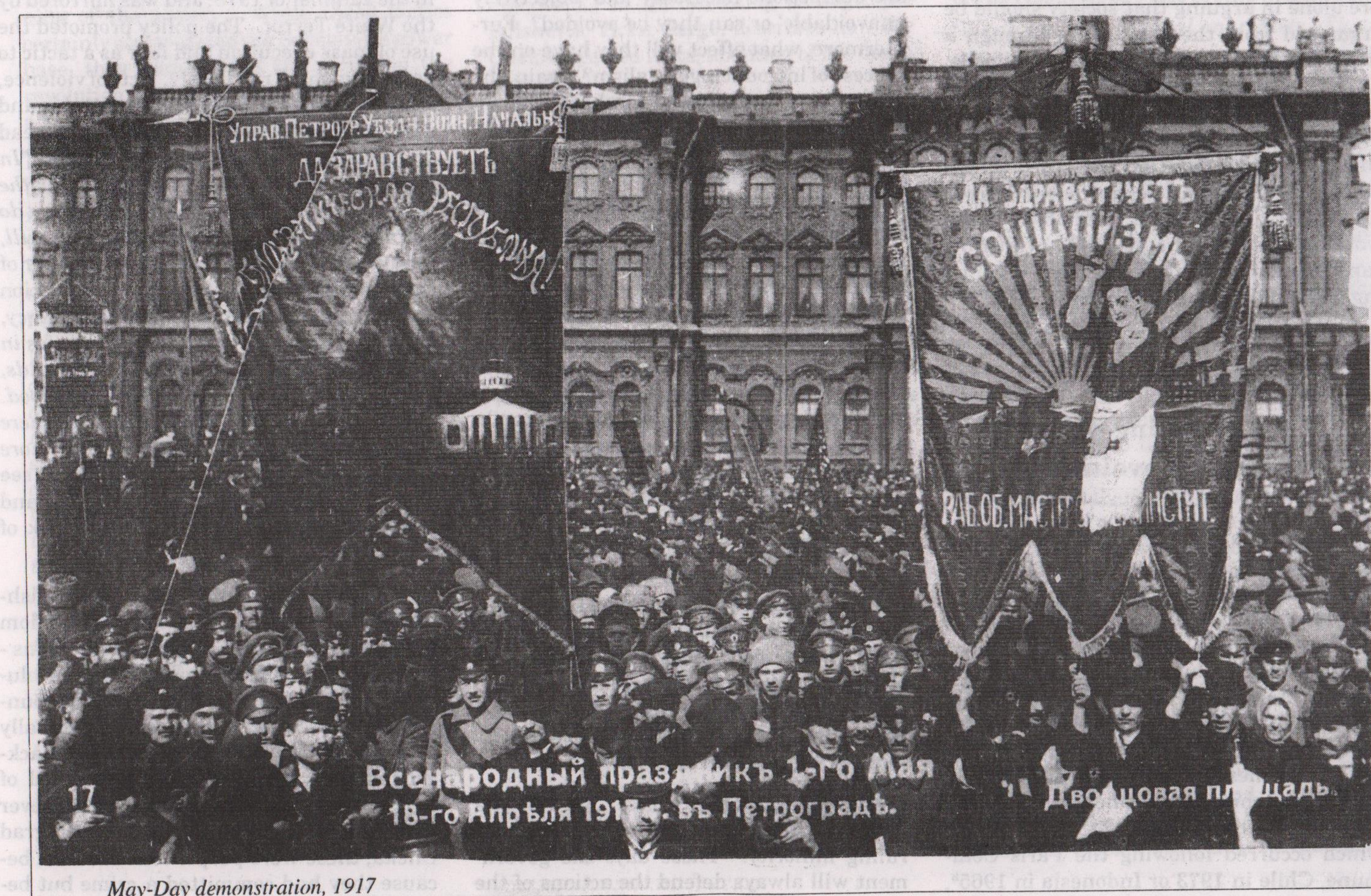
### The party

One of the main differences between the anarchist and the Leninist tendency is in their differing attitudes to power and control. While both agree that the revolution should be made by the working class, they disagree on who hold the reigns of power afterwards. Leninists believe it is the job of the party to exercise control of society on behalf of the ruling class and like a parent, the party interprets what the best interests of the working class are. In contrast, anarchists believe that it is the working class who should run society, making and implementing decisions from the bottom up, through a system of organisations similar to

the factory committees and the soviets.

Often Leninists will counter this argument by saying, the party is made up of the best elements, the vanguard, of the working class. Although at the time of October the Bolsheviks were the largest working class party this was because of what they claimed to stand for ("All power to the soviets" etc.). There were still many advanced workers outside the party, so even then the 'vanguard' and the party were not identical. In the years that followed as the party came to be increasingly composed of bureaucrats, the advanced workers were often as not in opposition. The mistake the Leninists make is to assume October froze the 'vanguard' in one organisation for all time.

Leninists and anarchists agree that, unlike most others in the working class, they have both an analysis of how society works and practical experience drawn from involvement in struggles. These are the tools needed to effect a complete transformation of society. However anarchism and Leninism diverge on the ability of the working class to run society. They have differing estimations of how aware the working class are of their revolutionary potential. Anarchists



May-Day demonstration, 1917



believe that it is possible to convince the mass of the working class of our ideas. In contrast, Lenin said that most workers are capable only of "trade union consciousness". Naturally therefore, Leninists believe that since the working class is sensible only to its short term interests, it is vital that the Leninists are in power, in order for the revolution to succeed.

It was this line of thinking that led the Bolsheviks to initially call for elections to the Constituent Assembly and then, once it had been held, to call for its dissolution, as Alexander Berkman commented in 1921;

*"They (the Bolsheviks) had advocated the Constituent Assembly, and only when they were convinced they could not have a majority there, and therefore not be able to take state power into their own hands, they suddenly decided on the dissolution of the assembly"*

Lenin, in a signed Pravda article published on 22 December 1918, quoted approvingly from Plekhanov's speech at the Second RSDRP Congress in 1903;

*"If in a burst of enthusiasm the people elected a very good parliament...then we ought to make it a very long parliament and if the elections have not proved a success, then we should seek to disperse parliament not after two years but, if possible, after two weeks."*

Their opposition wasn't based, unlike the anarchists, on the essentially anti-democratic nature of the Constituent Assembly, instead it was on whether or not the Bolsheviks were the controlling force.

In a revolutionary situation the anarchists are alone in arguing that society should be organised from the bottom up, through a freely federated system of workers' councils. Decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level. Delegates are elected solely to represent the view of those who elected them, receive no more pay than the average worker, may act as a delegate for only a fixed amount of time and are recallable. If the working class has the power to overthrow capitalism, it certainly is capable of organising a socialist society afterwards.

## 2. Fighting the Counter Revolution

Once the capitalist power structure has been dismantled, the next immediate issue on the revolutionaries' agenda is to ensure the defence of the revolution while also fostering its growth. It is a mistake to characterise revolutions as inherently bloody. In the October Revolution itself there were only 500 casualties. Many were surprised by the speed and ease with which the eastern European regimes fell in the 1980's. Similarly the dictatorship was bloodlessly toppled in Portugal in 1974. Bloodbaths, such as those which occurred following the Paris Commune, Chile in 1973 or Indonesia in 1965\*, are products of failed revolutions or more

accurately, successful counter revolutions.

There is likely to be violent opposition to any attempt by the working classes to take power from the bosses. After all, the masses have everything to gain while the minority ruling class have everything to lose. The danger this poses depends on the relative strength of the bosses' reaction. However, whether the threat is large or small, it will be necessary to physically defend the revolution from opposition, both internally and externally.

This raises a number of issues. The corner stone of any justical system is access to open and fair trials, a full appeal process and sentence proportional to the gravity of the crime. While these are easily attainable in peace, in war, particularly civil war, curtailment of rights and civil liberties are more

## The policy of revolutionary terror is in direct opposition to obtaining mass participation

likely to occur. This should not be glorified (as Lenin tended to do), short term expediency is likely to lead to long term damage. The questions revolutionaries must ask is, are our actions necessary and 'objectively unavoidable' or can they be avoided? Furthermore, what effect will they have on the process of introducing socialism? Again, the answer given will depend on what socialism is considered to be.

### The Secret Police

Only two months after the revolution (well before the start of the civil war) a secret police force known as the Cheka was founded, initially to inherit the security functions of the MRC<sup>9</sup>. There were no external controls on its operation. No judicial process was involved in assessing the guilt or innocence of any of its prisoners. Punishments, including the death penalty, were arbitrarily applied. The Cheka was meant to be a temporary organisation, at first it was an administrative body designed to carry out investigative functions. It was not initially judicial and had no powers of arrest, however it grew up quickly. Nine days after its birth, it was granted the power of arrest. In January 1918 it was being assigned armed units, in February it was granted the power of summary trials and execution of sentences (which included the death sentence). At the end of 1917 it had 23 personnel, by mid 1918 it had over 10,000.

The Cheka was a police force. The role of a police force is to defend the interests of a ruling minority. These days the government will always defend the actions of the police, seen for example in the whitewash-

ing of police involved in the Birmingham Six case in England. The same was true of the Bolshevik party's relationship to the Cheka. This is Lenin speaking to a rally of Chekists on 7th November 1918.

*"It is not at all surprising to hear the Chekist's activities frequently attacked by friends as well as enemies. We have taken a hard job. When we took over the government of the country, we naturally made many mistakes, and it is only natural that the mistakes of the Extraordinary Commissions [the Cheka] strike the eye most. The narrow-minded intellectual fastens on these mistakes without trying to get to the root of the matter. What does surprise me in all these outcries about the Cheka's mistakes is the manifest inability to put the question on a broad footing. People harp on individual mistakes the Chekas made, and raise a hue and cry about them. We, however, say that we learn from our mistakes...When I consider its activities and see how they are attacked, I say this is all narrow minded and futile talk....What is important for us is that the Chekas are implementing the dictatorship of the proletariat, and in this respect their role is invaluable. There is no other way to liberate the masses except by crushing the exploiters by violence."*

The quote begs quite a few questions; what are the mistakes being talked about? What has been learnt from these mistakes? And was the Cheka activity aimed solely at the old ruling class?

### Revolutionary Terror

The Bolshevik policy of Red Terror began shortly after the beginning of the Civil War in the summer of 1918, and was mirrored by the White Terror. The policy promoted the use of mass execution and fear as a tactic to be implemented ruthlessly. Acts of violence, rather than being viewed as regrettable and destructive were glorified. Latsis, the head of the Cheka on the Eastern front, wrote *"In civil war there are no courts of law for the enemy. It is a life or death struggle. If you do not kill, you will be killed. Therefore kill, that you may not be killed."*<sup>10</sup>. The paper of the Red Army wrote after an assassination attempt against Lenin; *"Without mercy, without sparing, we will kill our enemies in scores of hundreds. Let them be thousands, let them drown themselves in their own blood. For the blood of Lenin and Uritskii...let there be floods of blood of the bourgeois - more blood, as much as possible."*<sup>11</sup> It's hard to see what this frenzied call for destruction and retribution could contribute to the task of building a new and freer society.

Collective punishments, categorical punishments, torture, hostage taking and random punishments - aimed at providing lessons - were all applied in the name of the revolution. Categorical punishments were punishments based not on what someone actually did, but on what class or political background they belonged to. On the 3rd of September 1918, *Ivestia* announced that over 500 hostages had been shot by the Petrograd Cheka, these were people convicted not because they had committed a crime but because they were unfortunate enough to come



Delegates to the 1st All Russian Congress of factory and shop committees (Petrograd November 1917)

from the wrong background.

There are two interpretations that may be applied to the use of revolutionary terror; on the one hand, it may be aimed against counter-revolution, on the other it may be used to compensate for the regimes declining popularity. As Emma Goldman wrote in 1922, *"...an insignificant minority bent on creating an absolute State is necessarily driven to oppression and terrorism"*<sup>12</sup>. The policy of revolutionary terror is in direct opposition to obtaining mass participation in the running of the society. While these tactics certainly consolidated the Bolshevik's power base, they undermined the socialism the revolution had been about in the first place.

In the countryside the Bolsheviks became the 'occupying army' instead of the 'liberating army', alienating the very population they should have been trying to convince. Terror is a doubled edged sword, it may be expedient but its use also discredits any regimes claim to fairness.

Furthermore as Malatesta the Italian anarchist wrote in 1919 *"Even Bonaparte helped defend the French Revolution against the European reaction, but in defending it he strangled it. Lenin, Trotsky and comrades are certainly sincere revolutionaries, and they will not betray what they take as revolution, but they are preparing the governmental apparatus which will help those who follow them to profit by the revolution and destroy it. They will be the first victims of their methods, and with them, I fear, the revolution will collapse. History repeats itself, mutatis mutandis: and the dictatorship of Robespierre brought Robespierre to the guillotine and prepared the way for Napoleon."*<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Trotsky should have heeded Malatesta's words.

### The Death Penalty

One of the first acts of the 2nd Congress of Soviets in October was the repeal of the death penalty that had been introduced by Kerensky. This was restored on the 16th June 1918. On 17th January 1920, The Bolshevik government abolished the death penalty except in districts where there were military operations taking place. To circumvent this order, the Cheka routinely transferred prisoners to the military areas for execution. In the following passage, the Bolshevik Victor Serge, describes how the Chekas reacted to the abolition of the death penalty

*"while the newspapers were printing the decree, the Petrograd Chekas were liquidating their stock! Cartload after cartload of suspects had been driven outside the city during the night, and then shot, heap upon heap. How many? In Petrograd between 150 and 200; in Moscow it was said between 200 and 300."*<sup>14</sup>

Neither of these actions can be justified by the necessities of civil war as they occurred well behind friendly lines. Nor were these actions the product of random events, they weren't mistakes, rather, as explained above, they were part of the policy of revolutionary terror

### The Anarchists

On the 11th December Cheka and Lettish troops surrounded 26 anarchist strongholds in Moscow. The anarchists suffered 40 casualties and 500 were taken prisoner. On the 26th April similar raids were carried out in Petrograd. At this stage Dzershinsky (head of the Cheka) justified his action on the grounds that the anarchists had been preparing an insurrection and that in any event, most of those arrested proved to be criminal riff raff. He stressed that the Cheka had

neither the mandate nor the desire to wage war on "ideological anarchists". Yet documents<sup>15</sup> dating from the 13th June outlined that the department for counter revolution investigative section and intelligence unit had sections allocated to dealing with anarchists. The fact that 'ideological' Anarchists were under Cheka surveillance gives lie to the Bolshevik claim that they were only opposed to a 'criminal' element within the anarchist movement rather than anarchism itself.

While Leon Trotsky was saying in July 1921 *"We do not imprison real anarchists. Those whom we hold in prison are not anarchists, but criminals and bandits who cover themselves up by claiming to be anarchists"*<sup>16</sup>, 13 anarchists were on hungerstrike in Moscow. Fortunately a French Syndicalist trade union delegation in the city heard of their plight and the prisoners were released (all but three were expelled from the USSR). Not so lucky was Fanyan Baron, a young anarchist woman, shot without trial, along with several others, on trumped up charges of counterfeiting Soviet bank notes (it was later proven that the counterfeiting was done by the Cheka itself). Unlucky also were the 30 or 40 anarchists living near Zhmirink who according to the soviet press in 1921 had been *"discovered and liquidated"*. The last great mobilisation of anarchists occurred at the funeral of Kropotkin in February 1921 when 20,000 marched with placards and banners demanding, among other things, the release of anarchists from prison. From then on the suppression of anarchists became thorough and complete.

While there was opposition to the Cheka abuses from within the Bolshevik party, there was no institutional attempt to change its mode of operation. In any organisation, there is both a human and a structural element. Perhaps it could be argued that the abuses of Cheka were due to individual





"At last I have found the ideal soldier who will keep quiet and carry out orders without arguing."  
Cartoon from anarchist paper Golos Truda (27th Oct. 1917)

mistakes. If individuals are given unlimited power, including power over life and death, with no accountability, it's inevitable that a measure of excess and corruption will occur. Where this occurs it is up to the revolutionary organisation to make changes to prevent the same mistakes from being repeated. This is not what the Bolshevik party did. They continued to entrust individuals with unchecked power. They did not make any structural changes to the Cheka. Instead they occasionally rooted out the rotten human element, closing down certain branches, while leaving the edifice that engendered these abuses untouched.

Emma Goldman said, on escaping from Russia in 1921, "I have never denied that violence is inevitable, nor do I gainsay it now. Yet it is one thing to employ violence in combat as a means of defence. It is quite another to make a principle of terrorism, to institutionalise it, to assign it the most vital place in the social struggle. Such terrorism begets counter-revolution and in turn becomes counter-revolutionary."<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Defending the revolution

The other side to defending the revolution is that of defending it from outside military attack. Here there are two forms of organisation open to the revolutionary; employing

either a conventional military army or employing a militia. Again the Russian Revolution provides a concrete example, though initially a militia structure was adopted, by 1918 the conventional army structures had returned. The difference between the two is not, as is so often stated, one of efficiency or organisation (with the army being characterised as organised, while the militia is characterised as chaotic). The difference between the two is one of democracy.

Following the Brest-Litovsk treaty, Trotsky as Commissar of Military Affairs set about reorganising the army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire was reintroduced, as was saluting officers, special forms of address, separate living quarters and privileges for officers. Officers were no longer elected. Trotsky wrote "The elective basis is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has already been set aside by decree"<sup>18</sup>. Why did Bolsheviks feel there was a need to reintroduce military discipline? Why then was there a need for military discipline in Russia 1917 but not in the anarchist front lines in Spain in 1936?

The conventional army structure evolved when feudal kings or capitalist governments required the working class to fight its wars

for them. These had to be authoritarian institutions, because although propaganda and jingoism can play a part initially in encouraging enlistment, the horrors of war soon expose the futility of nationalism. A large part of military organisation is aimed at ensuring that soldiers remain fighting for causes they do not necessarily believe in. Military discipline attempts to create an unthinking, unquestioning body of soldiers, as fearful of their own side as of the other.

But, there is another way of organising armies, that of the Militia. The only difference between the two is that in Militias, officers and generals are elected, and soldiers fighting are fighting out of choice rather than fear. This structure removes the necessity for the creation of a division between officers and soldiers that is reinforced artificially by measures such as saluting and differential privileges. These measures are no longer necessary because there is no need to frighten or order soldiers to fight when they believe in the cause they are about to risk their lives for. There are many examples of militias successfully operating; the Boers fought with a volunteer army against the British. During the Spanish Revolution of 1936, militias in Anarchist controlled areas fought Franco. In 1936 the CNT declared:

"We cannot defend the existence of nor see the need for, a regular army, uniformed and conscripted. This army must be replaced by the popular militias, by the People in Arms, the only guarantee that freedom will be defended with enthusiasm and that no new conspiracies will be hatched from the shadows"<sup>19</sup>.

Over the four years 1918-1921 the anarchist Makhno commanded militias who fought against the forces of the Hetman, White Generals Denikin and Wrangel, nationalists like Petliura and Grigor'ev and, of course, the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine. At its height it had 30,000 volunteer combatants under arms. Makhno and his commanders won against odds of 30:1 and more, on occasion. The insurgent army was a democratic military formation. Its recruits were volunteers drawn from peasants and workers. Its officers were elected and codes of discipline were worked out democratically. Officers could be, and were, recalled by their troops if they acted undemocratically.

Those supporting conventional army structures argue that they are necessary because without them, in the heat of battle, soldiers will turn and rout. History has shown that people will give their lives in defence of a cause if it is great enough and if they believe in it.

Of course there are many more examples of operation of conventional military armies (W.W.I, W.W.II., Vietnam etc. etc.). These were conflicts where it was not necessary to obtain the consent of soldiers. The role of military discipline is to prevent conscripts from mutineering when faced with the horror of wars in which they had no interest in fighting. These were conflicts where human life was lost in great numbers. The generals directing the war effort were able to make mistake after mistake, wasting lives, with

no accountability (see any military history of the Battle of the Somme, Gallipoli, etc.). These many examples give lie to the excuse that it is more efficient and that it is necessary, to organise along authoritarian lines. The function of hierarchies of rank and decision making is to ensure that the power of an army is directed and controlled by a minority.

### 4. Factories in Revolution

After the revolution there were two choices available to those running the economy, either to organise production in the hands of the state or in the hands of the workers. In order to achieve the former the Bolsheviks had to move against the latter. The factory committees were groups of workers elected at most factories before, during and after the October revolution. The delegates to these committees were mandatable and recallable. They were elected initially to prevent the individual bosses from sabotaging equipment. They quickly expanded their scope to cover the complete administration of the workplace and displaced the individual managers. As each workplace relied on many others, to supply raw materials, for energy and to transport their products, the Factory Committees tried to federate in November 1917.

They were prevented from doing so by the Bolsheviks through the trade union bureaucracy. The planned 'All Russian Congress of Factory Committees' never took place. Instead the Bolshevik party decided to set up the 'All Russian Council of Workers Control' with only 25% of the delegates coming from the factory committees. In this way the creative energy of Russian workers, co-ordinated outside Bolshevik control, was blocked in favour of an organisation the party could control. This body was in itself stillborn, it only met once. It was soon absorbed by the Supreme Economic Council set up in November 1917 which was attached to the Council of Peoples Commissars, itself made up of Bolshevik party members.

In November 1917 Golas Truada (the official organ of the Union for Anarchist Propaganda) warned:

"Once their power is consolidated and 'legalised', the Bolsheviks who are Social Democrats, that is, men of centralist and authoritarian action will begin to rearrange the life of the country and of the people by governmental and dictatorial methods, imposed by the centre. Their seat in Petrograd will dictate the will of the party to all Russia, and command the whole nation. Your Soviets and your other local organisations will become little by little, simply executive organs of the will of the central government. In the place of health, constructive work by the labouring masses, in place of free unification from the bottom, we will see the installation of an authoritarian and statist apparatus which would act from above and set about wiping out everything that stood in its way with an iron hand."

This is indeed what happened. The factory committees were merged with the Bolshevik

controlled Trade Union movement. In a decree in March 1918 workers' control was supposed to return to the conception of monitoring and inspection rather than management, "in nationalised enterprises, worker's control is exercised by submitting all declarations or decisions of the Factory or shop committee... to the Economic Administrative Council for approval.... Not more than half the members of the administrative council should be workers or employees." Also in March 1918, Lenin began to campaign in favour of one-man management of industry. In 1919, 10.8% of enterprises were under one-man management, by December 1920, 2,183 out of 2,483 factories were no longer under collective management.

### Control of the Economy

So within a few short months of October, the Bolsheviks had taken control of the economy out of the hands of the working class and into the hands of the Bolshevik party. This was before the civil war, at a time when the workers had shown themselves capable of making a revolution but according to the Bolsheviks, incapable of running the

## ...in March 1918, Lenin began to campaign in favour of one-man management...

economy. The basis of the Bolshevik attack on the factory committees was simple, the Bolsheviks wanted the factories to be owned and managed by the state, whereas the factory committees wanted the factories to be owned and managed by the workers. One Bolshevik described the factory committee's attitude: "We found a process which recalled the anarchist dreams of autonomous productive communes".

Partly they did this to remove the threat of any opposition to Bolshevik rule, but partly, these decisions were a result of the Bolshevik political perspective. These policy decisions were not imposed on them by external objective factors such as the civil war. With or without the civil war their strategic decisions would have been the same, because they arise out of the Leninist conception of what socialism is and what workers control means. Their understanding of what socialism means is very different from the anarchist definition. At the root of this difference is the importance given to the "relations of production". In other words the importance of the relationship between those who produce the wealth and those who manage its production. In all class societies, the producer is subordinate and separate from those who manage production. The workplace is divided into the boss and the workers. The abolition of the division in society between 'order-givers' and 'order-takers' is integral

to the Anarchist idea of socialism, but is unimportant to the Leninist.

The phrase "workers control of the means of production" is often used. Unfortunately it represents different things to different tendencies. To the anarchist it means that workers must have complete control over every aspect of production. There must be workplace democracy. They must have the power to make decisions affecting them and their factory, including hours worked, amount of goods manufactured, who to exchange with. As Maurice Brinton, author of "The Bolsheviks and Workers Control" explains:

"Workers management of production - implying as it does the total domination of the producer over the productive process - is not for us a marginal matter. It is the core of our politics. It is the only means whereby authoritarian (order-giving, order-taking) relations in production can be transcended, and a free, communist or anarchist, society introduced. We also hold that the means of production may change hands (passing for instance from private hands into those of a bureaucracy, collectively owning them) without this revolutionising the relations of production. Under such circumstances - and whatever the formal status of property - the society is still a class society, for production is still managed by an agency other than the producers themselves"<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, the Leninist idea of socialism has more to do with the nationalisation of industry or State Capitalism than the creation of a society in which workers have control over their own labour power.

In "Can the Bolsheviks retain State Power?" Lenin outlined his conception of 'workers control':

"When we say workers control, always associating that slogan to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and always putting it after the latter, we thereby make plain what state we have in mind... if it is a proletarian state we are referring to (i.e. dictatorship of the proletariat) then workers control can become a national, all-embracing, omnipresent, extremely precise and extremely scrupulous accounting (emphasis in the original) of the production and distribution of goods." By 'accounting' Lenin meant the power to oversee the books, to check the implementation of decisions made by others, rather than fundamental decision making.

The Bolsheviks saw only the necessity for creating the objective conditions for socialism. That is, without a certain level of wealth in society, it is impossible to introduce all those things that socialism requires; free healthcare, housing, education and the right to work. Lenin said "Socialism is merely the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly"<sup>21</sup> or also "State capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and



The introduction of Taylorism and one man management in the factories in 1918 and 1919 displays a fixation with efficiency and productivity at the expense of workers' rights. They didn't see that without control over your own working life, you remain a cog in someone else's wheel. Workers' democracy at the point of production is as important as material wellbeing is to the creation of a socialist society.

However, there is yet another problem with the Bolshevik vision of a planned economy. The Bolsheviks thought centralising the economy under state control would bring to an end the chaos of capitalistic economies. Unfortunately they didn't consider that centralisation without free exchange of information leads to its own disasters. The bureaucratic mistakes of Stalin and Mao are legendary. Under Mao, the sparrows of China were brought to the brink of extinction to prevent them from eating the crops. Unfortunately this led to an explosion in the insect population (previously the sparrows ate the insects so keeping the numbers down) and resultant destruction of the harvest. In Russia huge unusable nuts and bolts were manufactured so quotas could be met. Industrial democracy did not exist. Plans were imposed on the population. It was not possible to question or criticise. Any opposition to the state was counter revolutionary, no matter how stupid or blind the state decisions were. Only with workers democracy can there be free exchange of ideas and information. Planning an economy in ignorance is like playing football blind, difficult if not impossible to do successfully. In short, it was bad politics, perhaps motivated by wishful thinking, that led the Bolsheviks to believe that holding the reins of state power could possibly be a short cut to socialism.

### 5. Learning the lessons of history

What unites all Leninist traditions (Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism) against the anarchists is their defence of the Bolsheviks in the period 1917-1921. It is this Bolshevik blueprint which they seek to recreate. The reasons variously given for the collapse of the revolution are the backwardness of Russia (either industrially or socially), the Civil War and the isolation of Russia. What Leninists argue is that the fault didn't lie with the politics of the Bolsheviks or with the policies they implemented but rather with conditions that were beyond their control. Even those who were critical of the Bolsheviks suppression of democracy, such as Victor Serge and the Workers Opposition group, ultimately defended the Bolsheviks' position. Their argument is that without the measures the Bolsheviks took, the revolution would have fallen to a White reaction and a return to the monarchy.

Our argument is that no matter what the objective factors were or will be, the Bolshevik route always and inevitably leads to the death of the revolution. More than this, defeat by revolutionaries is much worse than

defeat by the Whites, for it brings the entire revolutionary project into disrepute. For seventy years socialism could easily be equated with prison camps and dictatorship. The Soviet Union became the threat of a bad example. Socialists found themselves defending the indefensible. Countless revolutions were squandered and lost to Leninism and its heir, Stalinism.

### Freedom and utopia

In the following passage Engels outlines how revolution will lead to mankind's freedom;

*"Proletarian Revolution - [is the] solution of the contradictions [of capitalism]. The proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property. By this act the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne and gives their socialist character complete freedom to work itself out. Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible. The development of production makes the existence of different classes in society henceforth an anachronism. In proportion anarchy [chaos] in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of organisation, becomes at the same time lord over nature, his own master - free."*<sup>23</sup>

In power, the Bolsheviks followed this program. They centralised production, removing from it 'the character of capital', yet the existence of different classes did not die out. Bolshevik party officials got better rations, accommodation and privileges. In time they were able to transfer their privileges to their offspring, acting just as the ruling class in the West. Chaos in social production didn't vanish, chaos in Stalin's time led to famine. The political authority of the state did not die out and the soviet people were not free.

The 'character of capital' is not the only force underpinning the structure in society. Power relations also have a part to play, and contrary to Engel's assumptions, power does not only come from ownership of capital. The members of the central committee may not have owned the deeds to the factories per se but they were in charge.

Freedom isn't just a goal, a noble end to be achieved but rather a necessary part of the process of creating socialism. Anarchists are often accused of being 'utopian'. Beliefs are utopian if subjective ideas are not grounded in objective reality. Anarchists hold that part of the subjective conditions required before socialism can exist is the existence of free exchange of ideas and democracy. To believe that revolution is possible without freedom, to believe those in power can, through their best and genuine intentions, impose socialism from above, as the Bolsheviks did, is indeed utopian. As Sam Faber puts it in *Before Stalinism*:

*"determinism's characteristic and systemic failure is to understand that what the masses of people do and think politically is as much part of the process determining the outcome*

*of history as are the objective obstacles that most definitely limit peoples' choices"*<sup>24</sup>

The received wisdom is that there was no alternative open to the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks could have followed a more democratic route, but they chose not to. They were in the minority and their goal was to have absolute power. Their failure to understand that socialism and democracy are part of the same process destroyed the prospect for socialism in the Soviet Union. Next time there are revolutionary upheavals in society, it is to be hoped that the revolutionary potential of the working class will not be so squandered.

Leaving the last word to Alexander Berkman;

*"No revolution has yet tried the true way of liberty. None has had sufficient faith in it. Force and suppression, persecution, revenge, and terror have characterised all revolutions in the past and have thereby defeated their original aims. The time has come to try new methods, new ways. The social revolution is to achieve the emancipation of man through liberty, but if we have no faith in the latter, revolution becomes a denial and betrayal of itself."*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, (1918)

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Mstislavskii, *Five Days which Transformed Russia*, (1923)

<sup>3</sup> Paul Frolich in his book *Rosa Luxemburg*, (1933)

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*, (1970)

<sup>5</sup> Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*, (1953)

<sup>6</sup> The RSDLP was the name of the party that was to split into the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

<sup>7</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka, Lenins Political Police*, (1981)

<sup>8</sup> Where the US Government aided in the massacre of over half a million Communist Party supporters.

<sup>9</sup> Military Revolutionary Committee. This group was initially set up by the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet on the 12th Oct 1917 to organise for the October revolution. After the revolution the newly formed Second Congress of Soviets elected two interim bodies; the Sovnarkom (the government) composed only of Bolsheviks and the VTsLK (a legislative body). The Sovnarkom transferred the functions of the MRC to the Cheka.

<sup>10</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka, Lenins Political Police*, (1981)

<sup>11</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka, Lenins Political Police*, (1981)

<sup>12</sup> Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment with Russia*, (1922)

<sup>13</sup> *For Anarchism*, edited by David Goodway, (1989), pp73

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism, the rise and fall of Soviet democracy*, (1990)

<sup>15</sup> George Leggett, *The Cheka, Lenins Political Police*, (1981) p40

<sup>16</sup> quoted by Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*, (1953)

<sup>17</sup> Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment with Russia*, (1922)

<sup>18</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Work, Discipline, Order*, pp171-172

<sup>19</sup> Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, (1983)

<sup>20</sup> Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*, (1970)

<sup>21</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25 page 358

<sup>22</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 page 259

<sup>23</sup> Engels, *Socialism - Utopian and Scientific*, (1880)

<sup>24</sup> Sam Faber, *Before Stalinism*, pp198

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism*, (1929)

# Marx & the state

*"Indeed how do these people propose to run a factory, operate a railway or steer a ship without having, in the last resort, one deciding will, without single management they do not tell us"*

Engels

Since the Nineteenth century Marxism and anarchism have confronted each other as the two dominant strains of revolutionary thought. Some Marxists claim that in fact Marxism is not a statist or vanguardist ideology. Like all Marxists they also generally dismiss anarchism as utopian, marginal and non-scientific. The aim of this article is to show that Marx and Engels were deeply ambiguous on the nature of the state and the party, and that the criticisms by anarchists of them were and remain valid.

Far from being utopian anarchism has the same materialist origins as Marxism and, far from being marginal, has had a huge influence among workers since the nineteenth century. As Daniel Guerin put it:

*"Anarchism and Marxism at the start, drank at the same proletarian spring"*<sup>2</sup>

Since then many anarchists have, unfortunately, tended to demonise Marx. The genius of Marx and Engels was in the way they were able to combine the materialism of Hegel with various economic theories to come up with a critique of capitalism. By Marx's own admission *Capital* his major economic work is a synthesis of ideas from right-wing economists like Adam Smith to socialists like the Irishman William Thompson.

One of Marx's main contributions was to popularise the labour theory of value (though he was not the first to come up with this idea). Put crudely this is the idea that all material goods or commodities have another value besides their actual usefulness (or "use-value"). This value is determined by the amount of labour required to produce them. The capitalist does not pay this full value in wages (which only provide enough to feed and maintain the worker) the rest is held back as surplus value or profit.<sup>3</sup>

Thus workers have a real material interest in overthrowing capitalism. As well as this Marx pointed to capitalism's tendency to bring workers together in large workplaces where they can struggle together. This creates the social basis for labour organisation and the realisation of collective class interests.

Before Marx socialists were aware that workers were exploited but they had no explanation of the economic basis of this exploitation. The mechanics of capitalism were not understood.

Bakunin and his followers fully accepted this and other ideas in Marx's critique of capitalism. In fact Bakunin began the translation of *Capital* into Russian and the Italian anarchist Carlo Cafiero published a summary of the same work in Italian.

With regards to materialism Bakunin begins his seminal work *God and State*<sup>4</sup> by clearly taking sides. He asks:

*"Who are right, The idealists or the materialists? The question, once stated in this way, hesitation becomes impossible. Undoubtedly the idealists are wrong and the materialists are right"*

What are the divisions between anarchists and Marxists? You don't need a degree in political science to figure out the major one:

### The State

Marx and Engels saw the State as being a product of class struggle. It was the executive committee of the ruling class. It was an instrument by which one class rules another. In most of their writings they seem to see the State as a neutral tool. It can be taken and used by either workers or capitalists.

Their classical political statement is *The Communist Manifesto*<sup>5</sup>. In its 10 main demands it calls for the centralisation of credit, transport and means of production under the State. This is justified (according to Marx) because:

*"political power, properly called, is merely the instrument of one class for oppressing another"*

Here we have the idea of the State as a tool to be used by either class

(capitalists or workers).

In his *Comments on Bakunin*<sup>6</sup> Marx claims that the workers:

*"must employ forcible means hence governmental means"*

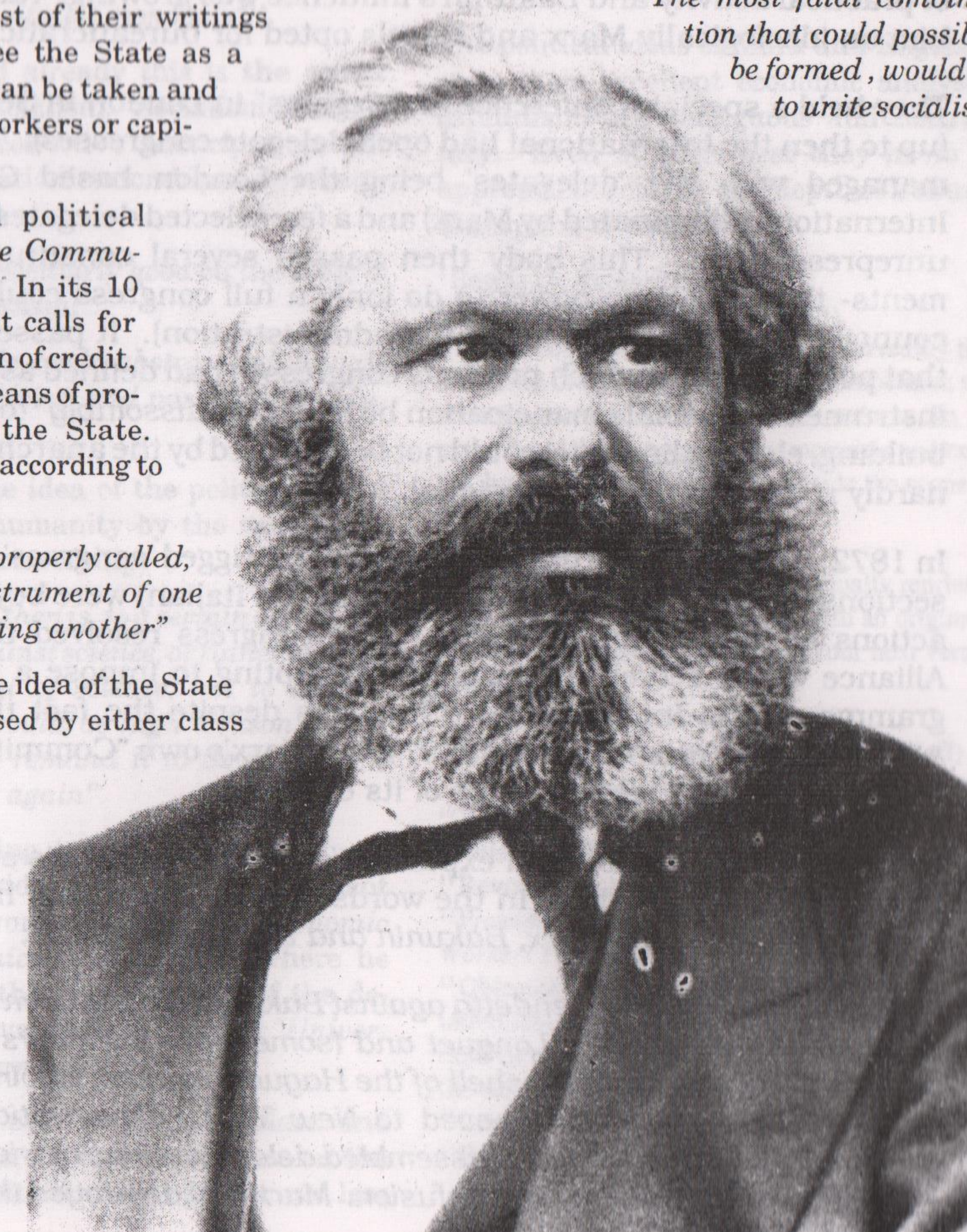
This is a common trend in Marx and Engels thinking (see also first quote). Kropotkin describes it well as:<sup>7</sup>

*"the German school which insists on confusing the state with society"*

Workers will probably have to use force in a revolution but why does this imply a government?

Bakunin vigorously opposed the Marxist conception of the State. The State was more than simply a product of class antagonism. If the programme of the manifesto was realised then a new bureaucratic class based on it rather than the market could arise. This for Bakunin would have nothing to do with socialism:

*"The most fatal combination that could possibly be formed, would be to unite socialism*





to absolutism"<sup>8</sup>

Bakunin was right. Getting rid of competition and the law of value did not stop the Leninist states from being class societies. The state embodied the interests of the ruling class and extracted profit from workers by brute force and ruthless exploitation. The state failed to wither away. The prediction by Engels that the seizing and centralising of property would be the state's last official act<sup>9</sup> proved to be a sick joke on the workers of the Stalinist countries.

At the end of the day no state can encapsulate the interests of the masses better than the masses themselves. As Bakunin says in *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*<sup>10</sup>:

*"where are those brains powerful enough and wide ranging enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real interests, aspirations, wishes and needs whose sum constitutes the collective will of the people?"*

### Marx the Libertarian?

Of course many libertarian Marxists will point out that Marx and Engels did sometimes move beyond the position of the Mani-

### Red & Black Revolution (26)

festos on the State. After the 1848 uprising in Berlin and the Paris Commune of 1871, for example. In *The Civil War in France* (1871) Marx says that the State has:

*"assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour...of an engine of class despotism..."*

Therefore:

*"the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made State machinery and weld it for its own purposes"*

and the liberation of the working class cannot come about *"without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class"*

He also calls for self-government of the producers and delegation from communes to higher organs of power by recallable delegates. However even here he fails to outline with any precision the forms of workers self-rule which might emerge: the ideas of worker's councils, militias, collectives on the land etc. (all of which are taken up by Bakunin in *Letters to a Frenchman* (1871)

In his 1850 *Address to the Communist League* (again a comparatively libertarian and revo-

lutionary speech) Marx comes closest to outlining this by saying that workers must:

*"immediately establish their own revolutionary governments, whether in the form of municipal committees and municipal councils or in the form of worker's clubs or worker's committees"*

### Marx the Democrat

However if you were to pick up the 1895 edition of this address you would be confronted by a new introduction by Engels. In it he informs us:

*"The mode of struggle of 1848"<sup>11</sup> is today obsolete in every respect"*

Why? Simple:

*"They [the German workers] rendered a second great service to their cause...they supplied their comrades in all countries with a new weapon, and one of the sharpest, when they showed them how to make use of universal suffrage"*

He quotes Marx<sup>12</sup> on how voting had been:

*"transformed by them from a means of deception, which it was, into an instrument of emancipation"*

*"We are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting in order to please them (the bourgeois)"* says Engels in 1895

However in Marx's 1869 *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and in an 1879 letter by the two to Bebel, the German Social Democratic Party is savagely attacked for supporting parliamentary elections:

*"We cannot therefore co-operate with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves"*

Confused? You should be. Marx and Engels are about as consistent (in their writings on the state) as a Labour Party manifesto and at many stages actually sound like such a manifesto. We are treated to Marx the democrat, the communist, the partisan of workers control and Marx the fan of representative democracy. The state, to Marx and Engels was just the executive committee of a particular class. Once capitalism went so would the State.

*"Do away with Capitalism and the State will fall by it-self"* says Engels (*On Authority* 1872). Tragically he was wrong. As we shall see Marx's and Engels ambiguity on this springs from deeper problems. In fact, there are major problems in their whole conception of socialism.

### What is socialism?

The anarchist answer to this question is that socialism, at base, must be about freedom. A society run collectively to maximise the amount of choice available to the individual. A society based on satisfying the needs and wants of many and not on the profit of the few, with full participation at all levels.

A revolution is a conscious act by workers to liberate themselves from the constraints of class society. It is a subjective act.

There is a fundamental contradiction in Marxism between subjective and objective.<sup>13</sup> Humanity according to Marx goes through a series of distinct historical stages based on ever increasing levels of production. Certainly it is true that the level of production in a given society does determine the range of possibilities open to those trying to change it. However Marx tends to reduce all human development to this single cause. Just as feudalism gives way to capitalism, so capitalism gives way to socialism. He leaves out or minimises the importance of other variables like the role of political institutions, culture, ideology and individuals. To Marx all these 'subjective' things are **totally** conditioned by the 'objective conditions' of economic development.

Social and political systems rise and fall because of their ability or inability to materially improve the life of their populations. Each new order arises because it does a better job at improving production than the old one. The transition from socialism to capitalism is seen by him as coming about as inevitably as the change from slavery to feudalism. Here Marx is wrong. For the first time in history a transition from one social system to another requires mass participation. Capitalism, like feudalism and the systems that went before, already contains the seeds of its own destruction in that it creates its grave-diggers: the working class. But Marx in much of his later work went way beyond this and implied that the death of capitalism was inevitable:

*"Capitalist production begets with the inexorability of a law of nature its own negation..."* (Capital Vol. I, p 837)

Further on, in the same chapter he even goes so far as to describe capitalism as:

*"already practically resting on socialised production"*

Or, as he puts it in *Grundrisse* (notes for *Capital*):

*"beyond a certain point, the development of the powers of production becomes a barrier for capital"* Its *"violent destruction"* must come about *"as a condition of its own preservation"*

This is pure determinism. It takes away the central role of people in changing their own destiny. It removes workers, as thinking and acting individuals, from the centre stage. It ignores the very seeds which might blossom into revolution: the workers. If the destruction of capitalism is inherent in its own evolution then there is no reason to fight against it. If maximising production is the key then why not work harder to help it along?

In fact, historically, capitalism, with increasing productivity, has been very slow to disappear. Instead it has become more centralised and bureaucratic, with the state playing an increasing role. So the leopard has changed its spots a little. But the monopoly capitalism of today has no more resemblance to socialism than the free enterprise capitalism of Marx's time.

### Secret dictatorships

Bakunin is sometimes accused of being in favour of dictatorship. Indeed he often talks about secret dictatorships. However if you read what he actually said in detail it is quite obvious that what he was talking about was the classic anarchist position of a leadership of ideas. In a letter ending his relationship with the notorious Russian revolutionary Nechayev he says of his secret society:<sup>1</sup>

*"Thus the sole aim of a secret society must be, not the creation of an artificial power outside the people, but the rousing, uniting and organising of the spontaneous power of the people; therefore, the only possible, the only real revolutionary army is not outside the people, it is the people itself."*

The secrecy aspect may be regrettable (though understandable given the climate of Tsarist Russia) but these are not the words of one who sought to set up a dictatorship over the workers. I would also hazard a guess that many of the people who peddle the Bakunin-secret dictator line are well aware of this.

Secret liberal and socialist societies were a permanent and widespread phenomenon in Europe and had been since the end of the Napoleonic empire often for good reason. Marx and Engels joined the secret German organisation "The League of the Just" in 1847 and changed its name to the "Communist League". The Communist Manifesto was published by this secret organisation in 1848 using the German Workers Education society as a sort of front. At the time of the major confrontation between Marx and Bakunin (1871) many sections of the international such as the Spanish one had again gone secret because of the persecution following the suppression of the Paris Commune.

<sup>1</sup> Letter written to Nechayev June 2 1870 and reprinted from the Herzen archives by the "Anarchist Switchboard", NYC.

This idea was to be taken up and expanded on by Lenin who believed that:

*"Socialism is merely a state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and to this extent has ceased to be a state capitalist monopoly"*<sup>14</sup>

As I have said already this is the **exact opposite** of socialism. Socialism is about freedom and collective participation, not some bureaucratic dictatorship or state capitalism.

Bakunin is particularly good on the topic of 'scientific' socialism:

*"History is made, not by abstract individuals but by acting, living and passing individuals"*<sup>15</sup>

He opposed the idea of the political scientists leading humanity by the nose to an enlightened dictatorship:

*"What I preach then is, to a certain extent, the revolt of life against science, or rather against the government of science, not to destroy science, that would be high treason to humanity, but to remand it to its place so it cannot leave it again"*

It is worth noting, to be fair, that the young Marx did consider the subjective element especially in works like his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* where he declares that the political form of the destruction of private property will be *"Universal human emancipation"*

However the later writings of Marx and Engels concentrate more and more on the outcome of capitalist development and less

and less on how to win workers to revolution. This combined with a blind respect for authority (see starting quote) leads Marxism to be a great recipe for incipient dictatorship even assuming the best intentions of the two authors.

The political ideas of Marx and Engels (despite their excellent economic analysis of capitalism) are ambiguous and contradictory. Even at their best they in *no* way approach the clarity and depth of Bakunin's conception of socialism.

<sup>1</sup> Engels *On Authority* (1872).

<sup>2</sup> in *Anarchism and Marxism* (1973).

<sup>3</sup> This is only a very simple picture. In reality there are a host of other factors such as competition that reduces prices, mechanisation that reduces the amount of labour, costs of raw materials and energy etc, but further explanation is outside the scope of this article.

<sup>4</sup> Written in 1872.

<sup>5</sup> First published in 1847 and continually reprinted in unaltered form. (If you disagree with an original position you usually change it in your next version!)

<sup>6</sup> 1874.

<sup>7</sup> *The State, its Historical Role* (1897).

<sup>8</sup> Bakunin on Anarchy (edited by Sam Dolgoff) p.4

<sup>9</sup> Anti Dühring (1878).

<sup>10</sup> Written just after the commune in 1871 and published in 1878.

<sup>11</sup> Revolution, workers self government and all that

<sup>12</sup> Preamble to the *Constitution of the French Workers Party* (1880).

<sup>13</sup> Objective conditions are those over which the individual has no control. For example whether it rains or not tomorrow. One could, however, take the subjective decision to bring an umbrella.

<sup>14</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works* Vol. 25 p358

<sup>15</sup> Both quotes from *God and State* (1872)

### Marx, Bakunin & the 1st International

Bad theory leads to bad practice. Marx and Engels were well capable of intrigue and authoritarianism in practice. In February 1869 Bakunin's "Alliance for Social Democracy" put in a bid to join the international. It applied for membership as separate Swiss, Italian and Spanish sections. These were accepted. This was the high point of the international in terms of practical activity and Bakunin's influence was growing. Rather than take him on ideologically Marx and Engels opted for bureaucratic intrigue.

They held a special "conference of delegates" in London in September 1871 (up to then the International had open delegate congresses). This was stage managed with the 'delegates' being the London based Council of the International (dominated by Marx) and a few selected delegates. It was totally unrepresentative. This body then passed several constitutional amendments- that it had no power to do (only a full congress could do this- the council was supposed to look after administration). It passed a resolution that political action which previous congresses had defined as a subordinate instrument for social emancipation be linked "indissolubly" to it. This (party building, electoralism, etc) could not be accepted by the anarchists who could hardly remain in the international.

In 1872, delegates were hastily convened to a rigged 'congress' to which some sections were not invited and others (like the Italian) were boycotting due to actions of the London congress. This congress resolved that Bakunin's Alliance was a secret organisation attempting to impose a sectarian programme on the International. This was despite the fact that Bakunin's Alliance hadn't existed since 1869. Even Marx's own "Committee of Inquiry" had found insufficient evidence of its existence.

However condemnation and expulsion of Bakunin and his supporters was not enough. We continue in the words of Paul Thompson, himself sympathetic to Marx, from *"Marx, Bakunin and the International"*:

*"It was at this point the vendetta against Bakunin having been concluded that Engels backed by Marx, Longuet and (some) other members of the general council, produced the bombshell of the Hague congress, moving that the seat of the general council be moved to New York. This motion, which was completely unexpected by the assembled delegates, was carried amid considerable (and understandable) confusion. Marx had destroyed the international in order to save it."*



# Syndicalism

Picture: Jim Larkin, the symbol of Irish syndicalism.

## Its Strengths & Weaknesses

**SYNDICALISM is the largest organised tendency in the libertarian movement today. It has built large workers' unions, led major struggles, been the popular expression of anarchism in many countries. To understand the anarchist-communist view of syndicalism we have to look at its roots, its core beliefs and its record.**

In the 1860s the modern socialist movement was beginning to take shape. The International Working Mens' Association, better known as the First International, was becoming a pole of attraction for militant workers. As the movement grew, points of agreement and of disagreement between the Marxists and the Anarchists about what socialism meant and how to achieve it were becoming clear. This led to the Marxists using less than democratic means to expel the anarchists.

In 1871 the Paris Commune came into being when the workers of Paris seized their city. When they were finally defeated seven thousand Communards were dead or about to be executed. A reign of terror against the Left swept Europe. The anarchists were driven underground in country after country. This did not auger well for a rapid growth of the movement. In response to the terror of the bosses, their shooting down of strikers and protesting peasants and their suppression of the anarchist movement a minority launched an armed campaign, known as "propaganda by deed", and killed several kings, queens, aristocrats and senior politicians.

Though very understandable, this drove a further wedge between the bulk of the working class and the movement. Clandestine work became the norm in many countries. Mass work became increasingly difficult. The image of the madman with a bomb under his arm was born. The movement was making no significant gains.

By the turn of the century many anarchists were convinced that a new approach was needed. They called for a return to open and public militant activity among workers. The strategy they developed was syndicalism.

### THE BASIC IDEA

Its basic ideas revolve around organising all workers into the "one big union", keeping control in the hands of the rank & file, and opposing all attempts to create a bureaucracy of unaccountable full-time officials. Unlike other unions their belief is that the

union can be used not only to win reforms from the bosses but also to overthrow the capitalist system. They hold that most workers are not revolutionaries because the structure of their unions is such that it takes the initiative away from the rank & file. Their alternative is to organise all workers into the "one big union" in preparation for a revolutionary general strike.

They established their own international organisation with the founding of the International Workers Association in Berlin in

### By the end of WWII the European syndicalist movement and the IWA was almost destroyed.

1922. Present at that conference were the Argentine Workers Regional Organisation FORA representing 200,000 members, the Industrial Workers of the World in Chile representing 20,000, the Union for Syndicalist Propaganda in Denmark with 600, the Free Workers Union of Germany FAUD with 120,000, National Workers Secretariat of the Netherlands representing 22,500, the Italian Syndicalist Union with 500,000, the General Confederation of Workers in Portugal with 150,000, the Swedish Workers Central Organisation SAC with 32,000, the Committee for the Defence of Revolutionary Syndicalism in France [a breakaway from the CGT] with 100,000, the

Federation du Battiment from Paris representing 32,000. The Spanish CNT was unable to send delegates due to the fierce class struggle being waged in their country under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. They did, however, join the following year.

During the 1920s the IWA expanded. More unions and propaganda groups entered into dialogue with the IWA secretariat. They were from Mexico, Uruguay, Bulgaria, Poland, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Paraguay and North Africa.

Syndicalist unions outside the IWA also existed in many countries such as the Brazilian Workers Regional Organisation and the Industrial Workers of the World in the USA (which soon spread to Canada, Sweden, Australia, South Africa, and Britain<sup>1</sup>). The influence of its methods, if not necessarily of its anarchist origins, was even seen in Ireland where the ITGWU throughout its existence, until it merged into SIPTU a few years ago, carried the letters OBU on its badge. This OBU refers to the IWW slogan of One Big Union. And let us not forget that both Connolly and Larkin were influenced by the IWW. Connolly was an organiser for their building workers union in New York state and Larkin delivered the oration at Joe Hill's funeral.

### DECLINE

The success of the Bolsheviks did great harm to the workers movement outside Russia. Many were impressed by what was happening in Russia, Communist Parties sprang up almost everywhere. The Bolshevik model appeared successful. Many sought to copy it. This was before the reality of the Soviet dictatorship became widely known.

Nevertheless the syndicalist movement still held on to most of its support. The real danger was the rise of fascism. With the rule of Mussolini, the Italian USI, the largest syndicalist union in the world, was driven underground and then out of existence. The German FAUD, Portuguese CGT, Dutch

NSV, French CDSR and many more in Eastern Europe and Latin America were not able to survive the fascism and military dictatorships of the 1930s and 40s.<sup>2</sup>

It was at the same time that the Spanish revolution unfolded, which was to represent both the highest and lowest points of syndicalism<sup>3</sup>. More about this below.

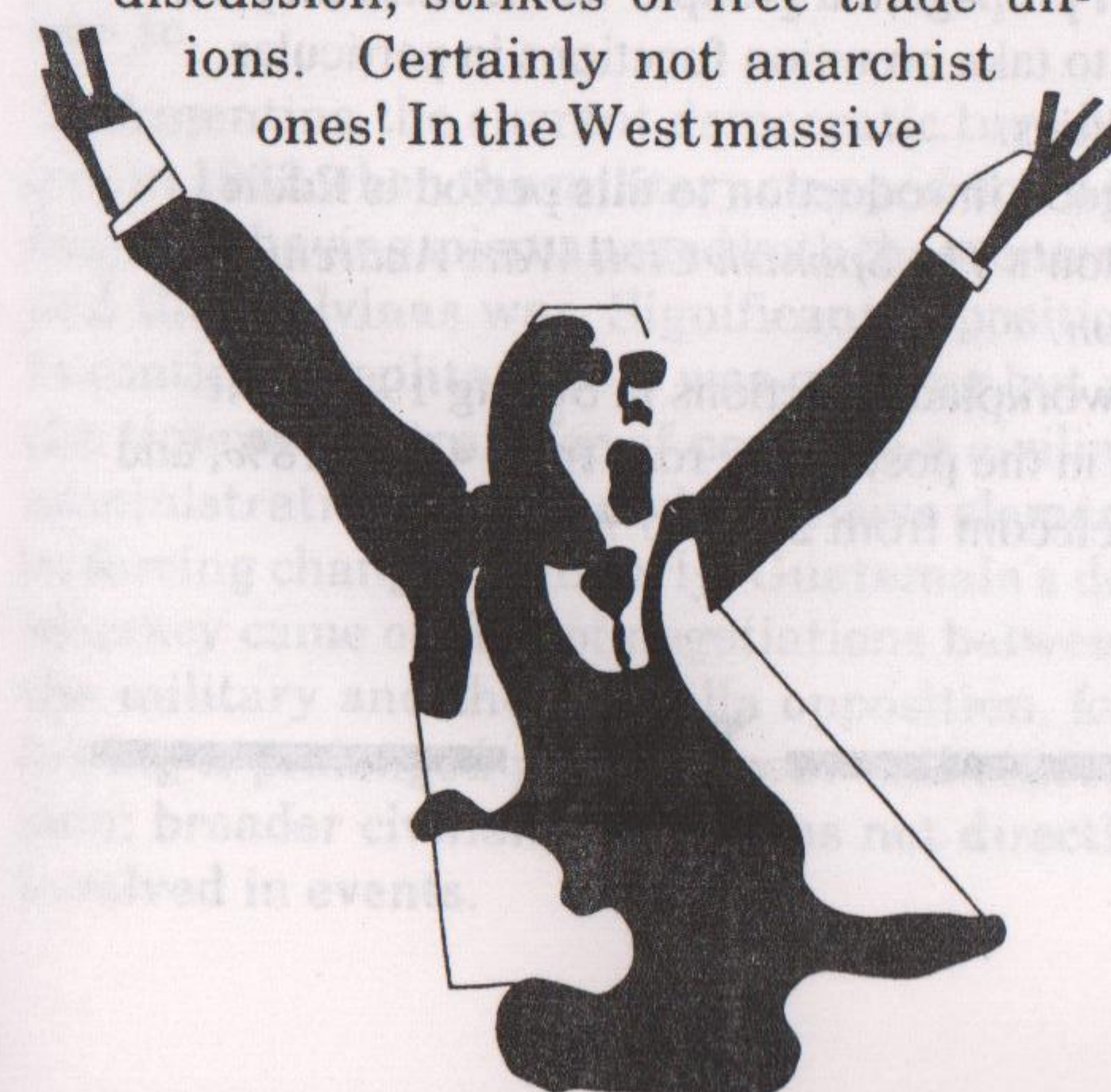
The Polish syndicalist union with 130,000 workers, the ZZZ, was on the verge of applying for membership of the IWA when it was crushed by the Nazi invasion. But, as with syndicalists elsewhere, they did not go down without a fight. The Polish ZZZ along with the Polish Syndicalist Association took up arms against the nazis and in 1944 even managed to publish a paper called *Syndicalista*. In 1938, despite their country being under the Salazar dictatorship since the 1920s, the Portuguese CGT could still claim 50,000 members in their now completely illegal and underground union. In Germany, trials for high treason were carried out against militants of the FAUD. There were mass trials of members, many of whom didn't survive the concentration camps.

One point worthy of mention about the Spanish CNT shows the hypocrisy of the British government which called itself anti-fascist. Not only were Italian anti-fascist exiles interned on the Isle of Man but CNT members whose underground movement assisted British airmen, Jews and anti-fascists to escape through Spain to Britain were repaid at the end of the war when their names were handed over to Franco's secret police.

### THE RUMP

By the end of WWII, the European syndicalist movement and the IWA was almost destroyed. The CNT was now an exile organisation. In 1951 the IWA held their first post-war congress in Toulouse. This time they were a much smaller organisation than the great movement which existed at their first congress. Nevertheless they still represented something. Delegates attended, though mostly representing very small organisations, from Cuba, Argentina, Spain, Sweden, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Britain, Bulgaria and Portugal. A message of support was received from Uruguay.

Things were not looking good for the re-emergence of anarcho-syndicalism. In Eastern Europe the Stalinists allowed no free discussion, strikes or free trade unions. Certainly not anarchist ones! In the West massive



### Direct Action Movement becomes Solidarity Federation

THE BRITISH section of the International Workers Association, the Direct Action Movement, is no more. In its place stands the Solidarity Federation. This is far more than just a change of name, they see it as the second step on the road to becoming a revolutionary union.

Step one was explaining the anarcho-syndicalist idea within the anarchist movement and getting a couple of hundred people together in the DAM. Now they have set up three 'industrial network's' in transport, education and the public sector. These are seen as the precursors of revolutionary unions.

These are open to any worker who wants to join - as long as he/she is not in another political organisation. Their bulletins carry reports of grievances and struggles in their industries. There are few mentions of anarchism, and possible members don't have to agree with it, or even know anything about it.

The 'who are we' piece in each issue of the Public Sector Workers' Network bulletin sums up their basic approach. *"Network is published by a group of militant public service workers to promote the idea of workers self-management and revolutionary change in society. It is also an open forum for all public service workers to share, discuss and analyse our experiences, and to develop solutions to the problems we face."*

*"...We are also seeking to network as widely as possible with like-minded workers. We see no point in wasting time and energy in trying to reform the existing unions or trying to elect more left-wing leaders. We want to see workers' organisation which is not divided by union affiliations, bureaucracy or political parties, and which embrace all public service workers... on the basis of practical solidarity."*

In an article 'Why we need political unions' in the summer 1994 issue of Transport Worker their plan is explained in a little more detail. *"Transport Worker Network believes we have to build an alternative to the present trade unions. An alternative openly committed to a revolutionary transformation of society, educating workers and raising class consciousness not only through militant industrial action to gain concrete improvements in pay and conditions, but also constantly raising and debating the failure of the current system and organising ways to implement a new society."*

*While initially some would be attracted to such unions simply on the basis of effective action, it is our aim to convince them of the urgent need and genuine possibility of building a new society."*

The new Solidarity Federation is not an 'anarchist organisation' in the sense that one must agree with anarchism before joining. It does not explain anarchism in its network bulletins or in its Direct Action paper. How are new members to learn about the ideas? Will it be left to informal approaches by other members, will it be left to a few people producing pamphlets and holding educational meetings? Will they end up with some sort of well-meaning elite running everything important lest it fall under the influence of members who don't fully understand or accept anarchist ideas?

subsidies from the US and the Catholic church went to tame unions controlled by Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. Meanwhile Russia did the same for their allies who controlled the French CGT, the Italian CGIL and others. The IWA, in its weakened state couldn't compete for influence. In the late 1950s the Swedish SAC withdrew from the IWA. There was now not a single functioning union in its ranks.

It staggered on as a collection of small propaganda groups and exile organisations like the Spanish and Bulgarian CNTs. Some wondered would it live much longer. But suddenly in 1977 Franco died and his re-

gime fell. The CNT blossomed. Within a matter of months its membership leaped from a few hundred activists to 150,000. [Problems later developed within the CNT and a split occurred which left us with two unions whose combined membership today probably does not reach 30,000, though this is still a significant number.] The growth of the CNT put syndicalism back on the anarchist agenda. The IWA now claims organisations which function at least partly as unions (in Italy, France and Spain) and propaganda groups in about another dozen countries.

Outside the IWA are syndicalist unions and organisations like the 16,000 strong SAC in



Sweden, the OVB in the Netherlands, the Spanish CGT, the Solidarity-Unity-Democracy<sup>4</sup> union in the French post office, the CRT in Switzerland, and others. Some are less anarchist and more reformist than others. Say what we will about them we must recognise that syndicalism is today the largest organised current in the international anarchist movement. This means it is especially important to understand them.

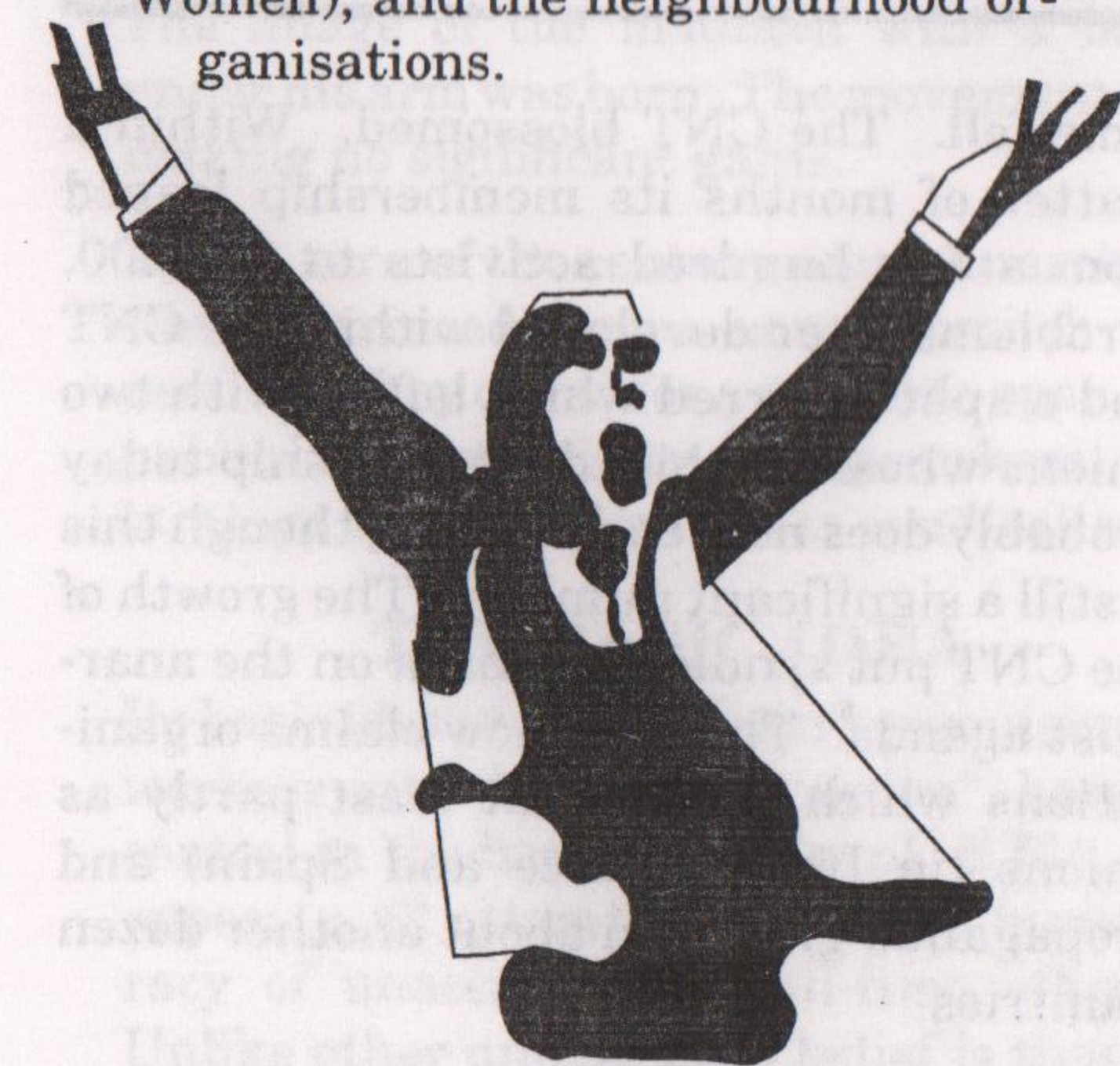
### SOME PROBLEMS

Anarchist-Communists do have criticisms of their politics, or more accurately lack of politics. Judging from their own statements, methods and propaganda the syndicalists see the biggest problem in the structure of the existing unions rather than in the *ideas* that tie workers to authoritarian, capitalist views of the world.

Syndicalists do not create revolutionary political organisations. They want to create industrial unions. Their strategy is apolitical, in the sense that they argue that all that's essential to make the revolution is for workers to seize the factories and the land. After that it believes that the state and all the other institutions of the ruling class will come toppling down. They do not accept that the working class must take political power. For them all power has to be immediately abolished on day one of the revolution.

Because the syndicalist organisation is the union, it organises all workers regardless of their politics. Historically many workers have joined, not because they were anarchists, but because the syndicalist union was the most militant and got the best results. Because of this tendencies always appeared that were reformist. This raises the question of the conflict between being a trade union or a revolutionary anarchist organisation.

Syndicalists are quite correct to emphasise the centrality of organising workers in the workplace. Critics who reject syndicalism on the grounds that it cannot organise those outside the workplace are wrong. Taking the example of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain it is clear that they could and did organise throughout the entire working class as was evidenced by the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth, the 'Mujeras Libres' (Free Women), and the neighbourhood organisations.



Section of CGT demonstration, Spain.

### SPAIN

The weakness of syndicalism is rooted in its view of why workers are tied to capitalism, and its view of what is necessary to make the revolution. Spain in 1936/7 represented the highest point in anarcho-syndicalist organisation and achievement. Because of their apoliticism they were unable to develop a programme for workers' power, to wage a political battle against other currents in the workers' movement (such as reformism and Stalinism). Indeed syndicalists seem to ignore other ideas more often than combating them. In Spain they were unable to give a lead to the entire class by fighting for complete workers' power.

Instead they got sucked into support for the Popular Front government, which in turn led to their silence and complicity when the Republican state moved against the collectives and militias. The minority in the CNT, organised around the *Friends of Durruti*, was expelled when they issued a proclamation calling for the workers to take absolute power (ie that they should refuse to share power with the bosses or the authoritarian parties).

The CNT believed that when the workers took over the means of production and distribution this would lead to "the liquidation of the bourgeois state which would die of asphyxiation". History teaches us a different lesson. In a situation of dual power it is very necessary to **smash** the state. No ruling class ever leaves the stage of history voluntarily.

In contrast to this the *Friends of Durruti* were clear that, and this is a quote from their programme 'Towards a Fresh Revolution', "to beat Franco we need to crush the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist and Socialist allies. The capitalist state must be destroyed totally

and there must be installed workers' power depending on rank & file committees. Apolitical anarchism has failed". The political confusion of the CNT leadership was such that they attacked the idea of the workers seizing power as "evil" and leading to an "anarchist dictatorship".

The syndicalist movement, organised in the International Workers Association and outside it, still refuses to admit the CNT was wrong to "postpone" the revolution and enter the government. They attempt to explain away this whole episode as being due to "exceptional circumstances" that "will not occur again". Because they refuse to admit that a mistake of historic proportions was made, there is no reason to suppose that they would not repeat it (should they get a chance).

Despite our criticisms we should recognise that the syndicalist unions, where they still exist, are far more progressive than any other union. Not only do they create democratic unions and create an atmosphere where anarchist ideas are listened to with respect but they also organise and fight

in a way that breaks down the divisions into leaders and led, doers and watchers. On its own this is very good but not good enough. The missing element is an organisation winning support for anarchist ideas and anarchist methods both within revolutionary unions and everywhere else workers are brought together. That is the task of the anarchist-communists.

Alan MacSimóin

<sup>1</sup> It was known as the Industrial Workers of Great Britain.

<sup>2</sup> Some, like the Italian USI and German FAU, have been refounded but exist only as relatively

## ...syndicalists seem to ignore other ideas more often than combating them

small propaganda groups. Sometimes they are able to take on union functions in particular localities.

<sup>3</sup> A good introduction to this period is Eddie Conlon's *The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism in Action*.

<sup>4</sup> In workplace elections in Spring 1994 their vote in the post office rose from 4% to 18%, and in Telecom from 2.5% to 7.5%.



# Review Grassroots democracy

LOW INTENSITY DEMOCRACY  
Edited by Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora and Richard Wilson.  
PLUTO PRESS.

Any discussion on the subject of democracy faces a critical problem early on - a problem of definition. In his contribution to *Low Intensity Democracy*, Noam Chomsky notes the essential modus operandi of conservative forces in society today and in times past when he states that the guardians of world order have sought to establish democracy in one sense of the term while blocking it in another.

The preferred sense of democracy, also known as parliamentary democracy or Western democracy, is relatively well known to many on the left today. Chomsky himself has done immeasurable work in recent years in further highlighting the undemocratic nature of parliamentary based societies - countries such as Ireland, Britain and the USA being cases in point.

Even so, there is still considerable debate and disagreement on the merits of fighting for the establishment of parliamentary democracy in societies where this form of political structure is not already in place. Broadly speaking, the debate often centres on whether the establishment of parliamentary democracy acts as a stimulus to a further democratisation of society or as a brake.

### TESTING TIMES

In past times the debate may have seemed marginal. Few, apart from those influenced by anarchism, questioned their involvement with the parliamentary process. But this has changed. Across the world today there are a greater number of countries in the throes of testing the debate out in practice than at any other time in recent history. Not just countries belonging to the former Soviet block - Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Belarus - but also others such as South Africa, El Salvador, and Thailand to name but a few.

In *Low Intensity Democracy*, four countries are examined in reasonable depth by the contributors. These are South Korea, Argentina, Guatemala and the Philippines. All differ in the manner by which parliamentary democracy arrived at their doorsteps. Both S. Korea and the Philippines conceded parliamentary democratic regimes under the pressure of popular mass action; Argentina and Guatemala, less so.

In Argentina the current democratic turn began in 1983 when the military stepped down in disgrace, having mismanaged both the economy and the Malvinas war. Significant opposition to continued military rule was growing but at the time of the transfer of power to a civilian administration it was not the decisive element in forcing change. Similarly, Guatemala's democracy came on foot of negotiations between the military and the guerrilla opposition, following a prolonged period of war and repression; broader civilian society was not directly involved in events.

South Korea and the Philippines were markedly different. For the purposes of this review the case of S. Korea will be looked at more closely:

**Background** - The democratic struggles that shook S. Korea in 1987/88 emerged from a growing resistance to the dictatorship that was installed in S. Korea in 1961, after a military coup. In the early sixties S. Korea was less industrialised than N. Korea. With the military in the driving seat, after the coup, rapid economic growth became a regime obsession. Authoritarianism in S. Korea reached a peak in the 70s. At the juridical core were the national security laws and the anti-Communist laws, the so-called **bad laws** that effectively banned any political activity outside the consensus of the establishment. Giant conglomerates, known as chaebol, were the main beneficiaries of military largesse. The chaebol were distinctive in their own right in that they were family owned and usually family managed.

### LOW COST

By 1985, S. Korea had one of the highest concentrations of capital in the world. The top 10 chaebol accounted for one-third of total exports and one third of total GNP. The low cost of labour underpinned rapid accumulation by the business class via export-oriented industrialisation. This strategy required political control over labour by the state and by employers "... By law, organised labour was forbidden to have any political or financial ties to any political parties." Nevertheless, the authoritarian regime could not entirely ignore the political interests of labour "... Therefore the state allowed the real wages to rise slowly and steadily behind increased productivity and spurts of economic growth."

**Crisis** - Despite recent economic success, S. Korea has been rocked by crisis at periodic intervals. This reflects a tradition of popular resistance to authoritarianism that is a constant in Korean politics. But, also, it is a reflection of economic realities. The crisis of 1986-88 that heralded in the current democratic regime was no different in this respect. Its immediate background lay in the popular perception that S. Korea had finally arrived at the promised land of economic success. The period 85-87 was one of economic boom - a fact reflected in a substantial trade surplus which had not been previously achieved in S. Korea. A number of ancillary factors tied into the mood of optimism:

The Chun presidential term, in effect a dictatorship, was to be the last. Both domestic and international interests had been promised a peaceful transfer of power.

Macros in the Philippines had been overthrown in the popular upsurge known as people's power in 1986. This encouraged anti-dictatorship forces in S. Korea.

The impending Seoul Olympics constrained the options of the military with regard to outright repression of any challenge to its authority.

President Chun effectively announced in April 87 that military rule under his presidency

would not end, after all, as had been promised. A popular uprising in June 87 followed. Massive demonstrations occurred, lasting 18 days. Over 120,000 combat police were called in to contain the upsurge. Nevertheless, the democracy movement was overwhelming in nature, linking both workers and middle-class in opposition to continued military rule.

**Concession** - A number of possible options were considered. Pragmatists within the military regime understood the futility of using military force to repress the uprising. As importantly, the U.S. signalled its opposition to martial law, or a new coup to replace Chun. Concessions to democratic forces were the favoured option to contain a further escalation. An Eight Point Plan for reform was announced which included: direct presidential elections, freedom for political prisoners, "... an end to press censorship, local government autonomy and guarantees on human rights." However, there was no concession or promise on economic reform.

**Restoration** - Economic reform and some, even minor, redistribution of wealth was the ultimate goal of the democratic upsurge of 87. Could the Eight Point Plan deliver this, even indirectly? As the author Barry Gills notes, "the democratisation that occurred in 87/88 set in motion a re-alignment of political forces..." But, he continues "... it would be an error to mistake this as the genuine substance of democracy." Popular input into the new S. Korea was to be channelled into three legitimate avenues - presidential elections; parliamentary elections and local elections.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

In regard to parliament and local authorities, the options open to the S. Korean electorate were limited, to say the least. Parliament in particular, but also the local authorities, had little power in the new order; executive power remained with the presidency. Gills notes that the political parties remained vehicles for leadership cliques and bastions of regionalism rather than true parties based on platform, principle or accountability to constituency. No effective say in South Korean society could be garnered by the public from either of these avenues. What about the presidential office?

The first direct and free presidential elections returned Noh Tae Woo as the first post-Chun president of S. Korea. Noh's success, on only one-third of all votes cast, followed on from the fragmentation of the anti-dictatorship movement in the immediate aftermath of the Eight Point Plan. Noh, billed as an ordinary man, was a former general and the candidate of the dictatorship. In the period up to and including the Seoul Olympics he played a populist front - but the eventual fate of these inclinations, indicate how limited the new democracy in S. Korea was. Noh appointed Cho Soon, a well-known liberal and economics professor to address a number of issues for economic reform - including the possible provision of social welfare to S. Korean society. In fact, Cho Soon never even got around to making proposals in this area.

Initially, he concerned himself with introducing a more competitive domestic economic en-



## DEBATE

vironment. Essentially he wanted to curb the power of the chaebol in the domestic market where it had a stranglehold on investment funds and resources. He introduced two key proposals - the Real Name System and the Public Concept of Land. Both proposals involved minor constraints on the chaebol: the former would require all financial transactions to include the names of all those actually involved in the deals; the latter was intended to curb rampant land speculation and irresponsible development. Both proposals, however, were ditched in 1989 since they were considered too controversial - Cho Soon lost his job and was later replaced with a pro-chaebol appointee. Proposals on social welfare never saw the light of day.

## HARD HIT

In the aftermath of the Seoul Olympics, the new democratic regime dropped its more populist pretensions and moved against the only other force in society had maintained a momentum of struggle against the ruling interests of the chaebol. This was organised labour. Strikes and wage settlements had been at their highest in 1987 - 88 and had caused record damage in production and export loss. Hyundai were particularly hard hit. Demands by labour went well beyond the traditional areas of concern for workers and called for the democratisation process to be brought into the arena of industrial relations. This was not acceptable.

The perceived necessity for the political defeat of organised labour was at the heart of conservative restoration. The Noh regime moved decisively against the workers' movement in the Spring of 1989. An active policy of strike breaking was resumed, along with the arrest of union leaders, using the full force of the state combat police. A ban on public sector unions was enforced - culminating in the break-up of the newly formed National Teacher Union and the sacking of over 1,500 for participating in illegal union activities.

Conclusion - The democratisation process in Korea came full circle. Authoritarianism was challenged by a mass movement for democratisation in 1987. This produced a period of rapid change in which corporatism was weakened and civil society gained more autonomy from the state. However, elites adjusted by forming a broader coalition of the military, business and the middle-class in order to restore conservative hegemony. Therefore, the fundamental nature of the system remained unchanged.

Broadly speaking then, the movement for democracy achieved minimal success in S. Korea. Minor, let alone fundamental, economic redress in favour of the mass of S. Korean society did not occur. The regime liberalised when it had to, but later it clawed back these gains made by wider society and the workers' movement in particular.

In looking at the overall developments of events in S. Korea, two other factors are also worth noting. These are the role played by the United States and secondly, the subsequent fragmentation of the pro-democracy movement in the face of some concession from the dictatorship. In regard to the U.S. role, the central point is that on this occasion the U.S. sided with the pragmatic wing of the dictatorship and came out in favour of democratic reforms as outlined in the Eight Point Plan. This reflects a significant shift in the assessment of U.S. strategic interests, a process begun under the Reagan regime (Crusade for Democracy, 1982, p9).

Secondly, in the face of concessions from the regime - the Eight Point Plan - the pro-democracy movement split on its response and future direction. The particular concession of new local, parliamentary and presidential elections succeeded in divesting the movement of its unity and single-mindedness. As Gills states (p249), "the radical wing of the democratisation movement also fragmented... Much of this debate revolved around the question of whether to participate in the electoral arena or remain underground. Among those supporting electoral participation there was a further split between those favouring support for one mainstream opposition party and those wanting to form a separate left-wing party."

Any assessment of the success or failure of any particular democracy movement must base itself on the potential possible as well as the practical results achieved. This can be put another way. To what extent has the removal of dictatorship simply led to the replacement of the old order with a newer, more sophisticated form of neo-authoritarianism? As indeed happened in S. Korea. Today, the chaebol conduct their business and exploitation under the cover of being a free democratic society. Concluding then on S. Korea: social and economic oppression has stabilised since the pro-democracy struggles of the mid to late eighties. A result that U.S. interests would, no doubt, be very satisfied with.

This is a central theme emerging from Low Intensity Democracy. The debate on parliamentary democracy has moved on from the stagnant format of past times when only the anarchists had serious reservations about parliamentary democracy. Democracy, that is parliamentary democracy, is now sponsored by U.S. and international business interests - IMF and World Bank - to the extent that it does provide a better cover than any other political system for the "generalised offensive for the liberation of market forces". In past times it was reasonable to expect a modicum of social reform during a transition from dictatorship to parliamentary democracy. Indeed this was the central basis for supporting such transitions. Not so any more.

The wave of parliamentary democracies that have emerged in past decades have done so under the aegis of a growing domination of all national interests by the interests of international free market politics or, in other words, that system which seeks the ideological rehabilitation of the absolute superiority of private property, legitimisation of social inequalities and anti-statism of all kinds. There are now a significant number of examples of where the onset of parliamentary democracy has actually increased inequality or stabilised it at current levels, particularly where it has caused, as it did in S. Korea, a fragmentation of the pro-democracy movement.

This raises a key problem. The role played by parliamentary democracy in demobilising struggles for fundamental change has generally been underplayed. In part this has reflected an enduring weakness in that section of the left that has derived the greater proportion of its politics from formal Marxism.

## WORKERS PARTY

Here the arguments in favour of participation, whether this is on the basis of existing parties or by the creation of a new workers party, rest centrally on pragmatism but also on naiveté. On the one hand it is said the arena of parlia-

mentary democracy is too large and too central to much of political discourse to be ignored. To leave the field of parliament to the political parties of the moderate left, centre and right is to abandon one's constituency. Or, so the argument goes.

But, on the other hand, there is delusion about what is possible. The comments of Frederick Engels back in 1895 as he observed the electoral growth of the German socialist party, the SDP, being a case in point:

*"Its growth proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as irrepressibly, and at times as tranquilly as a natural process. All Government intervention has proved powerless against it... If it continues in this fashion, by the end of the century we shall... grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not."*

But, pragmatism and naiveté aside, there is also a weakness of critique on the left that centres on the problem of definition and what democracy involves. Many on the left equate parliament with democracy. Few enough, in fact, have criticised the parliamentary road from the perspective of content. Instead they have accepted it and its methodology. Yet, how much progress is achievable through parliament? What level of participation does it even allow? Most importantly, what effect does opting for the parliamentary road have on the broader movement for social change? Particularly on grass root organisations, which are, after all, the bedrock of any pro-democracy movement?

In recent years, there has been a more far searching examination on the left of its history and traditions than at any time previous. Circumstances and the appearance of failure have prompted this. But how far is that re-examination going to go?

One thing is clear. There is a deeper realignment underway than is currently being imagined. And the debate on the nature of democracy and the part it plays in social change is part of this. But, one is not talking about parliamentary democracy here. There is a tradition of democratic struggle on the left that eschewed any involvement with the parliamentary method. This was for clear, practical reasons. Democracy, in this tradition, centred on the union, on the process of struggle and on participation. It was not about representing the ideas of others. It was about building up experience and confidence in the grass-roots on the method of democracy so that, when the time came and inequality was confronted, workers could proceed immediately to the socialisation of production. Centrally, it was about building up a counter-power in society to the power of the state. But importantly, a democratic, grass-roots counter-power.

The editors of Low Intensity Democracy note the importance of this other tradition when they say that the example of the Spanish anarchists earlier in the twentieth century should now be examined as an alternative model of revolutionary social transformation. From this perspective democracy must be painstakingly built up and constantly defended through concrete popular organisations embedded in the workplace and the community.

It is a measure of how times are changing that anarchists get a fair hearing in this area that is central to real change.

## the EZLN continued from back page

representatives from the NGO's ('non-governmental agencies'). Invitations were issued to the various political parties asking them to participate in the peace talks. No weapons have been handed over to the Mexican army.

The State adopted a more conciliatory approach after the international condemnation of the bombing raid on January 5th. The move towards negotiation seems only to have come about due to the light of international attention, as prior to this Mexico's record in human rights is a diabolical one.

*"Torture was frequently used by law-enforcement agents particularly the state and judicial police, throughout Mexico. Most victims were criminal suspects but some including leaders of indigenous communities and human rights activists were apparently targeted solely for their peaceful political activities."* As of February '94 the Secretariat of Human rights of the main opposition party - Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) - reported that 263 of their members, activists and supporters have been assassinated since the 1988 electoral campaign.

The EZLN rejected a request to drop political points from the agenda saying that they were not going to force national agreements but that as Mexicans they had "a right to form opinions and to protest about aspects of Mexico's political life". In this letter they go on to say that "Peace without respect and dignity continues to be, for us, an undeclared war of the powerful against our people". They then went on to show their willingness for 'peace with dignity' by withdrawing from certain towns and letting the International Red Cross move in and take control declaring them 'grey areas'. They also said that they would allow free passage of civilians while maintaining mobile patrols to ensure no military, police, or government officials entered the 'grey zones'.

In another statement issued to national newspapers the EZLN asked "Why is everyone so quiet? Is this the 'democracy' you wanted? Complicity with lies?" Going on to say "How much blood must be spilled before they (PRI) understand that we want respect not charity?" The statement finishes with the important lines

*"The CCRI-CG (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee General Command) of the EZLN will go to the negotiating table with reservation because of its lack of confidence of the federal government. They want to buy us with a ton of promises. They want us to sell the only thing we have left: dignity. The 1st of January was not enough for the government to learn to speak to its citizens as equals. It seems that more than January 1 are necessary. .... Here Zapata lives. Try to assassinate him again. Our blood is a pledge. That it be taken by he who is still ashamed."*

They also issued a communiqué to all the NGO's operating within the conflict zone saying that they continued to "respect and



A member of Mexican anarchist group Amor y Rabia interviewing Subcomandante Marcos

welcome their neutrality and humanitarian efforts".

The month of February and March is littered with accounts of the spreading popularity of the EZLN. There was a march of 300kms by nearly 200 indigenous people to the outskirts of Mexico city. Banners displayed read "This dialogue we don't understand" which was a reference to the massacre of students in 1968 and the more recent one in Chiapas. A demonstration for agrarian reform in Oaxaca was attacked by police. Students calling themselves 'Zapatistas' protested at a stop by the presidential candidate of the PRI. In Puebla local indigenous groups blocked the highway. In Tamaulipas dissident oil workers at the state petrochemical industry (PIMEX) broke with their unions and organised strikes, blockades and demonstrations at the plants. Unarmed Indians have staged land take-overs in the state of Chiapas - throughout the Mayan Highlands. There are reports that over 120,000 hectares of land has been expropriated from large private land owners<sup>5</sup>. On April 10th, 77 years after the death of Emiliano Zapata large demonstrations were organised and took place in support of EZLN demands in Mexico city. In June the EZLN rejected a peace offer set forth by the Government.

"Declaration of the Jungle" issued by the EZLN

*"We call upon Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution which states 'the people have at all times the inalienable right to alter or change the nature of their government.' There-*

*fore in accordance with our Constitution, we issue this DECLARATION OF WAR... People of Mexico, we call for your total participation in this struggle for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace."*

## Where are they coming from?

*"We are not Marxists, nor are we guerrillas. We are Zapatistas and we are an army."* EZLN Major

The first days of 1994 saw the resurgence of the name of Zapata on the airwaves of the world. The EZLN, are only the most public face of the Chiapas conflict. The EZLN act as an army, under the direction of a larger organisation, the CRIC-GC. The CRIC-GC is comprised of delegates from many indigenous communities and it is they who are responsible for the politics and organisation of the EZLN. The CRIC-GC is the highest authority of the movement. The EZLN is subservient to them and exists to carry out their wishes.

Major Benjamin of the EZLN says "We are not Maoists or Marxists, sir. We are a group of campesinos, workers and students for whom the government has left no other path than arms to resolve our ancestral problems."<sup>6</sup>

To understand what being a Zapatista means one has to go back to the origins of today's EZLN. In 1983 twelve young people entered Chiapas to organise the oppressed population. A vital lesson taught to these young people was that of democratic organisation. Sub Comandante Marcos revealed "The



Zapatista army was not born democratic, it was born as a political military organisation. But as it grew the organisational methods of the communities began to permeate and dominate our movement, to the degree that the leadership of the EZLN has become democratic in the indigenous manner."

The CRIC-GC is organised through a delegate based democracy. It is composed of delegates from each town and community. It is responsible for the politics and organisation of the EZLN and is its highest author-

## The Zapatistas have already rejected the ideas of the authoritarian left.

ity. The decision to take up armed struggle came first and the CRIC-GC grew from this decision.

"So we decided that there is no way other than to organise and rise up like this in armed struggle. So we began to organise ourselves like that, secretly, in a revolutionary organisation. But, as it advanced, each people elected its representatives, its leaders. By making the decision in that way, the people themselves proposed who will lead these organisations. The people themselves have named us. So first, someone from each people has been named responsible. In that way we advanced town by town, so that there was time, then to name delegates. In that way we came to be the CCRI." Sub commander Marcos is answerable to the CRIC-GC but remains the leader when it comes to military matters.

The delegate based democracy on which the CRIC-GC is based is best explained by a young Zapatista Isaac "if some member of the CCRI does not do their work, if they do not respect the people, well compa it is not your place to be there. Then, well excuse us but we will have to put another in your place." This is how the community understand democracy and it is easy to see why they see no relation to what the 'democracy' the PRI currently exercise in Mexico.

The conditions these people find themselves in are harsh yet they can still operate a form of participatory democracy. This disproves the lie put forth by Leninists that in difficult conditions a dictatorship over the people must take place in 'their interests'. It comes as no surprise that the Zapatistas repeatedly deny being Marxists or Leninists as these forms of political ideology have difficulty with the idea of participatory democracy.

Through this democratic process the EZLN developed politics on a wide range of issues.

For example the Women's revolutionary law supports the right of women to participate fully in the revolutionary struggle, control their own fertility, choose partners, and has regard to their health, education, and well being. This signifies a major advancement for women of the indigenous population. The peace proposal offered by the government was rejected by 97% of the people in the Zapatista controlled areas after consultation took place with all those over the age of 12.

In the negotiations with the Government, the EZLN put forward ten conditions which had to be met before a peace could be agreed. Many of these points for example the dissolution of the present government to be replaced by a transitional one until proper elections, were obviously not going to be met by the PRI. Also the EZLN demanded that NAFTA be revised. Within the core of Zapatista politics there seems to be an inherent flaw. On one hand they know that their demands will not be met by the authorities yet on the other hand, given this, the demands they make are watered down versions of their own political line. The question is when the Zapatistas were preparing their 10 point peace plan, what was their political strategy? Assuming that they knew the government would reject most of their points why didn't they include a fuller expression of their program. Perhaps they did have illusions in the government granting some of their demands, perhaps they felt that anything more radical would alienate the rest of the Mexican people, we don't know! These questions remain unanswered.

They claim to have learned from the guerrilla movements in Latin America. Firstly, to greatly distrust the surrender of arms, and secondly not have confidence "only in the electoral systems". Yet this position seems to be contradicted by Marcos who refers to the creation of a "democratic space where the political parties, or groups that aren't parties, can air and discuss their social proposals."<sup>9</sup> The point is explained further in a communiqué by the CCRI-CG in June where it says "...this revolution will not end in a new class, faction of a class, or group in power. It will end in a free and democratic space for political struggle." The EZLN are fighting a revolution for democratic space? Yet, the type of democracy which they wish is not tolerated in any Western society and is unlikely to be permitted in Mexico unless revolution spreads throughout the country.

While it is obvious that no such space exists in Mexico, even the creation of some form of social democracy will not bring about the changes which the Zapatistas so desperately need. Social democracy does not provide liberty or justice. This call for social democracy contrasts with the beliefs which Marcos says exist amongst the people that "they (politicians) are changing the leaves of the trees, but the roots are damaged... We say Let's uproot the tree and plant it again". The tree will not be uprooted though the creation of social democracy.

However the options for the EZLN seem limited. Prior to the Presidential Elections in August they organised a National Democratic Convention (CND) which took place in the Lacandona jungle. This logistical mira-

cle was attended by over 7,000 people<sup>10</sup>. The conference was attended by many of the established voices of opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Marcos said he wished to turn the CND into the leaders of civil society and that it should be they who decided how to respond to the PRI and the fraudulent State. Marcos presented democratic change as something which should come via peaceful means. The military solution would be adopted solely as a matter of last recourse<sup>11</sup> and only be tried when the CND decided upon it. Two weeks later the PRI presidential candidate went on to win the election amongst accusations of fraud. The creation of a democratic space through peaceful means to appears to have failed.

Mexico still needs to build a strong revolutionary movement. It will require greater numbers than the revolutionaries of the EZLN to destroy the rotten Mexican state. This difficult task, facing all the people who wish for change in Mexico, is made more difficult because of its dominant neighbour, the USA.

Within the EZLN, it seems, there is a widespread belief that their demands can only be met when as they say "the tree is uprooted." They have developed a democratic structure from which ideas can flow and develop. They have struck out against the system which causes them so much death, pain and suffering. Support work has been done by the anarchist group 'Love and Rage' who have members in the USA and in Mexico. They have sent people down to Chiapas to ascertain the facts, organised translations of EZLN communiqués and helped in the production of a book on the EZLN. Here in Ireland we in the WSM have held a picket on the Mexican Embassy and handed in a letter of protest. This type of work though it may seem at first to be of minor importance, in fact ensures that the Mexican government knows that their actions are being monitored thus decreasing the likelihood of a government crackdown in the area.

The task facing Mexican revolutionaries is to spread their struggle and will for change to the cities and to the north of the Country. Although Marcos and the CCRI-GC are emphasising the role of the media, it is more important for the EZLN activists to win support on the ground.

In the United States activists must work on raising awareness of the EZLN amongst the resident Latino population. Pickets can be organised. Any struggle that remains isolated will face certain annihilation. It is the responsibility of all revolutionaries to ensure this will not happen.

The job of anarchists in Mexico is to spread their ideas and to share their experience as revolutionaries with the people of Chiapas. The Zapatistas have already rejected the ideas of the authoritarian left. The demands of the EZLN for liberty, justice, and democracy will not be realised under capitalism. These demands have never arisen out of reform of any system in any country. Mexican anarchists should utilise the fertile ground that now exists for anarchist ideas in



Children dressed as Zapatistas at the May Day march in Mexico city.

Chiapas.

What has happened in Chiapas is encouraging and needs to be supported. The revolutionaries of the EZLN, however, have not stumbled onto something new. The basic principle of participatory democracy is one of the foundation stones of anarchism. The EZLN deserve praise for the way they have integrated democracy into their struggle against the state. Now in Mexico where history stopped with the usurpation of power by the PRI seventy-five years ago, the people are still struggling towards having control over their own lives and destinies. True democracy needs to be established and implemented as part of the process of destroying the oppressive state which keeps all of us chained.

<sup>1</sup> Article 27 in the Mexican Constitution is the one which promised agrarian reform. It was included in the constitution after the revolution and was always seen as the guarantee of similar land reforms as

those Zapata implemented in his own region of Morelos during the revolution.

<sup>2</sup> NAFTA will also drive down the prices paid for some of the basic crops produced by the indigenous people for their crops. The timing of the uprising was to coincide with the first day that NAFTA was supposed to take effect in Mexico.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from an Amnesty International Report.

<sup>4</sup> Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) are groups such as the Red Cross, Amnesty International, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Source Peter Martin Morelost who attended the National Democratic Convention and posted his report onto the internet. (24.9.94 Mexico's National Democratic Convention.)

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from early newspaper coverage of events - listed in Chapter 2 - The first days.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from interview with Javier of the CCRI 3/2/94 in La Jornada.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from interview with Subcommander Marcos in La Jornada 4.2.94 - 7.2.94

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Marcos 11 May '94

<sup>10</sup> Attendance figure quoted from report by Peter Martin Morales.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Martin Morales

## Who was Zapata?

Emiliano Zapata was from the Morelos region. He joined the army after being caught as a highway man. His other option was to be shot. After his release in 1910 he supported the Liberals and had to take to the hills when they lost the elections despite having more votes. He was now the leader of an army of peasants and they fought and defeated the tyrant Don Porphyry. Then the liberal Francisco Madero came to power and he spoke of freedom of the Press and Democratic elections. Zapata published a charter which called for 'Land and Liberty.' Despite the charter not much changed and eventually power struggles broke out again.

In the course of the following years Zapata in the south and Pancho Villa in the north defeated many power mongers who tried to grip the reins of power. Yet, despite many opportunities Zapata never took control himself. "A strong people do not need a government" he once said. Zapata was influenced by the manifesto drawn up by Ricardo Flores Magon (Mexico's leading Anarchist at the time who went on to die in an American Prison). In the manifesto issued by Zapata and signed by 35 officers in August 1914 he wrote "It (the country) wishes to destroy with one stroke the relationships of lord and serf, overseer and slave, which in the matter of agriculture are the only ones ruling from Tamaulipas to Chiapas and from Sonora to Yucatan". During the revolution the Zapistas destroyed public papers, deeds, property transfers, titles and mortgages in the hope that the land would return to the only true owners, the people. In 1918 Zapata was lured into an ambush and killed. Evidently there are some in Chiapas who still wish to destroy the relationship which Zapata spoke off 80 years ago

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