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## Direct Action against the war in Ireland

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2003

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2003

deemed particularly significant, or which involved direct action.  
The estimates of attendances are the editorial committees.

## Shannon/DA Timeline

December 15<sup>th</sup> 2001: 1<sup>st</sup> Grassroots protest, Shannon airport (70 ppl)

August 17<sup>th</sup> 2002: Grassroots protest, Shannon (70 ppl)

October 12<sup>th</sup> 2002: first IAWM protest at Shannon (350), Grassroots mass trespass (150)

October 27<sup>th</sup> 2002: GNAW formed at Grassroots Gathering 3, Belfast

December 7<sup>th</sup> 2002: IAWM march, Dublin (750)

December 8<sup>th</sup> 2002: Grassroots protest, Shannon (350)

January 4<sup>th</sup> 2003: Establishment of Peace Camp at Shannon.

January 18<sup>th</sup> 2003: IAWM march, Shannon (2500)

January 29<sup>th</sup> 2003: Mary Kelly disarms US warplane.

February 1<sup>st</sup> 2003: Catholic Worker 5 disarm US warplane.

February 15<sup>th</sup> 2003: National march against war in Dublin (100,000)

March 1<sup>st</sup> 2003: GNAW attempts mass direct action (300) IAWM march (800) Both at Shannon

March 20<sup>th</sup> 2003: War officially starts. IAWM 10 minute work stoppage. GNAW activists & others blockade Dáil.

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March: IAWM march, Dublin (15,000)

March 31<sup>st</sup> 2003: Grassroots protest buries Irish neutrality, Shannon (90)

April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003: IAWM blockade of Dail (800)

April 7<sup>th</sup> 2003: Bush and Blair meet at Hillsborough, Northern Ireland. IAWM protest (2000)

April 9<sup>th</sup> 2003: Baghdad regime falls, Televised war ends.

April 12<sup>th</sup> 2003: IAWM march, Shannon (470)

Note: this list is by no means comprehensive. There were many other protests and vigils at Shannon airport and marches, school walkouts and smaller direct actions around the country. This list focuses on those protests which are mentioned in the articles,

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## Among activists

In advance of the war there was a lot of ‘look at how big the demonstrations are before the war’ talk from activists, with the implication that the outbreak of war would make them even bigger. I reckoned this was unlikely. The demonstrations before the 1991 Gulf War in the US were bigger than those during it. Before the First World War millions demonstrated and it took three years of horrendous bloodshed before opposition once more reached the pre-war peak. This isn’t surprising. When war breaks out all those who opposed it because they reckoned it was bad for the national interest will end up backing ‘our troops’. As it is, many of the 100,000 who marched on F15 will wonder why they bothered. They marched, the government ignored them and that was that. The (wrong) lesson that many may take is that marching is a waste of time.

We could have called the government’s bluff. All we had to do was show them that allowing refuelling to continue was going to meet with actual resistance. Out of the initial arrests at Shannon last year there were no charges — obviously the state hoped the issue was just going to go away. They were then willing to arrest and process ten or so at a time, probably aware that this was a good percentage of those who had declared a willingness to act. But could they have survived arresting 100’s or even 1000’s in order to allow refuelling to continue? We have not only let a real opportunity slip through our fingers, the government has also managed to bring refuelling into the public sphere. It is perhaps fitting that the last GNAW action at Shannon to date was based on finally burying the well rotten corpse of Irish neutrality.

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tens of thousands of troops were pouring through Shannon. This in itself was a considerable victory – it's very hard to organise people to oppose something they are unaware of.

But getting this out in the open should never more have been more than a first step. The point was to stop it. And here is where the government's victory lies. On February 16<sup>th</sup> the state must have been worried. 100,000 people had marched in Dublin, polls were showing that an overwhelming majority opposed the war and there had been a series of militant direct actions at the airport which had seen over 100 people trespassing and 3 separate attacks on military planes.

But Bertie and co. kept their nerve. They gambled that they could split the movement by attacking the direct action wing as 'violent' and demanding that the respectable wing distance themselves from it. The Green Party had already revealed it was vulnerable to this sort of pressure when Trevor Sergeant had gone on air to attack the Catholic Workers after they had disarmed the same US Navy jet that he had praised Mary Kelly for attacking days earlier!. The secret police were presumably telling McDowell that they reckoned that even those trotskysts whom he so hated were unlikely to actually do anything.

The Irish state gambled and won. For the most part the anti-war movements reacted to the government ignoring the huge Feb 15 march and the fine speeches by organising more marches and more speeches. When the small minority who were Grassroots Network Against War took the only logical route and called for mass civil disobedience at Shannon, things went like a dream for the government. They played the violence card and won big time. Not only did the NGO's and respectable parties queue up with the bishops to denounce the planned 'violence', so too did McDowell's dreaded trotskysts. Gleeful laughs must have echoed around government buildings on the last day of February when the news came through that Sinn Fein was telling people to stay away from Shannon the next day for fear of violence.

**Across the globe millions of people mobilised against the war in Iraq. On February 15<sup>th</sup> 100,000 people marched through the streets of Dublin in the biggest political protest in Southern Ireland for over 20 years. Around 15,000 demonstrated in Belfast on the same day.**

The turnout on these demonstrations showed that the battle for public opinion had been won. Massive numbers of people opposed Bush and Blair's drive to war and the Irish government's role in it. But they seem to have had very little effect on the war. The governments concerned simply ignored them. In every country the anti-war movement was thus faced with the question of what to do next. After February 15<sup>th</sup> we should have expected to see the various movements internationally working on ways to stop the war despite the fact that their respective governments were ignoring them.

One obvious tactic was some form of direct action against the war. There were many forms this could have taken; from industrial strikes and boycotting of war work to mass invasions of the airforce bases and naval ports essential to the military to enable the war to take place. The mainstream anti-war movements talked of industrial action but in reality, aside from very tokenistic stoppages on Day X, the only action that took place was either the result of a few individuals taking the rhetoric seriously (as in the case of the Scottish train drivers who refused to transport munitions) or organised by the handful of radical unions that exist in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In Ireland, previous anti-war movements had limited themselves to marching around the larger cities and listening to speeches. This time, we saw the full range of debate and actions that have been common to anti-war movements elsewhere for some time. Recognising the huge public support for the anti-war position, significant numbers of activists argued for, organised and took direct action

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Spanish CGT called a 24 hour general strike against the war: [www.ainfos.ca](http://www.ainfos.ca)

against the war machine. Anarchists were amongst those at the fore of promoting direct action against the war machine. These actions were successful at driving out three of the four commercial airlines, which had been flying tens of thousands of Gulf-bound US troops through Shannon airport, before the war began. The acting head of the US Embassy in Dublin, Jane Fort, blamed the “threatening behaviour of protestors” for their decision to leave. “The combination of two back-to-back incidents of real destruction would prompt any company to ask if it would put people in harm’s way, people who might be working on planes or riding on planes.”<sup>2</sup>

These withdrawals were significant because Ireland’s location made it quite useful for the US war effort. Official government figures revealed that just over 20,000 US troops were flown through Shannon airport in the opening weeks of the year. The Wall Street Journal of December 19<sup>th</sup> reported that, in the January build up, “more than 50,000 US ground troops are likely to flow into the Gulf region”. It thus appears that over 40% of these may have come through Shannon airport, showing the importance of this airport to the US military supply chain.

In Ireland, for this reason, almost all of the direct action protests were targeted on Shannon airport. More than half dozen successful actions took place, ranging from a large scale breach of the fence in October, to physical attacks on planes as the build up to war escalated. Shannon has been a target of Irish antiwar movements before, for it has been used to refuel US military planes as far back as the Vietnam war. During the 1991 Gulf war, many of us marched around Dublin demanding ‘no refuelling at Shannon’ — to no effect. In the years since many things have changed, not least the growth of a libertarian network and a direct action culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in the Irish Voice, [www.irishabroad.com](http://www.irishabroad.com)

## **Diversity of tactics Unity of opposition**

Going forward, there is a need for all those who oppose war to do things very differently next time. A few things seem essential. This includes a clear acceptance that, although we disagree on tactics, we must unite in opposing the war. The situation where some organisations used their media access to attack the plans of other groups should not be repeated. All they succeeded in doing was damaging the movement as a whole and damaging their own credibility.

In terms of those involved in the Grassroots Gathering, we now have to recognise that being able to build on this in future requires that we convince some of the far, far wider forces in the anti-war movement that they also need to be willing to act. The general model, however, has been shown to work. In countries where the libertarian movements can claim thousands or tens of thousands of adherents, it should be possible to organise similar actions on a far, far larger scale. Above all else GNAW demonstrated that if we take ourselves seriously we can move from complaining about the tokenism of the left’s opposition to the war to demonstrating an alternative.

Unfortunately the government has won the battle of Shannon, at least for now. Up to now Irish aid to US wars has been a dirty little secret. During the Afghan war, the government was trying to deny that there was any military material or men bound for that war coming through Shannon. The US Marines in desert camouflage, spotted during the December 15 2001 protest, we were told were coming back for Christmas from West German bases. As we all know these are surrounded by extensive deserts. Through the dedicated work of the anti-war plane-spotters and the Dubsy<sup>8</sup> court case, the reality was blown wide open for the Iraq war. We knew

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<sup>8</sup> Eon Dubsy was convicted of criminal damage to a US warplane. He spraypainted anti-war slogans on it at Shannon in Sept. 2002

## Differences & Disagreements

After March 1<sup>st</sup>, the anti-war movements found themselves in a difficult place. The direct action proved to be a catalyst, around which all the differences simmering within and between the movements surfaced, often in pretty ugly forms. Within GNAW disagreements arose between those who thought that with a more determined effort we could have broken through police lines and those of us who thought, given our small numbers on the day, such an effort would have simply resulted in lots of arrests and serious charges.

Disagreements also arose about the role played by individuals, including the author, on the day. The failure of some local groups to appoint any delegates meant both that democratic decision making was impossible, but also that the Dublin delegates, playing out their roles, were seen to dominate proceedings.

This meant the ability of GNAW to organise future mass actions had been weakened rather than strengthened after March 1<sup>st</sup>. Many of the core activists had been excluded from the whole county of Clare. And the fact that none of the actions went to plan had inevitably resulted in some internal tensions as some sought individuals to blame for this. This would seem to be pretty inevitable in broad networks that lack both detailed agreed aims and formal organisational structures. When such rows occur, new initiatives are inevitably stifled as the focus is directed inwards rather than outwards.

So the immediate aftermath of March 1<sup>st</sup> and the outbreak of the war saw a move towards more local actions and internal work to both increase the numbers involved in GNAW and improve communication and organisation. Talks started about calling another mass action in the future — but this time where we had much more time to organise ourselves. The rapid nature of the war, however, meant that US soldiers had taken Baghdad before serious discussion of this had even started.

## Shannon — first steps

A couple of years ago, Irish anarchists in the WSM initiated the first of a series of conferences, the Grassroots Gatherings, aimed at bringing together the new groups of activists who could be described as libertarian in the broadest sense of the word. With the build up to war in Afghanistan, it seemed obvious that it was time to move from the traditional passive opposition to the refuelling of war planes at Shannon, to taking direct action against the refuelling. At the first Grassroots Gathering meeting, held in Dublin, it was decided to call a protest for December 15<sup>th</sup> 2001. About 70 people took part in that first protest, far less than the 3,000 at the Dublin anti-war march that took place at around the same time. This demonstrated to us that our first task would be to win the argument within the anti-war movements that Shannon should be an important location for protests and not just something mentioned in speeches elsewhere. On that occasion, as the protest was in progress, a jet loaded with US marines landed.

The protesters proceeded to the fence near the plane and some of the barbed wire atop the fence was pulled down. One courageous soul legged it across the margins towards the plane, but was tackled to the ground and arrested. The Gardai became aggressive and another protester was arrested when they advanced on the crowd, pushing people to the ground.

A report written shortly afterwards observed “what we could have done with 3,000 people will remain in the realms of speculation until those opposed to war realise that direct action is the way forward.”<sup>3</sup> This was a challenge to the other anti-war movements in Ireland as well as to ourselves. Picking up steam

Demonstrations at Shannon started to become semi-regular from that point on. In August 2002, during another demonstration (organised at another Grassroots Gathering), the Sunday Times

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<sup>3</sup> struggle.ws

created the first media scare story about the protests. The local cops reacted by trying to stop us getting to the terminal building by blocking the entrance road. We simply pushed through them. At the end of the day, one person managed to get over the perimeter fence and make a dash for the runway before being arrested. This protest were still small, again around 70 people, The SWP-controlled Irish Anti War Movement continued to “prefer marching around Dublin than taking the bother to travel to and take action at the site where the Irish state is directly aiding the US war effort. This needs to change. With war in Iraq looming it should be possible to organise major protests at Shannon that could shut the airport for a period of time.”<sup>4</sup>

Anarchists in the WSM consistently argued that while marches in Dublin were important, in terms of building the movement and giving people the confidence to publicly display their opposition to war, more was needed. Specifically, mass direct action protests at Shannon could have the effect of actually doing something to stop Ireland’s involvement in the war effort. In October the IAWM finally organised a demonstration there. Over 300 people attended. However, problems with its organisation detracted from the protest’s effectiveness.

## Mass Trespass

Firstly the understanding to hold a mass meeting at the gate to discuss tactics for the day, as had been done on previous occasions, was ignored. When activists tried to get the meeting together, the IAWM stewards — most of whom were members of the SWP announced that we were going to start marching to the terminal immediately. So the meeting never happened. This lack of discussion resulted in bad feelings afterwards, both from those who wanted direct action to happen (and would have liked a chance to organ-

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<sup>4</sup> struggle.ws

that, with two or three times the number, the cops would simply not have been able to keep us all away from the fence.

After a long period facing the cops, we decided to try something different and got the whole line moving parallel to the fence. Surprisingly, this caught the Gardai on the hop and quite a few of them just stared at us moving off, until their senior officers ordered them to follow us. This meant one end of our line suddenly found they were no longer facing a wall of cops, but that there was only one every 5 metres or so. Seizing the opportunity, people walked up to the fence and threw home-made grappling hooks onto the top of the fence and started to pull it down.

In the space of a couple of seconds, the fence had started to peel off from the top and cops had come charging in, rugby tackling people to the ground, grabbing the ropes and generally shoving people around. Most of the arrests happened at this point as cops randomly grabbed people out of the crowd and threw them into vans. There were further arrests of the few brave souls who attempted to stop these vans moving off, despite the fact that a sea of cops surrounded them. But, on our side at least, things remained calm and we offered no violent response to this Garda provocation.

We formed up and marched back to the entrance of the airport where we had a short meeting in the car park outside, to get details of all those arrested for the legal support team and to discuss how people felt about the action. Both here and on the coach back to Dublin, the overwhelming feeling was very positive. Most people reckoned they felt more positive returning from this protest than from any of the other ones. In the end, the direct action at Shannon was foiled in its intention to get onto the airfield. But it demonstrated to us that such an action is possible to organise and that is a major step forward. Indeed, were it not for the week of ‘its going to be violent’ hype from the media, the bishops and even some other sections of the anti-war movements, we almost certainly would have succeeded. However, in the days afterwards it emerged that not everyone was so happy with how things went.



left for the airport building ahead of their march. One of the IAWM activists later told me that our departure was pretty embarrassing for them as every single one of the large force of Gardai, who had been waiting at the meeting point, followed us.

We had expected most people with us would be joining the observer line rather than the direct action line, but this turned out not to be the case. At least two thirds of those with GNAW chose to march up to the fence. Approaching the fence, we saw there were a couple of hundred Gardai waiting for us, including the riot squad. The decision to publicly deploy the riot squad in the first line in this manner was very unusual in southern Ireland. Normally, at demonstrations they are sitting in vans, out of sight, on stand by. It was all the more extraordinary given that the vast majority of the population of Ireland were opposed to refuelling. The only conclusion is that the image of the riot squad confronting peaceful protesters was manufactured not for domestic consumption, but to keep one man in a White House in Washington DC happy.

## Outnumbered

Arriving at the fence the agreed plan was put into action. The protestors linked arms and then slowly walked forward until we came into contact with the line of Gardai. We had hoped that at this point we would massively outnumber them and be able to simply walk around them. They were obviously worried about this as well, as their senior officer was quoted before the protest as saying that it would be impossible to guard 7km of perimeter with 500 men but they would try their best.

In the event, he needn't have issued this disclaimer as there was pretty much one cop for each protester. Plus, they had enough to spare to have a cop every 5 metres or so running up either side of us and dozens more visible inside the fence. Still it was obvious

ise it properly), but also from those who did not (who wanted to argue against it or at least insist that there should be clear division between the two groups). It also set the pattern for the rest of the war, where the so called 'revolutionary' left within the 'Irish Anti War Movement' would play the leading role, not only in undermining specific direct actions, but also in preventing any real dialogue between the movement they controlled and other activists.

The IAWM intended to confine the demonstration to a very tokenistic effort to enter the terminal building, followed by the usual speeches from the usual politicians. This was not enough for some and, as we marched out of the airport, about a dozen people left the head of the march and crossed to the perimeter fence. They started to shake the fence and it rapidly fell away from its supports. Within seconds a 50m section was down. The Gardai grabbed one activist standing near the fence but, as they did so, another jumped through the fence and entered the airfield.

After a stunned few seconds she was followed by half a dozen more and then, seconds later, another 20 or 30. As the Gardai started to chase those already on the airfield, more and more people started to stream through the fence until about half the protesters had crossed onto the airfield, while the other half watched from just behind it.

Inside, the protesters continued to a point near the tarmac where a UPS plane was parked. There was a quick discussion as to whether to move on to the runway itself, but it was decided for safety reasons not to do so. As more Gardai arrived, they initially concentrated on stopping us moving any further into the airfield. Meanwhile other Gardai, some with dogs, intimidated and shoved those between us and the perimeter fence into leaving the airfield.

With most of the protesters back behind the fence, the Gardai concentrated on the thirty or forty still sitting on the grass. They grabbed a number of people from this group and threw them into vans, possibly concentrating on those who they thought were organisers. If they hoped this would intimidate the others it failed,

as it prompted a sit-in on the airfield as those remaining, said they would only leave if those arrested were released.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the fence a group of a dozen or so blocked the airport road, bringing traffic to a halt. They hoped to put additional pressure on the Gardai to release the prisoners. This action was actually opposed by the SWP who ordered their more eager members off the road. Inside the airfield, two huge fire engines were brought up and the Gardai moved back a little. They clearly intended to create the impression that they were going to use them as water cannon but when the activists still failed to move they retreated again. Eventually, the police vans drove off with their prisoners and, after a discussion, the remaining protestors decided to make their way to the police station to demand their release.

Within minutes of us arriving they started to release those arrested. They hadn't been charged but were told that charges might be brought later. Obviously, someone above the level of the local Gardai would have to make the decision as to whether a messy trial, highlighting the use of Shannon as a refuelling stop for foreign war planes, was the best strategy for the state.<sup>5</sup>

That day was our first real success. For the first time, there was a trespass at Shannon involving dozens of people rather than simply a couple of brave souls making martyrs out of themselves. It also revealed just how vulnerable the airport was to such tactics, there are miles of perimeter fence, it would take hundreds if not thousands of police to protect it from a large demonstration.

The deep divisions between anti-war activists on the issue of direct action also became blatantly obvious as it was increasingly clear that the IAWM intended to talk tough about Shannon but to do nothing beyond the usual protests. Those involved in the Grass-roots Gathering realised there was a need to be more seriously or-

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<sup>5</sup> Months later, after the March 1<sup>st</sup> action, the cops did finally decide to prosecute these people.

line of our plan of action read:<sup>7</sup> “This action will be an example of mass non-violent civil disobedience in the tradition of Gandhi’s salt march.” We presumed journalists would understand from this that ‘nonviolent’ meant ‘non-violent’.

Astoundingly, huge numbers of them decided ‘non-violent protest’ actually meant ‘violent protest’ and headlines to that effect were splashed all over the media. Chomsky’s theory of ‘manufacturing consent’ proved to be alive and well and living in the Irish media.

Things turned to real farce at Friday lunchtime, when Sinn Fein, the Green Party and the Labour Party released press statements saying they were staying away from the protest for fear of violence. To those of us involved in the planning, the Sinn Fein fear of violence should have had us splitting our sides. But unfortunately there was little room for humour, as we knew that many people thinking of going would presume Sinn Fein ‘knew something’, and wonder what possible level of violence we could be planning that would frighten them off!

Perhaps the most farcical of all were the reactions of the SWP and SP. The least we could have expected would be that, if they didn’t support the action, they would say nothing. Instead things went so far as to have Richard Boyd Barrett, chairman of the IAWM and a prominent member of the SWP, publicly belittling the action on national radio, and various members of both parties criticising the action vociferously in debates on indymedia and other media outlets.

The sheer level of hysteria, which ran right down to suggestions that the army might shoot people, seems a little unbelievable now, after the event. Despite all this and the stopping and searches of coaches travelling to the protest, over 300 people decided to take part in the GNAW action. As agreed with the IAWM, we explained what we intended to do to all those at the meeting point and then

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<sup>7</sup> Full details are still online at: [grassrootsgathering.freesevers.com](http://grassrootsgathering.freesevers.com)

Worst of all perhaps was the argument that direct action would alienate people from the anti-war movements. This ignored the fact that a good part of the movement-building in Ireland happened through the publicity that followed the various direct actions, in particular the physical attacks on planes at Shannon. There was a poisonous insert to this argument. Some left groups were throwing around the claim that direct actions would somehow stop workers in Shannon striking against refuelling. While all of us recognised that this form of action would be the most effective, there was little evidence that it was any more than a 'pie in the sky' slogan to pretend they had an alternative.

Some people in GNAW had been talking to Shannon workers. We knew that those who worked as cops at the airport didn't like the direct actions because every breach of security got them into trouble for failing to prevent it. We knew that most workers there feared effective action against military refuelling because some of the jobs at the airport may depend on this refuelling. For these reasons, there was little or no talk in support of anti-refuelling strike action by workers at Shannon. With the war just days away, to put all our eggs in the 'workers must strike' basket seemed foolish, to say the least, particularly if it meant avoiding action that had proved capable of driving out the troop carriers.<sup>6</sup>

## Farce

One of the mistakes made by the organisers was placing too much trust in the comprehension skills of journalists. The second

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<sup>6</sup> After March 1<sup>st</sup>, some GNAW activists initiated a letter, eventually signed by hundreds of Irish trade unionists, to the Shannon workers asking them to take some sort of action and pledging our support if they did so. Ironically, this was the first such attempt. As the trotskysts, who had done so much talking about Shannon workers, had not even done something as basic as this to encourage them to act.

organised. A Grassroots Gathering meeting in Belfast resulted in the formation of the Grassroots Network Against the War. This called a 'direct action' demonstration for December 8<sup>th</sup>.

This was a partial success, in that 350 people or so took part in something at which there was intended to be direct action. But it also showed up many of the organisational weaknesses in the Grassroots Network. The Gathering had decided to leave it up to affinity groups to organise their own thing on the day, but, with a couple of exceptions, these were never even formed. This and a substantial police presence meant that people ended up standing around wishing something would happen but without the organisational structures needed to get things moving.

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> of January saw a second IAWM demonstration at the airport at which around 3,000 people took part. These numbers represented the first real possibility of a successful mass action, but the IAWM took a position of non-participation in direct action in advance of the day and no real organisational efforts had been made by GNAW. The idea had been floated that we would simply meet up on the day, but even this didn't really work out and we proved unable to even march as a block up to the terminal. This was simply down to the continued failure of many activists to take the need for proper organisation seriously.

Despite the lack of preparation, two separate actions were attempted. First a group of protesters occupied the roofs of two buildings near the terminal, causing Gardai with dogs to charge the crowd beneath. Then, on the way out of the airport, a group of 30 people charged a poorly guarded entrance to the airfield, only to find themselves trapped in a dead end. Although these actions were both poorly focused and uncoordinated, they did show that there was an increasing number of activists attempting to go beyond tokenistic protests.

## Hatchets & Hammers

As well as the large scale protests it turned out that both individuals and small groups were planning their own actions. These were to have a very direct effect on the issue. On January 4<sup>th</sup> a small group of activists established a peace camp just outside the airport. Then on January 29<sup>th</sup> Mary Kelly, who had been arrested on the December 2001 demonstration at the airport and had also been part of the peace camp, entered the airfield. She found a US Navy Boeing 737 on the runway and proceeded to disarm it by whacking the nose with a hatchet. This damaged the radar and the state later claimed that this attack had caused 500,000 euros worth of damage.

In the early hours of February 1<sup>st</sup>, five activists from the Catholic Worker organisation entered the airfield and began to tear up the runway. They then discovered the US military jet that had been damaged by Mary Kelly, sitting unguarded in a hangar. They entered the hangar and once more smashed up the more sensitive external equipment with a hammer. The combination of these events grabbed the headlines and Shannon was now the subject of public debate all over the country.

As for GNAW, the two failures to organise ourselves seriously – and the two missed opportunities they represented – did give us the kick up the arse we needed. Proper planning got underway for the next demonstration. On the morning of February 15<sup>th</sup>, in advance of the 100,000 strong march that day, a meeting agreed to plans for a publicly announced, direct action at Shannon on March 1<sup>st</sup>.

It was reckoned that it would now be possible to get thousands of people to take part in such an action. The public nature of the announcement was intended to make it absolutely clear that what was planned was mass participation in the direct action, and not something elitist or involving only a small group.

The plan was simple – to form a line, march over to the perimeter fence and tear it down. Its success would depend on numbers.

If there were significantly more protesters than cops, it would be possible. Provision was also made for those who wanted to show solidarity but were not in a position to participate directly, by forming a second ‘observer’ line.

Within a day of the plan being released to the media, two of the remaining three troop-carrying airlines announced that they were pulling out of Shannon, citing security concerns. The disarming actions, along with the threat of another mass trespass had obviously caused ructions amongst the companies making profits out of the war. A successful mass action at the airport, as proposed for March 1<sup>st</sup>, had the chance of driving out all military traffic before the war was even underway. So the call went out to other sections of the anti-war movement, requesting their support for such an action.

## IAWM Leadership???

We expected a cautious and even negative response from mainstream political parties, such as Labour and the Greens, and from the trade unions and NGOs. However, we hoped that so-called ‘revolutionary’ organisations such as the Socialist Party and SWP, would support the action. Alas this was not to be. Their first excuse was that such an action was ‘premature’. But with war set to formally break out only days after March 1<sup>st</sup>, the question asked was, “if not now, when?” The government was, after all, going ahead with refuelling despite 100,000 marching in Dublin.

Alongside this excuse, which could at least be honestly argued for, came a range of miserable evasions that did their authors no credit. With three troop-carrying airlines already gone from Shannon, some sought to assert that such actions could not work! They muttered darkly about state repression, soldiers with guns, armoured cars with plastic bullets and the special branch (secret police). What should we have concluded from this, that we should avoid effective opposition in case a cornered state strikes back?