

Anarchism, Ireland and the WSM

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The current crisis in Irish society has taken many of us by surprise. The scale of the social and economic reversal is one thing, but the manner in which the establishment has turned what was an unpredictable economic meltdown into a serious position of advantage has also been disconcerting. Not surprisingly people have been throwing their hands in the air and wondering aloud about ‘what it will take’ before we all get up off our knees. The not inconsiderable demoralisation that has resulted has found expression in claims that the ‘left’ is in crisis.

The anarchist movement has not of course remained immune from any of this. The lack of any serious fight back has seriously undermined morale. Moreover the scale of this and the profound implications of what it indicates have exposed serious weaknesses in our own analysis and practice. While this is sobering and could be turned to some advantage, there is a developing sense also that there is no longer a clear understanding about how to move forward. I believe this, in part, is to do with the poor state of the WSM as we entered this crisis. It is one thing to face into a storm with a readied ship, it is another entirely to look up and see that your sails are in tatters.

The WSM, the main anarchist organisation in Ireland, then is at the heart of much of the paralysis. It continues to limp on in this difficult climate and it continues to do some things well – a fact that reflects hugely on the commitment of its members. But the recent Household and Water Tax Campaign has also shown that the organisation has become close to irrelevant in terms of its ability to influence the business end of radical politics. This is not a place where anyone of us ever expected to be. While some – for their own reasons – are careful to downplay the crisis, the prognosis, I believe, will not improve until the past is discussed, examined and faced up. To that end this contribution is added.

NOT GETTING PERSONAL

Two significant analyses on the state of the WSM have so far emerged. The *WSM and Anarchism: A Political Analysis*¹ (referred herein as the *WSM and Anarchism*) was written by JoB. Although containing some historical background, *WSM and Anarchism* is largely concerned with period of the 00s, and the experience and politics of the WSM in that time. Since it ends fairly precipitously with a rejection of anarchism – the author left the WSM prior to writing *WSM and Anarchism* – it has suffered the fate of many a heretical document and been cast aside quite quickly by some. Nevertheless it contains many valid points and has been vital in generating awareness of what the divisions that arose in the WSM in the 00s amounted to.

*The WSM and Fighting The Last War*² (herein *Fighting The Last War*) was written by AnF and is titled a reply to *WSM and Anarchism*. Extremely long, it is in part an item by item ‘this is why you are wrong and I was right’ exposition on the various points covered by *WSM and Anarchism*. It is not clear if *Fighting The Last War* was initially written as an official WSM response to *WSM and Anarchism* but to my knowledge it has not; that certainly is positive.

However it is important to note too that *Fighting the Last War* is more than a reply to the *WSM and Anarchism*. It moves on to address the general crisis now facing the left (anarchism in particular) suggesting that the current political basis for WSM activity (and for political activity

¹ The full corrected text is published at spiritofcontradiction.eu

² The full version is anarchism.pageabode.com

in general) is no longer sound. As a result it concludes with an exhortation for the creation of a new model of revolutionary organisation.

A note before continuing on. It is not my intention here to attempt cover both documents in their totality. There is a huge amount in each and a lot of material is touched on that I believe is not necessarily central to the main debate any longer. So this will be, for the most part, a limited and personal assessment of what both these documents have to say regarding where we find ourselves now and where to go from here.

THE WSM AND ANARCHISM

In the course of *WSM and Anarchism*, a number of observations are made about the development of the WSM. (In passing it should be noted that these observations largely relate to Dublin, where the WSM grew to a few branch in strength before shrinking again.) The author has set out his account in order to give context to his involvement with the WSM and his ultimate frustration with how it orientated itself – hence his decision to leave. But his account is nonetheless useful in that it attempts to understand the WSM in terms of the political influences that were active within it during this period and what they were saying. The main points of interest, it seems to me, as contended by the author, are as follows:

1. The Platformist basis of the WSM had got the anarchist movement so far. The organisation was coherent but a consequence of the strategy was that the WSM remained small in size. It is argued that by 2001 – the WSM was formed in 1984 – the organisation was stagnating.
2. With the new millennium (but with an uneven and unclear level of consciousness in the existing WSM membership) the organisation moved away from the previous Platformist/tight model. Growth (in numbers) became more important and the level of political agreement (needed for membership) was gradually lowered.
3. The period 2001–2005 was one of high relative activity for the WSM. More people joined and the new process – Point 2 above – accelerated during this period. However the new members were not embedded into any level of trade union work – an identified priority for the WSM. Moreover, according to the account “*it was doubtful if a single member was checked for their understanding of anarchism during this period*”.
4. By 2009 coherency had diminished in the WSM organisation. Two poles of general emphasis existed in the Dublin WSM. One favoured a reorientation mainly back to the idea of building within the trade unions; the other favoured a continued orientation towards the ‘libertarian milieu’, which was to an extent the basis for a great deal of the activism engaged in during the 2001–5 period. This schism gradually widened and deepened as Ireland’s crisis unfolded.
5. By 2010, three factors were to the fore in the organisation. A move to adjust recruitment in the direction of ‘tighter’ criteria in order to improve effectiveness and affect a move away from the ‘libertarian milieu’ was proposed but defeated. Education work was proving to be ineffectual in terms of dealing with the different understandings of the role and purpose of the WSM. Thirdly, the role of the organisation itself was becoming unclear. Should it

initiate and lead the way in the small number of skirmishes that were breaking out here and there as austerity took hold? Or was that a waste of time and should the organisation regroup around its original analysis of the central role of class influence, recognise the obvious and pull back to a more sustainable level of activity?

6. Matters as such didn't come to a head as one might expect or as they often do in other organisations/ traditions. Instead the (politically) broad non-libertarian milieu/ class struggle angle fractured. A section wanted to refocus the anarchist agenda on an entirely new initiative. This would shift activism back towards mainstream politics via the creation of a new populist organisation stressing the need for democracy and the need to fight inequality. This section, arranged around 'the Breaking The Anchor'³ document, did not muster enough support from its proposal and increasingly disenchanted with everyday activity, left or resigned in piecemeal. In time the small remaining class struggle/ Platformist section in Dublin also pulled away.

FIGHTING THE LAST WAR

Fighting The Last War, as said above, is two separate though linked documents. Part 1 mainly deals with the *WSM and Anarchism*. As mentioned above, I do not intend to comb through all the arguments examined in this document. The central contended points, it seems to me, are as follows:

1. The suggestion that the WSM fracture along a class struggle v activism/ libertarian milieu divide is not true. False Division – Summit Protest or Unions (1-III) argues that there was collective consensus most of the time about the direction that the WSM took in the 00s and, also, that whatever was done in the direction of the libertarian milieu was easily counter-balanced by other organisational efforts focused on the class struggle. (A number of examples are given but one would be the WSM's commitment to making its paper Workers Solidarity a free mass-distributed class-struggle paper.)
2. In section 1-III it is accepted though that there was a shift in the early 00s as follows within the WSM. (A modicum of agreement here, you might say.) *Fighting The Last War* explains though that this shift was on sound grounds since revolutionary organisations need “to adapt to the actual situation they find themselves in rather than acting as if there were somewhere else”. It continues: “... there was little or no significant workplace struggle and little or no activity at the base of the unions. But ... thousands of mostly young people were being drawn to a broad anti-capitalist politics by international events, in particular the summit protests. Many of these people were either already self defining as anarchists or adopting broadly anarchist organisational methods – in short they were a willing audience for our ideas.”
3. *Fighting The Last War* goes on to contend (“misleading”, “skewed analysis”, “selective” in examples etc) that the *WSM and Anarchism* either wilfully misleads us or simple lacks an understanding of the politics ongoing in the WSM during this period and that this

³ To my knowledge the Breaking The Anchor document is not available online.

accounts for the interpretation it places on this period and what happened. Whereas in fact – according to *Fighting The Last War* – the activities in the 2001–5 period, gave very positive outcomes. Thus: “[Our] ... success ... was responsible for the large and sudden growth in numbers that took place at the end of this period. With person after person who joined the reason given for doing so was because they had been working alongside us and observed how we were able to collectively pull together to make sure that what needed to be argued and done to build the movement was carried through.”

4. Chronologically we now enter the period in which the WSM according to *WSM and Anarchism*, though raised in numbers, lacked any realistic plan or strategy for moving forward. There is some agreement between the two documents here with *Fighting the Last War* pointing out about this period: “*But the tide had retreated and it was only a question of time before we would be stranded, our real failure, and perhaps in the circumstances it was inevitable, was [not – kd] to prepare those new members for the low period of routine activity that was to come.*”
5. Initiatives that attempted to recreate some of the successes of the 2001–5 period were proposed and acted on in due course – the Social Solidarity Network being one. *Fighting The Last War* importantly maintains that even with this initiative the WSM still focused a great deal of its real energy on standard class struggle politics. Hence its claim that the divisions adduced in *WSM and Anarchism* are quite exaggerated.
6. Nevertheless there is commentary in *Fighting The Last War* on the tense atmosphere that had developed in the Dublin WSM when the following is said: “*Organisationally we failed to deal with the awful dynamics in the branch until eventually it got to such a crisis point that the branch itself had to perform an intervention. It is probable that the failure to intervene earlier led to the resignation of at least one member from the WSM (who said she found the atmosphere too distressing) and at least 3 members of that branch invented excuses for why they had to transfer to other branches. Others stopped coming to meetings for a period. It’s really quite odd to see those dynamics held up as some sort of model.*” So clear difficulties existed, but both documents – to a much lesser degree *WSM and Anarchism* – downgrade them almost to the category of personality-driven.
7. In I-VII of *Fighting The Last War* the controversial topic of membership and what it amounted to is addressed. Reading this section it is clear that quite substantially different positions now existed in the WSM. Though the significance of this is questioned by *Fighting The Last War*. Nevertheless it notes about the attempt to tighten up membership: “*... in effect [this proposal]... would have moved us back towards being a small cadre organisation directed at making arguments to the existing left.*” A view point better explained by this assessment further on: “*Most of all though many of us thought the existing membership system wasn’t broken.... In the period we are talking of around 100 people joined the WSM, one mistake is not a significant problem. Trying to create a system that is water tight in every single case will almost always introduce negative consequences that are considerably worse in impact than the occasional unsuitable person becoming a member for a brief period.*”

CORK WSM

It is worth noting at this point that the Cork Branch – which grew to a sizable number at one time also – showed a similar pattern of development over the same period. My recollection is that the internal discussions, albeit unevenly and irregularly, reflected some of the above, but there was no hardening into definite factions as – it would seem – occurred in time in Dublin. However Cork in the 00s (in line with the WSM as a whole) developed a strong activism leaning and also moved enthusiastically to a more open membership basis. A consequence was that many joined but a good number left again in time: the very real problem being the inability to find a tangible and realistic political activity which would full-fill the requirements of short and long terms goals. The IWU had potential but was not straight-forward, nor is it even now. Moreover a substantial part of the Cork membership came from among students and the libertarian quarter. Neither were necessarily adverse to class struggle – indeed many accepted that it was this that grounded the WSM as an organisation – but they were in reality once if not twice removed from it in terms of it having any relevant to their present political activity. Indeed the real issue to my mind – more obvious in Cork as it is a smaller place – was the inability to move outside the ghetto of the far left and small bubble that that creates for itself. Perhaps this would've come in time or with time, though it is hard to know.

One aspect of Cork WSM's development was the active pursuit of the book shop idea (not an alternative space as such). There were many positives in this initiative, but ultimately even here the vision was unclear (or perhaps underdeveloped) in terms of how it exactly complemented the WSM's priorities. It has remained an activity for the WSM but it has also assisted in Cork WSM avoiding the real problem in its politics which became quite evident in the important CAHWT campaign.

CAN YOU SEE MY POINT?

Returning to the two documents. If the *WSM and Anarchism* attempts to unpick the superficial unity of the WSM in the 00s in order to indicate that there were in actual fact significant political divisions in the organisation that widened with time, *Fight The Last War* largely attempts to claim otherwise. *Fighting The Last War* is in fact an aggrieved polemic. Some of this is justified of course, but a good deal isn't either. One of the slights that has arisen is the *WSM and Anarchism*'s assertion that a significant faction within the Dublin WSM in effect abandoned class-struggle politics for the sanctuary of the libertarian milieu. This of course is a harsh accusation and is unacceptable to many who supported initiatives such as the Social Solidarity Network. *Fighting the Last War* insists – rightly I think – that the WSM never formally endorsed (at conference) any such shifts and in any case, it argues, there was always plenty of focus on the class struggle side of things. But as we all know (and this is where *WSM and Anarchism* has a strong case) that with regard to much in life, the exact emphasis that is placed on a particular initiative can be everything. One can agree to partake in a project but is one's heart in it? In other words a concrete choice may not be taken – as say was the case in Dublin WSM – but one can still end up going in one direction for the most part.

Between the two documents then, who is right? To some extent the answer is given emphatically by what has happened since – further decline and marginalisation has been the order of the

day for the WSM. Also, for me, the *WSM and Anarchism* is simply a more plausible and believable account of the past than *Fighting The Last War*. Leaving aside the key arguments – real organisation orientation, membership criteria, hollowing out of the centrality of the Platform etc – *WSM and Anarchism* presents us with a framework around which we can understand better what has happened in the WSM. Whereas in *Fighting The Last War* we are told that the alleged differences (the minority/ majority split) are exaggerated and that nothing as clear cut as is suggested ever actually happened in practice. It is even suggested in regard to some aspects also that the author of *WSM and Anarchism* is wilfully misleading us or that he doesn't actually understand key aspects of what was going in the WSM when he was in it? Is that really plausible? For me it certainly isn't.

WSM and Anarchism points to serious and real differences – exaggerated perhaps but significant nonetheless – developing in the WSM. To some extent the nature of these remained hidden because some of the significant defections from the WSM occurred quietly in the end. In other words there was never an open choice put to WSM members, nor was there a precise time at which one could opt to go one way or the other. The absence of any formal split – even though it was talked about – allowed the pretence at the heart of *Fighting The Last War* to persist.

For the *WSM and Anarchism* the way forward is a rejection of anarchism itself and the document ends with such a declaration. But what of *Fighting The Last War*? Note that this document in the main asserts that much of what was deemed to be problematic in the WSM in the OOs was not really so. In fact in some ways the WSM in this period was making a lot of the right decisions, it argues. *Fighting The Last War*, to me then, is also a defence of the WSM as it was in the period leading into the beginning of the economic meltdown. In effect it dismisses the main contentions of *WSM and Anarchism*:

- That the loosening of membership criteria to the point that it seriously affected cohesion was a mistake and ill-considered.
- That the emphasis towards the libertarian milieu and activism without end was also mistaken and ill-judged and contributed to a practical unwillingness in the WSM to re-analyse where it was in terms of the long term project.

But ultimately *Fighting The Last War* cannot hide from reality either. Something is wrong, it realises, and it alludes to this here and there in the course of its arguments (as set out in its Part 1). For *Fighting The Last War* the big test – when the penny dropped so to speak – was the period before and around the Occupy moment. (What moment, you may well ask?) It wonders, using a cumbersome surfing/tsunami analogy that I will not pursue here as to

“... how could the organisation [WSM] have failed so badly as to almost not notice the size of the wave bearing down on it and worse still be distracted by trivial debates about ‘activism’ or ‘lifestylism’. Most members in 2009 were very resistant to the proposal that the organisation might need to move onto a war footing, just as most people at the 2008 Grassroots Gathering in Cork had been similarly resistant. The few voices that cried ‘shut up and look at the size of the fucking waves’ were ignored or perhaps quietly sniggered at. In retrospect its (sic) clear that in any case neither the WSM nor anyone else on the Irish left was remotely approaching the level of preparedness needed to have a hope at successfully surfing that wave in to the beach.”

Concluding on this in general, *Fighting The Last War* in a rare note of agreement with *WSM and Anarchism* actually states that:

“[There is] ... the sense that our experiences demonstrate that the methods of the WSM and perhaps anarchism in general cannot achieve what we set out to. Here, in these most broad terms [WSM and Anarchism] is correct.”

Leading onto:

“If so far I have seemed to defend the actions of the past it is solely to establish an accurate base from which to critique those same actions – one that can be used to start to uncover the real outline of what a revolutionary organisation should look like in the modern networked age.”

WAKE UP COMRADE, YOU ARE ENTERING...

So what is proposed by *Fighting The Last War*? The answer it seems has to do with the fact that we have for some time been entering – we could even be in without ever having known it – a new paradigm in politics. Chiapas, Anti-Capitalism, Occupy, Why It's Not (meant – kd) Kicking Off Everywhere and the Internet all mark the boundaries of this new force field.

According to *Fighting The Last War* it is important to bear in mind that fundamentals have changed and there is no pointing hankering over any of that or this anymore. Some of what animates what is proposed in this section (2-III) is tied in with a thought process that now sees the 'system' having decisive control over society. The problem is that the 'system' can be just about anything. Thus we get:

“Even in Greece dissent is being successfully channelled into the electoralism of Syriza while in the wings Golden Dawn is being prepared ‘just in case’.”

There is nothing here about the ideas that people have or the belief systems that they hold. We are, it seems now, but passive vessels in the world. The system, *Fighting The Last War* goes on, is moving us about at will and even controls our potential liberators since:

“In particular one of the skills capitalist rule has developed is incorporating radicals of one generation and using them to pacify the struggles of the next generation.”

Politics itself may even have been incorporated into the project of control since:

“...the evidence suggests that sending the best of the left of one generation into a long march through the institutions simply ensures that those controlling the next generation are far more skilled..”

If the old ways are dead and buried (and you can kiss goodbye to your dream of storming up the steps of the Winter Palace too, it seems) then what are we to do? *Fighting The Last War* is not suggesting a specific programme but much can be deduced from the following:

“Revolutionaries must fight capital like insurgents and not as a regular army. We must avoid any symmetry in the class war, any attempt to match our resources against theirs....Instead we build networks across the working class, in the broadest use of that term, using what possibilities exist in any particular moment. When capital or the state is slow to respond to crisis we insert ourselves into the gaps that develop to build in those moments but with the understanding that this is not a long term emplacement. Like an insurgent force our aim is to build widespread discontent and widespread experience of organisation so that each time a crisis arises more and the population have the skills and vision to push on.”

Throughout this contribution I have resisted being facetious and I certainly don't intend to fall near the last hurdle, but in heaven's name what does any of that even mean? Perhaps it is words like 'insurgents' and phrases like 'we insert ourselves' and "using what possibilities exist", but I am left wondering I must admit.

Thankfully *Fighting The Last War* points out almost immediately that *“this is not an argument for an underground organisation”*. It states that is emphatically opposed to a strategy that involves *“a long march through the institutions that can lead to anything other than pulverising defeat or incorporation into a system we set out to fight.”* (One wonders is this a comment on the WSM but I can't imagine that it is.). *Fighting The Last War* then stands in the end:

“... for valuing broad, loose and open networks over capturing institutions of power whether those institutions are council seats, union officerships or full time community staffer positions. “

In a concluding section – added an addendum – the proposal is made that the WSM focus

“for the next year with the aim of developing the model of revolutionary organisation not just on the local level but also as an international example.”

And there one has it.

THE BABY, THE BATHWATER OR BOTH?

One thing that is important to establish is that we are dealing with two significant problems, not one. These problems have overlapped and become enmeshed tightly in places but they are distinct at the end of the day. Solving them involves separate initiatives.

One set of problems is to do with the state of WSM as we entered the crisis. The other set is to do with the impact on (and implication for) our politics of the huge rollback evident in the period since the crisis/ crash – particularly with capitalism now resurgent in the ideological and economic spheres.

In addressing the enmeshed picture both *WSM and Anarchism* and *Fighting The Last War* catastrophise the situation we face. For the *WSM and Anarchism* things are so bad that the only way out is to abandon anarchism and deem it an unmitigated failure. For *Fighting The Last War*, after spending a lot of time saying that things were moving along decently –right choices were being made and not that much was really broken – we suddenly find ourselves jumping (in the

light of crisis) to an entirely new plain. *Fighting The Last War* suggests that the WSM (and even anarchism itself) may no longer be fit for purpose and then proposes what is plainly bizarre – some sort of politics of insurgency. [I am reminded of the scenario where a dysfunctional family, seeking to find the source of its distress, blames its condition on the amount of TV that everyone is watching. In other words neither rhyme nor reason appears to be at work in *Fighting The Last War*; there is some cogency at least in *WSM and Anarchism*.]

DEAR MAHKNO, I AM WRITING TO ...

We started out in 1984 with very ambitious aims and those aims were re-affirmed again and again on numerous occasions by the WSM as an organisation. There is nothing wrong with ambition but it is worth bearing in mind that ambition is also blinding – to real obstacles, to innate weakness. In my time in the WSM, there have been three significant periods of movement forward that ended in very difficult head on crashes. These episodes have always shaken the organisation to the core and each one has had the potential to end the WSM for good. But the option is always there too to re-affirm what has been learned, regroup and get going again. This time we have hit more a difficult impasse – because it is composed of a significant internal division but also a significant external crisis too.

First and foremost I think we should reject the ‘catastrophe’ outlooks. What has happened is a wakeup call. We made wrong decisions. We were right to make decisions and to try new initiatives but, as we with many decisions in life, there are intended consequences. But what exactly are and were those and what do we do about them? What were we right to do and what was not sound? Inevitably though there is no way out without consolidating around (1) a common agreed understanding of this past and (2) a core programme for the next period.

The suggestion has been made that doing the above means taking the WSM back to the 90s. But that cannot happen. The organisation is quite different now, even the movement of anarchist ideas in this country, such as it is, is a lot different now. The organisation did make bad decisions – in good faith – but it has learned a huge amount. Certainly, in the case of Cork, where I am more familiar with, this is obviously true; one cannot go back.

Where we have fallen down most clearly is in the hollowing out of the Platform as the basis for organisational activity and planning. As is evident from the shift in the WSM in the 00s, there was never a black or white choice offered on this process or on the principle of it. There were sound reasons for attempting to find a new balance, given that we seemed to be overly rigid. But a shift became a slide. I recall at a Conference held in Cork (I think in 2009 but I am not certain). Bear in mind that those present were the most active at that time in the WSM. When polled about the Platform and its relevance to the WSM, a majority at that Conference said that it no longer saw it as key to the WSM. To not be able to join the dots here (as what was going on and the state of the organisation) is, for me, strange.

But there is ample other evidence and I will only briefly mention one of those here and only in general – the CAHWT. In this significant and vital campaign, our commitment was organisationally piecemeal. Individuals who are anarchists did a lot of work but as the WSM we appeared to be a third rate outfit. It was difficult at times to even know who was active in the Campaign in the WSM. And even when significant opportunities were placed in our lap – the grassroots democracy initiative – we were not sure how to take it forward. I know from Cork that there was

a great deal of confusion. And I would maintain that CAHWT as it developed did for a period present anarchists with one of the most significant opportunities in a long time for getting its ideas out there and into a much more mainstream swathe of life. CAHWT brought together the most militant and active people opposed to austerity and a significant minority never wanted it to go down the electoralist route. We were (and are) one of the few political traditions with the politics and ability to address this and yet a significant number just didn't seem to think it mattered.

What the CAHTW brought out most clearly was the slide inside the WSM. From a practical point of view now the organisation finds it difficult to implement politics anymore except where members – by voluntary activity on their own part – move to do this. So what happens is determined more and more by the drive or interest of particular individual or group of individuals. Increasingly then the organisation settles back into a zone where what happens is what is expected as a minimum to happen. So regular meetings occur, the internet presence say, is maintained, or the odd protest around the old reliables tends to happen. Such low level of work is fine if you are keeping a club together, but it just won't cut when you have to face a formidable and readied opponent like the government.

I emphasise here that is not a commentary on any individual or myself even, it is a criticism of the state we have let the organisation slide into. The Cork WSM may have been in a healthier state than other sections of the WSM (I don't know if it was) but in Cork we began to largely act like a collection of individuals after a while. Personally for me having driven a stake through the heart of the 'Cork Anarchist Group' vampire a number of times, it was bad karma indeed to see it return in its full glory again. Comrades, there are occasion when it is reasonable to trade (very carefully) coherency for numbers, but is this one of those times?

A TOUCH OF HARRY POTTER'S WAND

Both *Fighting The Last War* and *WSM and Anarchism* conclude with new recipes. The past, in both their views, has been duly analysed, a balanced sheet reconciled. It is time to move on. Both documents to different degrees however are deeply flawed in another important way. This is in the lip service that they pay to objective conditions.

Objective conditions greatly determine what we can do at any one time. In both *Fighting The Last War* and *WSM and Anarchism* objective conditions are mostly mentioned only with an eye to removing them from the equation. It is as if, by some feat of magic, that by merely mentioning your enemy you turn him or her to dust. A fine example of this in one of the documents is this statement: *there was little or no significant workplace struggle and little or no activity at the base of the unions. But ...* And off goes said document on its merry way anyway never again really engaging with the reality of that simple observation. Is it seriously being suggested the anarchism can be moved forward when there are little or no significant struggle in the society about us; even worse when passivity is actually on the rise. Isn't it struggle that provides the basis for breaking the hold of the ideas that hold people in check? I always thought so anyway.

If we are to understand the trajectory of this present crisis and understand what it says about the anarchist project then we need to better appreciate the real and substantial ideas that bind people to the Irish capitalist agenda. Contrary to claims that people are vessels or mere puppets

that are moved about at will, I would argue that many, many people uphold and share values that are deeply opposed to where we want to go.

Since the previous economic crisis in the 1980s, the left (in its totality) has failed to build any new significant base of support for its ideas (its *ideas* I emphasise here) within the working class on this island. In fact as many of us know much of what is and was essential to working-class combativity – rank and file activity and networking – has actually atrophied. This isn't only to do with the practical impact of 'partnership' – although this is and remains an important factor. Other factors are also active. Previous bouts of high unemployment and "the emigration experience" (arising for the 1980s/90s recession) have also taken their toll – and are doing so once again. In parallel, the more militant sectors of the Irish trade union life, as we should know, have seen their industries dismantled or radically overhauled, while the relatively active and influential milieu of 'old Left' trade unions activists has fallen by the wayside in part to do with the ideological collapse of Soviet Union model, which many held some truck with and which did provide succour of sorts. Similarly a hugely significant factor has been the revitalised capitalist project built around neo-liberalism. On an ideological front, this is now in the ascendancy – abetted by the media – in many significant area of social discourse.

Perennially weak aspects of the Irish economic situation – affecting the temper of class radicalism – have also had an important influence on where we now are, determining to an important degree what was and is possible. So the ideological reliance of the current economic platform in the Republic on FDI (the role of multinationals etc) and the marshalling of State resources (media and state investments) to defend this pillar of our 'our economic wellbeing', has resulted in a considerable level of public and working class support for our (supine) relationship with these same multinationals; you could even argue at a stretch that some of these multinationals rescued some of us from a precarious reliance on gommeen Irish capitalism (admittedly at an extortionate cost). A further important ideological factor has been the aggressive push in Irish society from the 80s on to impress on all (utilising the not so dormant spectre of Irish nationalism) that Ireland can only thrive in the harsh new world economy if we support 'Brand Ireland' whenever and wherever it shows its head. So from 'Buy Irish' to partnership, the corporatist model of Irish economic life (and not class division) has been to the fore and has been repeatedly re-enforced.

The above is worth emphasising in order to point out that they are actually a considerable number of reasons why we are where we are today – in retreat. Some people indeed are throwing their hands in the air and despairing but to me the outcome from this crash is the logically conclusion of the twenty or so years that preceded it. Why should it be otherwise? What is the saying: if it looks like and it tastes like, it is....

The tendency in anarchism that suggests that the masses are ready at a moment notice to overturn the social order is a hard one to understand, for me anyway. Note too that it is an idea that permeates *Fighting The Last War* – yet another reason why it should be substantially rejected.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is very clear now looking into short and middle distance of politics that we are in for a period of heightened conflict in society. This is a different period from what has gone on before – the period that was about the long reign (and fall from grace) of social democracy. [This is not to suggest for the moment that SD can't or won't be reinvented again – since it does answer a

reasonable desire in society to avoid social revolution]. But can we build on in this period and keep in there? Learn more, build more and fall back again? Those are the questions.

People will know of old that I have always maintained this business is a very long term project. One cannot predict the future but in the process of planning and working for the long term there is always the possibility that a perfect opportunity might come along. But you cannot operate on a Lotto eventuality either. Plans that do not base themselves on the long term are doomed in my view. Short terms scheme also attract people who engage in unsustainable levels of activity that are in themselves detrimental to pragmatic consistent engagement. And a consistent mode of engagement has to be the way forward since ultimately anarchism was, is and always will be about establishing and building human relations – solidarity in a word.

Much of what has stood to anarchism in the past has been its ability to establish and nurture such strong human bonds around a very hopeful vision of the future. I don't think it will ever be any different in essence. That is why I don't think there is any new paradigm. We may find new ways to put ideas about and we might find new ways to maximise numbers at protests but at the end – if anarchism is to prevail – it will because of what is established between human beings in workplace and communities.

The aim now should be to recognise that for the moment – given the current hegemony of capitalist values – that the long term has got longer; but we don't know how long either. That is why I believe that the anarchist project on this island needs to be put back onto a sound and sustainable footing based around the centrality of the Platform and focused on class-politics. We need small localised effort – that fit within a national coherency – to keep our heads on the ground. We also need time and honesty to pick over the past so that we can take from it what we have learned and needed to be made realise.

There is no guarantee that we won't hit another crisis again in the future but that is how it works. Learn more, build more and fall back, and then go on again. I can certainly see how far we have come since when I first got involved and it is a long, long way

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