

Anarchism and Religion

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers' Solidarity Movement

November 2010

1. Anarchists are materialists. We understand that there is a real and concrete basis for the way society is organised right now: why here are rich and poor, why there are order-givers and order-takers, why there is starvation and misery on a massive scale — and we understand how this can be changed. Religion sees such things as “God given” and acceptable, the poor being rewarded in the afterlife for accepting “their lot” in this one. This means that anarchism and religion stand diametrically opposed to each other.
2. Religion, by its nature, must be authoritarian — whether to a greater or lesser extent. It must be based on “faith”, on obedience. The reality we face is of churches that play a particular role in the oppression of women, of gays and of all who seek to change the traditional authoritarian family. They play a very real role in the repression of sexuality. It is no coincidence that fundamentalists of all religions, from Iran to Ireland, are in the vanguard of the movement to push back the the gains made by women in the workplace and in the “sexual revolution”.
3. The strong hold religion has in Ireland cannot be seen just as a result of historical factors, today it offers something that many people want. It “explains” all sorts of natural and personal disasters as the “will of God”. It offers hope in a world of misery, ignorance, ‘poverty, frustration and alienation — the promise of a better world in the hereafter is a powerful addition. The way to take away this basis for religion is to provide a much better life, not in any “hereafter” but now.
4. To break the power of the churches we need a strategy that combines our vision of a better world in the here and now with struggles that bring people into conflict with clerical power and show up religion as a prop for the status quo that stands in the way of their needs and desires. The authoritarianism and hypocrisy of the churches have to be confronted.
5. We support the demand for separation of Church and State. It is wrong to say “...but we oppose the State as well”. Of course we do. It is a tactical question dictated by the sort of society we are living in right now. We oppose the wages system but that doesn't stop us fighting for higher wages. This means fighting against clerical control of hospitals,

schools, youth clubs funded by the taxpayer, community groups, etc. It means fighting for the best possible secular laws in the areas of divorce, contraception, sterilisation, abortion, etc. These struggles force the churches to come out openly against what many people desperately want, and so weaken their support. A victory on any of these issues both lessens church influence and proves that the clerics can be beaten; which in turn creates the possibility of involving more people in the next battle.

6. We regard religion as a private matter, within society's whole. It should enjoy no special privileges, tax reliefs, powers, influence, etc. Membership of a church should carry no more of the above than would membership of a sports or drama club. We stand for equal rights for religious, non-religious and anti-religious views.
7. Within the revolutionary organisation – which is a specifically materialist body – it is not a private matter. It is part of our programme to take up the battle against the power and influence of the churches. This does not mean that we deny membership to religious believers. We do not. But they must understand that our politics will inevitably bring them into conflict with the clerics. They will, for example, be publicly selling our paper which calls for divorce, abortion, an end to religious control of education, etc.
8. In short, we fight religious ideas by attacking their root causes. We fight for an anarchist society where people will come to find they have no need for religion, or any other authoritarian or mystical ideas. We challenge religion in a concrete way – by showing where it obstructs social progress and by leading the opposition to it at every opportunity.

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