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Alan MacSimóin (1957–2018): a pioneer of anarchism in Ireland

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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On December 5th we were pained to hear about the untimely death of Alan MacSimóin, veteran anarchist, trade unionist and tireless organiser in Ireland. Today we said farewell to him at Glasnevin cemetery in Dublin, where many other revolutionaries before him have been put to rest. Many friends and comrades from all parties and movements of the left joined his family to bid farewell to this exceptional man. SIPTU, his trade union, had arranged a guard of honour for him. The previous night, the wake at the Teachers' Club was equally well attended by comrades of all persuasions: from the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, Sinn Féin, Workers Solidarity Movement, Workers' Party, even Labour. He, as a true non-sectarian, had friends in every single left-wing party, a friendship nurtured in decades of activism.

Alan started his political involvement in republicanism, and by the early 1970s he was in the 'official' Sinn Féin, which would

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eventually become the Workers' Party. It was around this time that he changed his name from 'Fitzsimons' to the Irish version 'MacSimóin'. As a group of young republicans were becoming interested in libertarian communist politics, he left the party in 1975. They would have left earlier, but decided to wait a year more in order not to be mixed with the 1974 split led by Seamus Costello, which led to the foundation of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and being thus dragged into the bloody feud in which both parties engaged in the coming years. He developed contacts with the British anarchist organisation Anarchist Workers Association (AWA), one of the organisations in the 1970s which had re-discovered the strand of anarchist 'platformism', emphasising a cohesive political organisation for anarchists.

Like most Irish people, Alan struggled with unemployment, for the best part of the 1970s and 1980s. And yet, he still managed to participate actively in the creation of the anarchist movement in Ireland, with the creation of the Dublin Anarchist Group and the Anarchist Workers Alliance in the late 1970s. He was then a founding member of the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) in 1984, an organisation which would have a massive importance for the re-emergence of an engaged, platformist-inspired, form of anarchist communism in many countries in the aftermath of the end of the /Cold War, including Chile, Colombia, Turkey, Italy, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, France, among others. He contributed extensively to the anarchist press, particularly through the journals linked to the WSM, *Workers Solidarity* and *Red & Black Revolution*, and before that, in the *Anarchist Worker*. He regularly distributed *Workers Solidarity* door to door in Stoneybatter, his neighbourhood.

He drifted away from the WSM in recent years, arguing that the organisation was moving away from class politics into a more counter-cultural direction. He remained committed to community and trade union activism, being a member of SIPTU, as he firmly believed that anarchist should be engaged in mainstream unions

as opposed to alternative unions. He remained a staunch anarchist to the very end. He was active, literally, in every single campaign in Ireland from the 1970s: anti-racism, choice and pro-women, anti-bin charges, anti-water charges, environmental campaigns; in every strike, he was always there. The last time I participated in a struggle with him was the victorious struggle against water charges in 2015–2016 while I was still living in Stoneybatter, a few blocks away from Alan. In his latest years he was devoted, apart from his tirelessly campaigning, to the Irish Anarchist History project and to the Stoneybatter & Smithfields' People's History Project.

He was a dedicated militant who never aspired to be in the spotlight. He led by example, being a persistent and consistent activist who participated in meetings, attended every picket and contributed in any way he could to local campaigns. His commitment to anarchist politics wasn't merely rhetorical: he was always building from below, from the bottom-up. He was a practical man, but he also was, as his long-time anarchist companion Kevin Doyle reminded us in today's oration at the ceremony in Glasnevin, a dreamer. A dreamer who believed in the capacity and ability of ordinary people, particularly the working class, to change things for the better, as Doyle clearly stated.

His sense of humour was rather dark, sometimes self-deprecating; I still remember when my first son was born, he sent me a text message just saying '*Don't worry; the first 40 years are the most difficult, then it is ok*'. I don't think I've ever laughed so much as then. He was stubborn and often engaged in bitter polemics (I remember being at the receiving end of his arguments a good few times); yet, his sincere commitment to the struggle for a better world was doubted by no one. He gained the sympathy and admiration of almost everyone in the left because of his earnest commitment and his sincere devotion to the working class. He is one of the sharpest and most intelligent comrades I've come across. Kind, generous and witty, when I arrived to Dublin

as a young migrant, he gave me a good few books on Irish working class history for me to get a better grasp of the reality here. He was like that to everyone, always ready to share his knowledge, his experience and his resources with his comrades.

He will be remembered as a most influential figure in the Irish left of the last decades. He was among a handful of people who started talking about anarchism in the 1970s and 1980s; his work to create a space for the libertarian left in a country dominated by political and religious conservatism changed the face of politics forever. If Irish society has moved forward in any measure over the last decades, it is to a great degree thanks to the efforts of people like Alan.

Sit tibi terra levis, dear comrade.