

Report on WSM (Ireland) National Conference — Autumn 2013

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The WSM had its Autumn national conference in Dublin on the 23rd November. National Conference is the ultimate decision making body in the WSM. It happens every six months usually over a day or two. As well as discussing motions time is also spent on discussing the past six months activity and prospects for the next period. Conference also hears reports of activity from all branches, officers and working groups. This covered areas like the Irish Anarchist Review, WSM Website, Dublin Anarchist Bookfair and our pro-choice and anti racist work.

Conference then moves on to an open discussion of perspectives which as with the previous couple of conferences was grounded in the enormous disruptive impact the crisis has had on the left and class based organisation in Ireland. The period since the last crisis had seen the defeat and subsequent disintegration of the Campaign against Household and Water Taxes, it was feared the nature of that defeat would have lasting impact for some time to come.

On the other hand there appears to be a high, if quite passive, level of interest in our politics as illustrated by our large following on Twitter & Facebook (still the 2nd largest of any political organisation in Ireland). And the fact that about 700 people have trusted us with their contact details via our email contact system (Not on it? Self register here) suggests that there is some substance to that interest. On the other hand because we have lost a lot of members its becoming difficult to do everything we want to and financially we are spending more than we are taking in. Both will lead to problems in the medium term.

Points raised in the discussion also included

- whether our current structures were the ones we would create if we were setting up from scratch, do we have too much structure and is this alienating for newer members in particular
- is demoralisation of the working class confined to traditional areas (unionised public sector workers) but perhaps not so present / important in other areas where people were willing / had to fight. Migrant and anti-fracking struggles were specifically mentioned
- whether in a period like this where there was a shift to 'look after myself individualism' there was much possibility for activity beyond keeping anarchist ideas alive
- whether the crisis of legitimacy for the whole system of representative democracy meant there were really quite significant opportunities
- whether there were international examples of organisational practises we could experiment with like the Seattle Solidarity Network which mobilised those directly effected by wage theft or bad landlords to directly confront and win.

The perspective discussion isn't set up to come to any particular conclusions, its more of a space for members to speak their mind so we can have an accurate sense of where people are at which can inform discussion on motions. The summary above is just intended to give a rough idea of the discussion.

Motions

Conference then moved on to take the motions members had submitted.

WSM policy is based on the WSM position papers which can all be accessed on the WSM website at www.wsm.ie. If a member thinks WSM policy should change in a specific area they should propose a motion as an amendment or an addition to an existing position paper, this means that the decision can be stored for future reference and won't be forgotten about. Delegate council has the power to change the short term sections of position papers, changes to long term sections need to be made as motions to National Conference.

On Membership

Conference rejected a motion that would have required all members to take on a 'key organiser' task either internally or externally and which would have raised membership subs to 5% of income from the current 2%/4% requirement. (see our Membership paper)

On Critical assessment

Conference passed a motion inserting the text below into the short term section of Our Perspectives position paper

Add to Short Term Perspectives:

"As of November 2013 the Cork and Dublin branches will commit at least four hours a month from their branch meeting time to the following two projects.

Project 1: A critical examination of the strategy and theory behind our engagements in social struggle, and an exploration of the best strategy and theory from revolutionaries and social movements around the world.

Project 2: A rewriting of our position papers on gender inequality and race, and a writing of a new paper which in everyday language presents our position on how we relate class to other forms of oppression. If resources permit, other position papers could also be critically re-examined as part of this project.

Each project will involve branch discussions, assigned readings and presentations (decided by the branches), and the collating of discussion notes (not conversation transcripts) on the internal website.

A project coordinator for each branch will be voted for at National Conference. They will be responsible for ensuring the required branch meeting time is committed to these projects, and that reports on progress and developments are presented to Delegate Conference and National Conference. Spring 2014 national conference will review projects and assess results.

Conference then rejected a motion that would have partly predetermined the language to be used in the outcome of the process above.

On Publications

Conference replaced the existing point 7 of the Publications position paper with the text below and deleted point S4.

“WSM Publications will endeavour to represent and analyse the broad range of oppressions felt and resisted by the working class. We therefore try to avoid the sole focus on economic exploitation that is common to many left papers and encourage articles that address the intersections between feminist, queer, race and class issues, as well as the subjective experience of alienation and resistance.”

Conference voted to remove references to Workers Solidarity from the publications position paper, therefore in effect ceasing the intention to regularly publish a ‘newspaper’. Workers Solidarity had only appeared once since the previous conference.

This was further clarified when a second set of motions as below were passed

“The Workers Solidarity newspaper has been discontinued, and its editorial committee has been replaced by the Printed Materials committee. This committee is responsible for producing high quality – both in terms of design aesthetics and depth of analysis – leaflets and other printed materials. Through communication with working groups and branches, the committee will anticipate when such materials would be useful – for example: union marches, strike mobilisations, elections, referendums, queer pride, or key moments in campaigns like important national conferences or periods of extensive pro-choice mobilisation – and commission or write texts that present an intelligent anarchist analysis expressed in everyday language. Working groups and branches can also commission the committee to make specified materials.”

“Guidelines for the printed materials: They are not to talk down to their readers. They are not to assume their target readers identify themselves as working class even though they objectively are. They are not to solely appeal to outrage over injustice, but rather to reason and logic. They are to be honest about the possibilities for social change and the challenges to achieving it. They are to keep lefty clichés to a minimum both in imagery and text.”

Conference vote to insert two new sentences into the description of the Irish Anarchist Review. These were

“It will also publish a small number of news analysis pieces. These may be taken from the website or solicited specifically for IAR.”

“Each issue will contain one short piece aimed at those with little prior knowledge of anarchism, focussing on a particular aspect of anarchist theory or practice.”

Other motions passed at conference included agreeing an Accommodation Protocol to be used for events where members were offering to accommodate guests in their homes and a number of housekeeping motions removing out of date sections of position papers.

Conference then move on to election to all national positions and national committees. No one can hold any of these positions for more than 3 years but in practise positions tend to be rotated more frequently than this, at this conference most of the people holding these positions were changed.

Conference closed with an open discussion that looked at the first steps that we needed to take to implement the motions we had passed before moving on to a feedback circle where members said how they had found the conference. This was overwhelmingly positive. We then had dinner together before joining the Revolutionary Anarcha Feminist groups launch party for RAG 6.

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