

Incorporation

A Spoonful of Sugar

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There are many ways in which governments can prevent opposition. Some are more open and obvious than others. When police attack protests, when pickets are broken up, when opposition is imprisoned it is clear what the State is up to. However there are subtler tactics, one is the way in which opposition movements are ‘incorporated’ and made part of the system. This article looks at some examples, mostly from Ireland, but the same process can be seen at work internationally.

So what is incorporation and how does it happen? It is the process by which radical individuals or groups are integrated into the State structure thus neutralising them as an effective opposition. Incorporation is integral to the operation of most advanced Capitalist countries. It is a mechanism by which, day to day, opposition can be diluted and disarmed.

Incorporation is mediated through an organisation’s needs for funding. Whoever pays the piper calls the tune. This old saying is well understood by the State and the bosses who are prepared to pay a limited amount in order to ensure social stability.

Basically an incorporated opposition group rather than fighting against the State has become a quasi-independent arm of that State. They are the spoonfuls of sugar which aid the medicine in its passage downwards. Some are born incorporated, some become so. One example of an organisation conceived and born as incorporated is the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE).

The INOUE is a federation of anti-unemployment groups and union funded advice centres. They also have individual membership for any unemployed person who wants to join. The INOUE claims that it represents the unemployed in the 32 counties. Hence the by-line in all their publications; *the unemployed-speaking for ourselves, fighting for our rights*. In practice they answer mainly to their funders rather than to their members.

More directly the State may enter what the Irish government describe as *social dialogue arrangements* in the PCW (Programme for Competitiveness and Work.) This is the latest in a series of national wage agreements signed between employers, unions and government in Ireland that tie the unions into wage moderation and a promise of industrial peace.¹ These agreements have wider pretensions to bring about a form of consensus politics selling the lie that we’re all in the same boat. It gives the bosses the stable conditions they need to keep raking in the profits.

In April 1995, the Irish Minister for Enterprise and Employment Richard Bruton, announced a 15% cutback in Community Employment Schemes.² There was no opposition from the parliamentary ‘socialists’ of Labour and Democratic Left as both were part of the government that was implementing the cuts! There was, of course, some opposition from unions, church groups and community groups. One small group, the Scheme Workers Alliance, even attempted to organise a scheme workers’ strike to coincide with the European week of action against unemployment.

Publicly the INOUE were loud in their opposition to the cuts. But in their April 1995 bulletin they published their more considered response. They had carried out a survey among all their affiliates. The purpose of this was to ask members how they thought the cutbacks should be implemented.

¹ The Programme for National Recovery (1987), Programme for Economic and Social Progress (1991) and the Programme for Competitiveness and Work(1993).

² These schemes are government sponsored training where one works for a sum roughly equivalent to the dole (similar schemes exist in England and Northern Ireland and throughout Europe). Though they are voluntary and not workfare as such the training is often quite limited and they are usually a source of cheap labour and are often used to replace full-time jobs .

The report found that there was a high degree of consensus among the affiliated groups that responded. There was a preference for selective cutbacks. They were in favour of eliminating some projects at the end of their 12 month period and *targeting specific projects for protection against any cutbacks*. The survey showed

That there was a clear agreement that less effective projects should be 'weeded out', this method was seen to be in the interest of the participants on the weak project and to the benefit of other projects.

It should be said, in fairness, that not all groups went along with this. Some felt that the approach was *divisive* and wanted no role in setting criteria for cuts.

As it happened, on this occasion, the government was just testing the waters. As such they must have been delighted to see a group claiming to represent the unemployed telling them how they should take their medicine. The INOU and nearly all of its affiliates had proved to be classic cases of incorporation in action.

Partners in Progress?

The Dublin Inner City Partnership is another such example. It is one result of the PESP deal (see footnote 1) signed in 1991. It was established to *take a fresh and radical approach to the issue of long-term unemployment*.³ The stated aim was to bring together employers, government agencies and community groups to co-operate on job creation. The real deal goes back to the idea of social partnership and keeping areas of the inner city (where generations of unemployment and deprivation could explode into anger) stable and under control.

The 'partnership' is part of the whole government strategy of agreement and alliance between bosses and workers. This is the idea of social partnership put forward in successive national agreements since 1987. In the past real struggles have emerged from Dublin inner city, e.g. the Corporation rent strike in the 1970s. The powers that be are prepared to be generous or so it would appear. The partnership's programme for action 1992–1993 was hoping for £10 million.⁴ But addressing the real problems would cost a hell of a lot more. For example, a massive programme of State housing and a Corporation rent freeze would go some way towards solving Dublin's housing crisis but it would cost many times this figure.

The 'partnership' has incorporated potentially radical groups like the Larkin Unemployed Centre, the Building Allied Trade Union and the National Painters Union and companies like Guinness who have been responsible for the loss of hundreds of jobs in the inner city. The State too gets well represented with FAS, CERT (State training agency for catering) and the Eastern Health Board on the board.[5] Everyone is supposed to have a shared interest in helping the unemployed.

³ Turning the Tide; A Review of Progress and Future Plans. (Dublin Inner City Partnership 1994)

⁴ This included; £2,531,000 from the European Union (money from the Global Grant, Community Reserve, Horizon, Euroform, N.O.W) and £6,922,000 through FAS and the VEC. Private Enterprise held its side of the *partnership* with a measly £218,999. SES = Social Employment Scheme (A former particular scheme now grouped under the general Community Employment banner). FAS = The Irish State Employment Service. VEC = Vocational Education Committee. NOW = New Opportunities for Women scheme. It should be pointed out that these figures were expectations and proved wildly optimistic. Also in fact a lot of this money was already committed and would have gone in anyway regardless of the programme. At present (according to a source within the partnership) they are budgeting for about £3.5 million over the next 4 years. 5 *ibid.* page 36.

As a policing exercise it has worked. Unions, unemployed groups and community groups keep the peace in some of the most deprived areas of Dublin. In some cases this policing aim was quite specifically laid out. A community leadership course has been set up. The aims are given as:

To enhance the skills and expertise of local community activists and to develop an effective response by local organisations to the growth of the complex problems with which they are faced.

Reading between the lines the desire is to take out effective, active community leadership and re-educate them in the new realities of 'partnership'. While everyone was busy making friends unemployment in the inner city has increased by 30% between the launch in 1991 and July 1994.⁵

Other groups do not start off incorporated. Community groups, tenants' organisations, women's groups and other such groups are often founded with an agenda for change. These groups result from people organising to better their lives. They wish to educate and organise but usually arise from people agitating around a particular issue. Those who want change find themselves opposed by those who wish to keep the status quo. They are drawn into struggle with existing power groups, especially the State.

As these community based organisations grow and develop, their need for funding often leads them away from their original goals. The funders, be they the church, charities, the State or transnational funders like the European Union begin to impose their ideas. The purse comes with strings attached. This immediately leads to professionalisation. Funders always like a manager, co-ordinator, administrator or some such leader they can deal with.

The groups become less democratic, also they begin to water down their original aims. While lip service is still paid to the founding goals in reality they become a dead letter. Anyone raising the original policy is seen as utopian, out of touch or even as a danger to funding! Such groups lose sight of the idea of social change. They often lose any sense of having a long-term aim or direction.

Incorporated groups become grant-addicted. Extra funding buys new premises, computers, offices and workers. However then bills for rent, electricity and wages and so on begin to mount up. A vicious spiral is created where funding assumes top priority. This means, firstly, that more time is wasted looking for funding. Secondly and most importantly the funders get a veto over activity they don't like. Activity is dictated by them and by what they will tolerate.

This process of becoming incorporated is described very well in the book *Community, Art and The State*⁶ by Owen Kelly. This book describes the development of the community arts movement in Britain. In the late 1960s and early 1970s many wished to involve ordinary people in art with a view to using it to help effect social change. Increasingly they became obsessed with funding especially from the British Arts Council. He describes how

naively community artists thought they could take the money and run.

This led to:

⁵ *ibid.* page 1

⁶ Co-Media, London 19848 According to its own publication *Organising against Unemployment* (Pat Mc Ginn and Michael Allen INOU Dublin 1991) the Projects of INOU centres were funded as follows; FAS/SES 29% DED/ACE 3% Trade unions 14% Local authorities 9% Irish American/Ireland fund 9% Religious bodies 7% Other government agencies 5% Voluntary trusts 5% European Community 3% Combat Poverty Agency 3% Other sources 12%

a progressive loss of control over the direction of the movement and its ability to construct a programme to put its aims into practice.

Any debate on ideas or long-term direction was seen as utopian. Later, incorporated groups begin to worry about any debate seeing the danger of public splits. They become terrified of scaring funders.

Most funders (especially the state) are clever enough never to provide anywhere near to the amount of funding asked for. The cash dosage is kept deliberately low. This keeps the organisations constantly begging like addicts who can't score enough to feed their habits. The funders drop and take up groups according to the public profile of the group and the trendiness of the issue. If it is international year of the disabled those groups do well and so on.

Destructive fights for funds may break out. In order to keep a good vein open for supply members get on to funding committees themselves and so get in on the game of dividing the cake.

Incorporation in practice

The INOU shows clearly how the mechanism of incorporation functions. It is funded by FAS, the unions, church and State.⁷ It has two members sitting on government committees doling out E.U. cash.⁸ It is registered as a limited company. The main voices in the organisation are its full-time paid officers and the full-time *co-ordinators* of advice centres. According to figures on page 15 of its own 1991 report (see footnote 8) *Almost half the associations (within the INOU) reported that their development had been limited by restrictions placed on them by funders.* The INOU is a good service provider. The advice supplied in the centres is good and professional. As a campaigning organisation it is utterly useless. It confines itself to ineffectual media stunts often bringing in groups like Machnas (a professional arts group who put on shows for campaigns like that for the release of the Birmingham 6) to put on a good show *on behalf* of the unemployed. These are not seen as a group to be mobilised in defence of their own rights but 'a deprived section of society' to be helped by professional do-gooders.

The consequences are seen in cases such as the proposed CE cutbacks. The INOU did little to mobilise scheme workers. But on hearing of the Scheme Workers Alliance's (SWA) attempt to organise a strike and march they sprang into action. They told their co-ordinators to close the INOU centres and organised a march an hour earlier than the SWA march. They refused to co-ordinate with SWA and managed to disrupt and split a potentially good protest.

In another case a campaign was fought within the INOU in 1991 against the then new national deal, the PESP (Programme for Economic and Social Progress). According to an ex-member of its executive the INOU were told, unofficially that if any anti-programme motions were passed

⁷ FAS is the Irish State Employment service. DED/ACE were the employment schemes in the North when the report was published.

⁸ The total amount available through the EU is huge (though community groups see very little of it). In 1993 the amount of social funds paid to Ireland alone was £312 million along with Regional Development Funds of £464 million. A grand total of £8 billion was promised between 1994 and 1998. Other funders include; the Ireland Fund (set up after the Anglo-Irish Agreement on Northern Ireland and mainly funded through Irish/American business and the US government), the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, funds realised under the Programme for Competitiveness and Work and other direct grants from government departments.

their centres would lose union funding. This is how incorporation functions to police and stifle protest and dissent.

Fighting back

Incorporation by its nature is very difficult to fight. As anarchists we know that it is not enough to be back seat drivers in the struggle for social change. We know that we have to become involved in campaigns and struggles; to test our anarchism in practice. This means becoming involved in real campaigns and groups and pointing out and trying to fight incorporation on the ground.

This is not easy. Those within a group that feel it must be fought will find themselves isolated and without funds. So they may have to fight a double fight both for their rights as women, unemployed, Travellers or whatever and against the 'professional core' of the group.

There are some steps that new groups may take to fight or minimise incorporation. It is important to be open, democratic and entirely transparent (to members) in organisation. It is important that the group reflect a real need and is set up and controlled by the people effected. Nothing will come out of parachuting in activists to 'help' others.

It is also vital that members know and understand fully the shared aims and long-term direction of the group. A group must be fully democratic and be open to continuous debate and education so that all members have a say in where it's going.

It is possible to distinguish two types of community organisation. One is set up to provide services such as an unemployed centre or tenants' rights advice centre. The other specifically to campaign to improve things. Some groups claim to do both but there will be a clash and a choice must be made. Any group which relies on money from institutions like the State will, inevitably, be compromised in fighting against that State. Genuine campaign groups cannot afford to accept this compromise.

Any community group will have to face compromises in its day to day operations. It is important that these are made with the consent and understanding of all the members. Decisions on funding, taking on Community Employment workers and other potential compromises must be made in an open way and on a case by case basis.

The main stumbling block will always be funding. One idea is a tithe. This is a small voluntary subscription from members and supporters. Basically this is how unions were originally built. Tithing means that the money comes from within the group and is totally independent and it gives members a sense of involvement. Campaign groups can sometimes get money from unions. However it is important to appeal directly to workers through their branches. Any approach to the bureaucracy would be avoiding the chance to build genuine solidarity and probably doomed to total failure anyway.

Other fund-raising events such as concerts, pub-quizzes, race nights etc. also have the advantages of involving members directly in raising money and deciding how it is spent.

Usually and unfortunately, this won't raise enough money. For service based groups external funding will have to be sought. This should not be rushed into on a 'grab it where you can' basis. The funding with least strings should be looked into first. Funding should be sought for individual planned projects rather than becoming dependant on a regular income. Where possible multiple funding for projects should be sought to minimise the control of any one funder.

This only applies to voluntary service groups. Genuine political or campaign groups should never accept State money.

Above all the group has to be clear in its aims and direction and know when it is compromising and how far it can go. It must be prepared to debate out compromises on a case by case basis. It must also be realised that, short of a revolution, most long-term campaign and community groups can only go so far and that isn't far enough.

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