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utilization of a moral interpretative framework rather than a sober analysis of the balance of forces as its guide to action, its lack of interest in gaining popular support, and its assumption that the population are a lot more radical than they actually are.

The consequence of this is that the return is much less than the investment; members of the organisation have given a fair chunk of their lives (and money) to Anarchism and yet there is not a whole to show for it. There are no institutions of any note that signal a broader base in society, no grounding in the unions, the ephemeral activist groups into which so much effort has been poured come and go like mayflies, the capacity to project media influence remains extraordinarily weak, while the intellectual level of members is trapped by adherence to doctrine that enables survival but not much else. And yet the WSM is perhaps the most impressive Anarchist organisation in the English speaking world. Its members are known for their work ethic and their self-effacement. It has been a participant in many of the progressive struggles in Ireland over the last thirty years. One cannot blame lack of dedication for the sheer unpopularity of Anarchism. The causes go deeper, down to the root of the ideology itself. Decent, hardworking people are constrained by a framework that, due its tendency to embrace inward-looking radicalism, an inability to come to terms with non-revolutionary times and an incapacity to adjust itself to the enormous development in capitalism since 1872, condemns its adherents to forever pushing the rock of revolution up an increasingly steep and slippery slope.

reflected much deeper issues than this or that wrong policy or this or that particular format.

The experience of Delegate Council indicated that for all the Anarchist interest in organisational form that we didn't have much useful advice that we could offer the public on this front. If we could barely organise 50 people ourselves, why should we expect unions or society at large to listen to us?

Conclusion

The differences in emphasis that surfaced over the years had, under the pressure of the capitalist crisis, taken overt form as distinct theoretical understandings, strategic choices, and, in its own important way, cultures. Once this occurs in a cadre-type organisation it either has to change its self-conception into something more akin to a mass party that is tolerant of quite profound differences or there has to be a parting of ways.

Overall, the period of 2005 to 2010 is one long argument against the viability of the Anarchist conception of organisation. Ironically, I'm not at all sure that the original Anarchists were particularly concerned with issues of hierarchy that are of such interest to modern Anarchists: the split with Marx revolved around the utility of using the State as an instrument of liberation which had certain implications regarding the relative importance of the political and economic organisations. It didn't really say much, indeed anything, about hierarchy per se. But anti-hierarchy has become vogue even though when it comes down to it, it is a rather vague concept. Over the 140 year course of its existence, the influence of individualism has permeated Anarchism fairly substantially and in its modern Anglo-Saxon incarnation at least, it doesn't bear a whole lot of resemblance to the Bakuninists of the First International, although it retains the hostility to state-centred political action. At this point, the WSM is probably closer to a Kropotkinite organisation with its

The Workers Solidarity Movement is one of the more impressive anarchist organisations of modern times. While always a small organisation it has been active on the radical left in Ireland for close to thirty years and at the same time it has exerted considerable influence on Anarchism internationally, particularly in the early years of the Internet.

The organisation has gone through a number of different periods and has seen its fortunes rise and fall repeatedly in that time. Not that the ride has been a roller-coaster of ups and downs; the highs were, in the grand scheme of things, modest enough, the lows correspondingly tolerable. The WSM, in other words, is no Workers' Party.1

Founded in 1984, the WSM was oriented towards socialism at a time when radical liberalism was particularly influential in British Anarchism, which was as culturally influential then as tendencies from the United States are today. Given the historical weakness of Irish socialism, let alone anarchism, the few precursors of which came out of the Official Republican Movement, this explicitly left ideological foundation served to ground the WSM throughout its history. The avowedly socialist orientation served to inoculate for a long-time against too great a penetration of the more individualist strains that have bedevilled Anarchism since the 1880s.

Not that the journey was plain sailing. Building any sort of socialist movement in what was still a fairly backward and underdeveloped country dominated by a highly religious and rural culture was always going to be an uphill task, one made harder by the lingering presence of a radical nationalist movement.

The WSM was initially the fringe of the fringe. The Workers' Party was the major left oppositional force and, oriented as it was towards Moscow, an array of Trotskyist mini-parties were sucked into its orbit. The WSM were the thorn in the Trotskyist side; the critic of the critics so to speak.

The Tradition

The attraction of Anarchism lies in its combination of socialism and democracy. But Anarchism also had an inglorious history of distancing itself from the socialist left in favour of an emphasis on individualism. The WSM rejected that approach and instead identified with the Platformist tendency within Anarchism. This tendency traced its core features back to exiles of the Russian Revolution who, reflecting on their defeat, attempted to rethink their experience and help ensure that they wouldn't suffer a similar fate in the future. Their first document was called a draft platform for future Anarchist organisations, hence the moniker "Platformist".

Nowadays, the main factors of that document that tend to get emphasised by its proponents are ones of form, that is, relating to structure and organisation, primarily federalism, theoretical and tactical unity and collective responsibility.

Essentially, the authors, most famously Makhno and Arishnov, were emphasizing a more disciplined political organisation than had previously been cultivated by Anarchists. The striving for theoretical unity is an obvious goal of any organisation that aims to last for more than one event. A common framework for understanding the world is essential to cohesiveness and efficiency. Cohesiveness is important because even if there are tactical disagreements, the minority tendencies will generally be happy to go along with the majority if they are confident that they are all on the same page at a more abstract level. It lends itself to efficiency because it saves an organisation from treating every question, no matter how minor, as one of principle, which becomes very draining if it doesn't lead directly to paralysis. If, for example, one has to debate the pros and cons of electoralism every time a state election is being held, there is less time to discuss the nuts and bolts of a potential anti-electoral campaign.

Of course, achieving total theoretical unity is akin to hitting a constantly moving target, but as long a high enough level of unity

larly suited to the role found themselves giving up their Saturday afternoon to attend DC. Given that it was supposed to be a directly democratic process with delegates being armed with mandates the intellectual quality of the delegates wasn't supposed to matter all that much. Eventually I came to the conclusion that it did matter. Some members simply had trouble organising the thoughts in their head and this was important because if it was to be a useful decision making body, DC had to depend on that old chestnut, individual judgement.

If the imperative mandate had been strictly followed then there would have been no need of DC meetings in the first place. The internet was good enough to gauge the mood of the organisation. The advantage of a DC meeting was that it provides a forum for the presentation of different policies and the reasoning behind them to be explained in person, which cannot always be fully spelt out in a motion. This allows room to compromise with other viewpoints and the process of negotiation itself helps cement the unity of the organisation. But a malfunctioning Delegate Council where there isn't much by way of political discussion, particularly given the high turnover and variable quality in its membership, might well maintain Anarchist observance of anti-hierarchical form but does so at the expense of being not much use and at the expense of failing to unify the diverse tendencies. It becomes mired in mechanically following the forms of democracy at the expense of substantive content.

I had pushed for the adoption of a more representative form to the DC and for giving it more leeway to make decisions on its own authority. These were adopted, albeit it with mutterings about the encroachment of Bolshevism, mutterings which were to increase on foot of the membership proposal that followed in 2010. Their failure to result in any substantive difference in the levels of political discussion (there was some minor pick-up) led me to conclude by the tail end of 2010 that the problems we were encountering

its proponents had appealed for its passing partially on the basis that we would work out the details later. Recalling the oblivion to which the 10 year plan had been condemned I wanted to get down to the nuts and bolts of finding a pathway to implement it. But despite it having been passed the month before and coming on top of the intense debate on the internal website regarding co-operation with Eirigi, it evoked very little input. It was a sign that something serious was awry.

As Anarchists we had spent quite a bit of time thinking about democratic processes and frankly we attached too much importance to form. While obviously not irrelevant, the bigger issue was that the membership as a whole weren't particularly interested in thinking about policy and its political consequences. Most members wanted to do things. They were very much radical activists and would have been satisfied with almost any policy that didn't disrupt that activity or offend their sensibilities. They didn't have much to say regarding strategy.

Since we had constructed an organisation form that depended on regular input from all the members, when it turned out that such input was not forthcoming, the structures proved to be not really capable of acting at a lower level. This, of course, was not something unique to the WSM; something similar is likely to occur in all such systems, including many participatory democratic ones, e.g. a federated system of Workers' Councils.

Also, and to be somewhat brutal, it was apparent that although all members had a lot to contribute in a whole host of ways, many did not have a particularly good capacity for considering questions of general political strategy abstracted from day-to-day concerns and issues that were particularly emotive for them. A division of labour goes without saying when it comes to layout and design. But it is factor in policy making too. Some people just weren't as good at thinking politically as others. The reality of the delegate selection process – we generally relied on volunteers rather choosing on a political basis – meant that people who weren't particu-

is achieved an organisation can continue to function effectively. The minorities in an Anarchist organisation, as in all democratic organisations, are free to canvass for the superiority of its opinions. Again, this seems somewhat obvious these days – and would have been obvious before 1914 – but the aura of the Cominternized Bolshevik Party exalted submission rather than dissent, thereby bestowing a certain novelty to the Anarchist conception of political organisation.

Tactical unity entails going along with actions that you might not agree with. This is not as big a deal as it sounds since most of the time it is hard to know which particular tactic is best suited to a situation. Rather than have everyone try their own thing, why not give the majority proposal a run? The more people that pull together the more likely that whatever tactic is adopted will receive a fair wind. If it doesn't work, then the competing ideas can be resurrected.

Again, this is a rather elementary idea for any organisation, although it has proven controversial amongst Anarchists. It comes down to seriousness. A member's behaviour reflects on the organisation and vice versa. If there is unbecoming conduct, either personally or politically, then the organisation has a duty to intervene in order to ensure its position is upheld.

These principles have provoked much debate in Anarchism over the years. Some of that debate was healthy, clarifying what was meant by theoretical unity, how far it should go and so forth. But much of it was unhealthy too. The Anarchist tendency to elevate any issue into one of moral principle creates a propensity for denunciation and Platformists are regularly accused of importing Leninism into the movement, of supporting authoritarian structures and the like.

Those criticisms echo the anti-organisational sentiments of the post-Bakunin generation, appropriately enough, given that Platformism is itself a recapitulation of Bakunin's brand of Anarchism

(for which reason I shall use Platformism, Bakuninism and especifismo – its Latin American incarnation – interchangeably).

The emphasis which Platformists have placed on matters of basic organisation indicates the degree to which Anarchists have to struggle to keep incompetence at bay: in any other political tendency they would be prior assumptions not ones that require decades of polemics. No ideology can influence society if its organisational expression is overrun by rampant individualism.

Bakuninism never had to direct its focus onto such questions, probably because the rise of Anarchist individualism post-dates Bakunin and the First International itself. Once such organisational questions are settled – or taken for granted – the political ones can come to the fore and there is one particularly distinguishing political factor that Platformism, especially the WSM, aimed at: intervention in mass organisations of the working class.

This also echoes Bakunin and finds more coherent modern expression in its sister tendency especifismo. The strategic orientation of Anarchism is that social revolution will be made by the masses rather than a political party (hence the Anarchist desire to be identified as a mere organisation rather than as a party as the latter implies a desire to assume state power so that it can implement its programme). Anarchism disavows that role and allocates it to the masses. Specifically, Bakuninism allocates it to the mass organisations, i.e. in practice the trade unions, which by their very nature are the worker organisations which are most thrust forward into the class struggle. Conceivably there could be other mass organisations that serve as the vehicle of social transformation, but in practice they have never really materialised.

Bakunin's enthusiasm for the First International was therefore much more than a naive gladdening of the heart at cross-country co-operation. It was a strategic orientation, one which later re-emerged from the fog of Anarchist terrorism of the 1880s and 1890s as syndicalism, though for the most part without Bakunin's concomitant specific organisation dedicated to intervening in

gates from each of the four branches in proportion to the size of the branch. It could make policy within the parameters set down by national conference. It never quite clicked however and the level of political discussion at its meetings was low. It suffered from the same problem of too much formalism. A motion would be submitted and it would receive the consensus treatment, not so much in that votes were avoided, but in that it would get passed if nobody actively opposed it. People might have thought a fair amount of the ideas submitted were not all that useful but out of courtesy for the proposer they would passively support it with the justification that if the proposer wanted to put in a bit of work on it then they didn't feel strongly enough to cause a fuss. Thus a lot of motions got passed that had no hope of being implemented because in a small organisation without full time administrators enthusiasm is a requirement as much as agreement.

Delegate Council expended a lot of effort on trifling administration issues that had little political importance and which one of the executive officers should have just dealt with. But the wariness of being hierarchical entailed the officers being very circumspect about showing initiative in mundane matters. Most things had to be routed through DC. This tended to crowd out political discussion, although it might be more accurate to say it covered up the absence of political discussion, which wouldn't necessarily have magically appeared if the routine had been shunted out.

This became evident to me in 2010 during my last stint as Secretary. At that point I was conscious of the problem and attempted to canvass the membership for political items for the agenda. Such items tended to be scant and notably failed to evoke input. For example, even after we passed a motion in the Summer 2010 conference in favour of a United Front strategy (against the wishes of the usual suspects of course!) the experience of the 10 year plan recurred; it was policy on paper but didn't actually mean anything in practice. I put it on the agenda for the next DC, because even though I thought it wasn't much of a policy, it was still a policy and

One reason for the plan's failure to anchor policy making was that it was so ambitious, well beyond the WSM's capacity to implement. Goals have to walk a tightrope between ambition and realism and this plan fell off on the ambition side. It's all very well agreeing goals but they're not much use if they are arbitrarily plucked out of the air.

Another reason was an over-concern with formalism. There is a difference between getting a motion passed at conference and getting the motion to grab the membership such that they would act on it. We were in the habit of passing policy motions far beyond our capacity to implement them and in time, of course, this lessens the credibility of the process itself. Rather than simply getting motions passed, one has to win people over to actually believing in them. This is a much more subtle process than winning a vote.

In addition, and related to that tendency towards formalism, wherever possible we attempted to replace individual judgment with detailed sets of rules. This was an anarchist solution to the conundrum of coping with organisational decisions affecting more than 10 people while preventing the emergence of a specific leadership. It played out in unusual ways however, e.g. the method for deciding which articles could get published on our website was a strictly algorithmic one: if a submission fulfilled some basic criteria (it was grammatically okay, correctly categorised, within policy etc) then it had to be published. To those of us who had been through the Indymedia mill this was a recipe for mediocrity at best: we wanted capable editors to have the authority to edit, change or reject submissions based on their quality. This was rejected by majority vote on at least two occasions. The distrust of individual judgment was to recur in the membership debate of 2010.

The strange twilight zone of policy making was exemplified by the fate of Delegate Council, a body that is living proof of the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics in its ability to suck up energy and remit very little by way of coherence. The Council was made of dele-

the unions. The authors of the Platform correctly identified the complete lack of contradiction between trade unionism and political anarchism.

The WSM, then, was founded on an intention to be involved in the mass organisations, to influence them with libertarian ideas, and, ultimately, to convert them to being instruments of social revolution. The not-always-stated premise of the strategy is the refusal to set up isolated, radical unions at the expense of involvement in the existing large trade unions. The urge to found a radical (in Anarchist parlance a syndicalist or, even more exclusively, an anarcho-syndicalist) union is a perennial rival Anarchist strategy. It is here rather than in the slightly inconsequential – and indeed fairly obvious – ruminations on theoretical and tactical unity that the strategic divisions within socialist Anarchism lies. The Platformists, in other words, advocate "going to the people" rather than setting up radical alternatives and trying to make the people come to them.

Of course there is a big question as to whether such a strategy is viable in the 21st century; I will argue elsewhere that it is not, but it is, at least, a strategy. A small political organisation which consciously does not wish to assume political power itself must find an alternative method for the implementation of its programme. The trade unions provide that.

In order for it to succeed as a strategy, Anarchist ideas must come to predominate in the mass organisations and this requires them to organise as Anarchists and to promote Anarchism within the larger formations. Hence, Bakuninism (or Platformism or especifismo) requires involvement in two layers of organistion: the Anarchist political one and the mass one, which is open to the general working class by reason of their economic situation irrespective of their political opinions.

The WSM, then, was founded on quite a conscious political basis: it was socialist, it was democratic; it was anti-individualist; it was

hostile to Anarchist exclusivism and avowedly in favour of mass work.

Ups, downs, and stagnation

It grew from half a dozen members in 1984 to a few dozen by 1988. However the political basis on which new members were recruited was low and they lost a few key members to the Leninist parties and, as happens in splits, others drifted away. By 1991, however, a new core group comprising Aileen O'Carroll, Andrew Flood, Conor McLoughlin and others arose in Trinity College, Dublin and joined with Alan MacSimoin and Kevin Doyle – both founder members – to essentially refound the organisation, this time with a much more stringent process of recruitment.

The higher political level was maintained throughout the 1990s and furnished a useful corpus of Anarchist critiques of Leninism and popularisation of left-libertarian history as well as a record of solid participation in standard left-wing campaigns such as the Anti-Water Tax one of the late 1990s. Reading lists of key political texts were introduced for prospective members and educational meetings, covering the basics of Anarchist thought were regularly held and the notes published.

However, by the turn of the millennium it was apparent that the coherency came at a price; the organisation was unable to recruit more than a dozen active members. Juggling growth with the requirements for coherency is always a bit of a balancing act but if an organisation is so small — a political organisation of a dozen members is minuscule even in a small country like Ireland — its impact is inevitably limited. It is natural that people will want a return on their investment: if you put energy into a project, you want to see some results.

Ten years of stagnation is a long time to tread water, even for a small organisation. And given that the fall of the USSR was ex-

discussion never achieved a degree of depth and detachment necessary for strategic-level policy as there was always many issues of pressing concern to address. A good example was the WSM's agreed 10 year goals. It was proposed by Andrew and adopted with some debate at our Conference in 2008 and entailed a series of ambitious goals to be achieved by 2018, including the establishment of some 80 WSM branches(!), many libertarian social centres, libertarian union networks and more. There was some criticism from Alan (of course!) and Kevin Doyle on the basis that it assumed growth irrespective of the broader class struggle, as if the fortunes of the WSM could be independent of that. More novelly, Chekov expressed skepticism regarding the likelihood of achieving 80 WSM branches, given the rarity of political activists among the population, and therefore the wisdom of setting it as a goal, especially in the absence of an actual pathway to achieve the goal. Andrew sold the policy on the basis that although there wasn't a plan, having a goal would force the organisation to develop one, that is, the policy would be the start of a process rather than end-point in itself. This never happened in practice.

Chekov's skepticism signalled a differing strategic outlook, which was notable in that it was the first inkling of a divergent thinking that wasn't confined to Alan MacSimoin; a portent of things to come as it turned out. The skepticism regarding that whole approach deepened given that the goals of the 10 year plan were then more or less forgotten about when it came to directing medium term policy, although they were wheeled out occasionally from time to time. Their focus on building a definite libertarian culture ensured that the more orthodox Platformists didn't attempt to develop an implementation plan at all: we had no interest and saw no utility in libertarian neighbourhood centres or strictly libertarian union-networks. But the people who liked those ideas also didn't attempt to construct an integrated path to achieving those goals. It was a case of passing policy and then ignoring it, a trend which was to continue.

rest of the minority, including Gavin, Alan, and Chekov followed suit.

Organisational Fetishism

The WSM like many other modern Anarchists is very concerned with structure. It robustly advocates direct democracy and considers representative democracy to be a fraud. When it was an organisation of less than 15 people, the question of structure didn't pose much of a problem but once it grew to three or four branches, more complex forms were necessary. In response it developed a Delegate Council (DC) with each branch sending delegates commensurate with their numbers. The delegates were supposed to be issued with mandates from the branches they represented.

One of the distinguishing features of libertarian style networks is that anybody can turn up to a meeting and have an equal say in the decisions made. This is made possible by the deliberate absence of having a definite membership list. Indymedia, Grassroots, and Seomra Spraoi all persisted for a long time in accepting anyone who might turn up at their meetings as being entitled to partake in decision making, although over time, tighter policies did arise. Such a model makes longer-term planning very difficult as policy can swing depending on who shows up for a given meeting, which is a major reason why such organisations are unable to grow beyond a very small size. In addition, of course, it is anathema to Anarchists to have a central leadership responsible for policy making. The WSM slotted into the middle between the two, with a clear idea as to who was a member but without a central leadership, elected or otherwise, with the authority to make policy.

A twice yearly annual conference was the supreme decision making body, which was probably too often as this meant it tended not to focus on longer-term issues. This is not to say that nothing beyond the coming six months was discussed, but that such a

pected to benefit Anarchism this was all the more disappointing. Anarchism, after all, had never propounded the Bolshevik Myth; it had stridently criticised the lack of democracy for decades and could have expected to benefit from the USSR's collapse especially since it led to the precipitous decline of its sister parties, including in Ireland, the Workers' Party. This clearly opened a space for a radical left organisation, at least in the major urban areas. As it turned out, neither the WSM nor its Trotskyist rivals profited from the sudden laying low of their much larger rival.

Allying with activists

So, by 2000, the WSM was beginning to reassess its situation, in particular its orientation as a fringe group on the edges of the Trotskyist dominated left. The process was not a completely conscious one, but it did involve some level of political understanding, which was expressed in internal debates around the degree of involvement in the so-called anti-globalisation movement, identification with the Zapatistas, and co-operation with other non-Leninist radicals who were interested in anti-authoritarian structures. The two major positions were primarily associated with Andrew Flood and Alan MacSimoin, and they and their positions remained the locus of the debate over the next ten years. One has to be wary of overpersonification of course and there were obviously other influential participants (Kevin Doyle, Aileen O'Carroll, Conor McLoughlin, Chekov Feeney, Deirdre Hogan, and James McBarron from that period alone merit a mention), but given the propensity to anonymity within Anarchism it is helpful to identify the human face of the abstract arguments.

Andrew was the leading supporter of increased co-operation with non-WSM libertarians who were emerging thanks to the influence of the Zapatistas, disillusionment with the Green Party, anti-globalisation and so forth, while Alan remained an advocate

of the classic union-oriented Platformist strategy that had guided the organisation for two decades. Alan tied the fortunes of the WSM to the wider fortunes of the working class: in the absence of the radicalisation of of the class there was no prospect of the WSM of growing significantly. Nor could a tiny organisation like the WSM radicalise the class. If anything, Alan thought the idea absurd. Andrew viewed this as an anarchist version of Kautsky's so-called "actionless waiting" and advocated increased attempts to engage with other non-Leninist anti-capitalists with the hope of developing a radical alternative. Of course, reality is always messier than this neat little division. The tendency that considered an orientation towards unions as overwhelmingly important did not suggest non-co-operation with other Anarchists; the pro-anti-globalisation tendency didn't advocate ignoring union activity. Nevertheless these two polls do express real currents within the WSM, which initially were expressions of differences of emphasis but which over time came to delineate substantial strategic differences.

I joined the WSM in late 2002, at the tail end of the initial debates around the organisation's strategic orientation. By that time I had identified as an anarchist for three years and was probably one of the last to come to Anarchism primarily through books rather than the Internet and personal contact. Being instinctively left-wing, I had nevertheless been put off radical socialism by the pro-Leninist stance of the Trotskyist parties I had encountered in the mid-1990s. Their frenetic activism also gave them an aura of hysteria that was deeply unattractive. Having never heard of Anarchism until fortuitously coming across a reference by Chomsky and months later a compendium of Bakunin's work in a library, I hadn't paid much attention to radical politics in the late 1990s.

At around the time I came across Bakunin I happened to be working in a job that had fairly 19th century labour conditions. Cycle couriers were paid piece rates and had no holiday or sick pay. What's more, they loved it! There was something about the job that

The possibility of such a cessation engendered strong feelings, both for and against. In my opinion the constant mobilisation militated against our capacity to reflect and plan a way forward. Sometimes, especially when faced with difficult problems like a massive capitalist crisis and the stagnation of your previous strategy, you can't come up with solutions in a weekend. You need 12 months to think things through.

Right at this point however, the Irish state was bankrupting itself. If ever there was a time to be at the forefront of action, this was it, at least if you thought social conflict could escalate quite considerably. So beyond the disagreement on the proposal itself there wasn't even basic agreement on how to go about treating the debate.

This latter issue was the catalyst for my leaving the organisation. It was clear I had major differences of opinion regarding Platformism, recruitment, the mass organisations, demonstrations, the fate of capitalism and so on. The surge of WSM protests in late 2010 surrounding the IMF's entry onto the Irish scene, during the period when the minority believed that we should be ceasing activity in order to reflect on our future directions, indicated that there was going to be no let up in the pace of mobilisation. I considered these protests to be pointless and to be in direct contradiction to our need to take a step back and think. If anything, I was reminded of the SWP's freneticism, which I had found off-putting back in the 1990s. At least the SWP had some rationale for their approach and an ability to capitalise on it. For Anarchists, it seemed an odd trajectory to be on. Clearly, many members didn't agree with us on the need to slow down and reflect; in fact, as small protests followed one another, it was as if Chekov had never even suggested it. I decided that being a member of the WSM was more of a hindrance than a help to advancing socialist politics – and that I in turn was probably more of a hindrance than a help to the WSM, given its focus on protests. I decided to leave and over a period of a few months the

sation with a narrow remit of promoting anarchism) and the mass organisation (which would be the vehicle of community struggle). Since Anarchists had been instrumental in setting up unions in the past, we weren't in principle against being the pioneers in creating mass organisations; we were just against setting up radical ones on an exclusively Anarchist basis. The proposal was criticised by Paul Bowman as a move towards Kautskyist Social Democracy which, in retrospect, it was, albeit an unintentional one – Kautsky is anathema in radical circles after all – and one which suffered from attempting to simultaneously ride both the Bakuninist and Kautskyist horses.

By the end of 2010, while nominally Platformist, only two or perhaps three members were consciously followers of that line, with the two other tendencies, the proto-Kautskyists and the radical activists – having come to the conclusion that a strictly classical approach was not going to be sufficient, were attempting to work out a way forward. In practice this resulted in the new tendencies pulling in very different, i.e. diametrically opposed, directions, both in terms of theoretical conceptions and practical policy. To have three such distinct tendencies co-exist under the one roof is par for the course in a genuinely mass party but it creates an issue for a cadre group (one reason for the bewildering number of small cadre groups on the revolutionary left).

Ultimately, there was some interest in the proposal but it was outweighed by the skepticism, which was understandable given the extent to which it was a change in approach. Overall, most people seemed happy enough to remain with the status quo.

The proposal also explicitly required a cessation of 95% of our political activity – this was in the aftermath of a seemingly eternal series of protests without any noticeable results – in order to provide a prolonged period to think things through and, if we decided to go for that option, to set up an organisation properly rather than in the half-baked fashion that was somewhat traditional.

projected the illusion of freedom; the lack of grooming standards, the ease with which one could quit. Since I was working there for a few years, which was long enough in that industry, I eventually developed a level of class consciousness regarding the realities of employment and the division of spoils between employer and employee. If reality hits you over the head often enough, you can come to your senses.

Being young and fired up by reading about the CNT2 I set about trying to win some gains for the couriers. Being influenced by Anarchism I was intent on doing it democratically. As it happens we were fairly successful, winning two decent pay rises and fighting off cuts in out conditions as well as increasing other workers' class consciousness, albeit, it has to be said, only temporarily. Arising from that experience, I was very much infused with a pro-union conception of Anarchism: a radical union would have been a dream while the absolute minimum requirement of any political organisation that might win my allegiance was for it to be socialist.

My involvement with the WSM built up gradually. I hadn't even been aware that Anarchism was a living tendency when first delving into Bakunin and was delighted when I first came across an existing group that had its own publication. After attending a few open educational meetings and working with them in broader campaigns (e.g. the Bin Tax, the Grassroots Gathering), I signed up. By this stage I had regular access to the Internet and the WSM's organisational seriousness and clear socialism was attractive. I had no interest in vague anti-hierarchy politics and am temperamentally inclined towards disciplined organisations.

Of course, right at the time I joined, the WSM was in the midst of a long-term turn towards an alternative libertarian movement. This is a rather vague term for working with people who were radical opponents of the status quo but who had an instinctive – and sometimes well reasoned – dislike of Leninism. Its institutional manifestation was the Grassroots Gathering which was organised to explicitly exclude Leninists. It provided a forum for left-

libertarians to discuss and socialise and although it didn't organise anything more than six monthly meetings itself, it did provide the impetus for ongoing co-operation between the WSM and the diverse range of individuals who made it up, e.g. in the creation of anti-war network free from Leninist influence.

The turn towards the anti-globablisation movement was not without reason. By 2001 it was clear that the WSM was stagnating and was only going to stagnate further if it followed the old Platformist road. The Zapatistas and the protests in Seattle galvanised a younger generation into radical politics, in particular a layer who were likely to be open to Anarchism. If the Bakuninist strategy of going to the people was not directly applicable – given the minuscule size of the organisation – then perhaps an intermediate step of going to libertarian activists, winning them over to Anarchism and thereby increasing the organisational capacity of the WSM to influence the actual mass organisations, would prove a necessary bridge.

Such was my conception of the reasoning for focusing on what we called the libertarian milieu, a focus which I wasn't very enthusiastic about, partially for cultural reasons, but one which did seem to make sense.

One of the arguments against old fashioned class struggle Anarchism was that it carries the alienating baggage of a century of socialism with it and the advantage of chucking that baggage overboard was a recurring theme over the next decade. But the argument cuts both ways: for those whose primary allegiance is to classical Socialism and to whom Anarchism is just a variant of Socialism, it is alienating to mix with political activists who are, at best, deeply uninterested in Socialism and whose primary political expression is through stunts that masquerade as direct action, not to mention their tendency to display the traits of that classic label, lifestylism, especially if your lifestyle is pretty conventional and not given to veganism, poor clothes, organic farming and the like. Obviously, this somewhat facetious description of the cultural di-

A mass organisation is a very different beast in all sorts of ways compared to a highly committed group of political cadres. For an organisation to be capable of recruiting a mass membership the recruitment bar has to be set very low with respect to ideological unity, a centralised administrative and policy making apparatus is necessary and so forth. Marketing and branding are also important to a mass organisation in a way that it isn't to a small group of militants. As long as the WSM was Platformist its branding as Anarchist didn't really matter because it wasn't geared towards attaining mass popularity for itself. But once it became an activist organisation that attempted to replicate the function of mass organisations, albeit in a very distorted form, the branding was always going to be unhelpful, even fatal.

Since these changes were antithetical to Anarchist doctrines, or at least to the version of Anarchism that has come to predominate since the 1960s, any attempt by the WSM to be a mass organisation was doomed to failure from the start and, indeed, its many and varied attempts at creating networks which had Anarchist principles baked into their DNA suffered – and will always suffer – the same fate.

Chekov's proposal actually went some way towards meeting the majority's desire for activity while setting it upon a more realistic and potentially constructive foundation. Naturally, it was expected to be controversial, though we had thought that there was a fair chance that the more activist core would be interested, as indeed some were. But, as it happened, the key thinkers of the majority (Andrew, Aileen) came out against it. It was seen by them as a big step away from the WSM's traditional approach.

In some ways it was, particularly in terms of language. It also represented a significant change in that it proposed setting up a mass type organisation rather than simply attempting to create a base in the unions. But at a more fundamental level it aimed at keeping the core of Bakuninism in its separation of role between the WSM (which would revert to a very specific political organi-

intervention amongst other left forces. The prospect of developing a base played absolutely no role in any of our other campaigns, a major reason why those campaigns achieved remarkably little.

Capitalising upon campaign work required an organisation that people could have signed up to if they were broadly supportive of our politics but were not Anarchist militants, a sort of community syndicalism.

The proposal excited some interest but it was a big change and it would have required a high degree of unity for us pursue it properly. There are some policies that can get by with a slim majority, but this wasn't one of them. As it happened, it provoked a good deal of skepticism, from Alan on the grounds that it ditched socialist vocabulary and from a fair few others on the grounds that it in effect was creating a hierarchical organisation with a centralised leadership. There had already been mutterings about the spectre of Bolshevism during the membership debate and over various tweaks to the Delegate Council structure (see below); the prospect of centralist organisation is one of the reliable Anarchist bogeymen that is liable to cripple any initiative.

The major fissure over the proposal revolved around competing visions of the role of the Anarchist organisation. In effect, we concluded that despite nominal adherence to Platformism the majority were most interested in a non-electoral radical activist organisation and saw the WSM as being a vehicle for this. We thought it ran counter to Bakuninist strategy of retaining a limited and very specialised role for, as it is called in the trade, the specific political organisation as compared to that of the mass organisation. But there was something to the critique that unions, given the development of Western capitalism since the 1870s, might not be able to cut it as the traditional mass vehicle of choice. In the absence of a mass organisation the WSM had slipped into trying to being one, only it was very, very bad at it, especially since it was the manifestation of an unconscious shift in strategy with an was an old-school orthodox minority who were pulling in the opposite direction.

vergence between the old and the new is yet another simplification: the dreadlocks versus the cloth cap so to speak. But as usual, the simplification contains a truth and one which, over time, assumed a degree of importance.

The cliché of the hippy protestor is a staple of the right. While it is an unfair description of most of their targets, who are normally fairly culturally mainstream, there is some truth to it with regard to the libertarian left. This separates the libertarian left from the population at large in ways that it ostensibly shouldn't but nevertheless most certainly does. Radical activists are already distant enough from the population by virtue of their political ideas that any other differences exponentially increase the difficulty of influencing them. This isn't to say that many libertarian activists weren't insightful and they certainly weren't lacking in energy. But they were fundamentally uninterested in winning over the population to radical left-wing ideas; hence the complete lack of interest in how they presented themselves in public or in how their actions would be perceived. Political activism was an expression of moral outrage, not an attempt to effect structural change.

The WSM's ambition was to harness that moral outrage, which, after all, it shared, towards the pursuit of a more a political strategy. To accomplish that it had to ally itself with the fairly amorphous self-described libertarians.

Perhaps on a par with there being a conscious orientation towards the unorganised libertarian left, ongoing co-operation was pursued because it could as much as because it should. The choices available to a small Anarchist organisation are limited.

At the time, the USA was gearing up to invade Iraq, and the Irish state gave the US military the use of Shannon Airport as a transit facility, an issue that could hardly be ignored. There was some debate within the WSM about the degree to which it should focus on working with the Trotskyist led Irish Anti-War Movement or the much smaller but more libertarian inclined networks. The de facto decision was to focus on the latter.

The same pattern reoccurred over the next few years. The Grassroots Network, as the broad libertarian milieu came to be called, organised protests at Shannon and against the EU on May Day 2004.

The payoff for the WSM came after the May Day protests, which were and are the biggest explicitly libertarian protests ever held in Ireland. Whereas prior to that, we had been stuck on about 12 members, over the next four years it shot up, first to twenty, then to thirty, forty and eventually over eighty members were on the books and it looked like we had hurdled an important stumbling block. The palpable increase in success lent the anti-globalisation strategy credibility. It felt as if the organisation was at last going places.

A few members, most notably Gregor Kerr and Alan MacSimoin, were involved in union work but this work was for the most part carried out in an individual capacity rather than being under the direction of the WSM. For example, I helped organise many of my colleagues into SIPTU and we sorted out some low-level disagreements relating to working conditions, the sort of work a shopsteward would do. Such work provides some space for raising political consciousness, but it is limited, especially given it was a service providing NGO where the inherent class struggle was fairly low. Any union work I had engaged in, from organising the couriers to simply giving advice to third parties was carried out separately from the WSM; it was personal, not organisational. Partly this was a result of the small and disorganised nature of the workforce which meant that plugging into the wider union movement was difficult (an ATGWU official once informed me that they had no interest in recruiting us!). Partly it reflected that there wasn't a whole lot of use for the WSM's input.

Even Gregor and Alan's input at WSM's meeting regarding their activity in the unions was confined to reporting back on their activity. There simply wasn't a lot for the rest of the membership to do which would be of use to them. Of course, on occasion some bigger issue would blow up, such as the strike of Irish Ferries workers in

the challenge posed by the question: it's all very well criticising, but what is your alternative?

Andrew was correct in thinking that the difficulties in pursuing the old-school union policy as taken from The Platform were significant, although it was more of an intuitive understanding than a rationally detailed position; it was nevertheless a feeling that was common to a considerable number of members. Chekov aimed to provide a third-way that avoided the sub-culturism that the orientation towards libertarian radicals brought and the Sisyphus-like fate of concentrating solely on the unions. In effect he proposed creating a mass, non-electoral party that would be set up and initially run by the WSM. A major part of it was the modernisation of the use of language (e.g. not to bother mentioning communism), but the basic politics of democracy and equality would remain. The other major facet was a complete rejection of orienting towards the anti-globablisation milieu. He aimed it at regular Joes and thought that it was important not to increase the already considerable distance between us and them by imposing unnecessary cultural barriers between us.

The most important factor, however, behind the proposal was the recognition that we were completely unable to capitalise on any work done in campaigns. We had no ratcheting effect, no cumulative benefit from the hours poured into protesting against Shell, racism, war, the banks, or even on foot of our small but solid work in the Bin Tax campaign because there was no institutional basis with which we could organise whatever level of goodwill we had engendered along the way. Such an oversight would have been understandable if we had held to an idealist notion that the population would take care of creating such an organisation, but in fact we just didn't discuss the problem at all, which indicates the degree of political reflection in the organisation at the time. And it should be remembered that the Bin Tax campaign was perhaps the high point of our competence both in terms of being able to make an impact on members of the public and with regard to the coherence of our

have any significant intellectual accomplishments that we could point to. We didn't have any electoral profile that would put us on the map. If we weren't to lose out to other radical strands there had to be some way of alerting the public to our existence and the occasional bout of handbags filled that gap. In addition, by this point there was a culture of doing stuff, which was healthy to an extent, but which had become a disease which inhibited political reflection.

But there was a further theoretical reason that underlay the differing strategic directions. The minority of go-slowers did not think there was the remotest possibility of socialist revolution in the short-term. Insofar as there could be a breakdown in capitalism and the authority of the state, the likely result would be chaos followed by right-wing nationalist reaction. Socialist ideas just did not have a grip on much of the population.

The majority, as ever with Andrew as their most vocal spokesperson, but also including other thoughtful contributors such as Paul Bowman, held that there was the possibility of rupturing with capitalism and the state and a libertarian socialist society emerging, Durruti-like, from the ashes.

This was a major gulf indeed. Because if revolution is immediately possible, then any event could kick it off and if you miss that event you could have missed a very brief and rare window of opportunity. The example of May 1968 and how it caught the left by surprise was invoked. This was the underlying reason for the interest in the anti-capitalist demonstrations of May 2010; what if they were the start of something big? On the other hand, if you think that not only is the prospect of socialist revolution remote but that it would actually be counter-productive for socialism if a collapse occurred, you couldn't help but see those same demonstrations as, at best, a bit of a waste of time.

The third round of intense debate arose from a proposal of Chekov's, outlined in a document called "Breaking the Anchor". It arose from the debates surrounding the anti-capitalist protests and

2005, but in essence they weren't any different from any other sort of mass demonstration.

During this period, we not only failed to embed ourselves in the union organisation, we failed to try: our efforts were confined to, at best, isolated organising and, at worst, total neglect of even the most basic organising requirement: that of securing a base in workplaces. Larger forces than mere incompetence were at work of course. The drive to recruiting from the anti-globalisation milieu resulted in those recruits being primarily students or young people working in fairly casual jobs. We probably couldn't have established much of a base if we had tried, but the lack of systematic effort ensured we didn't have the scantest of influence, apart from, again a half-dozen isolated members whose very isolation was in itself very limiting. It was more or the less the opposite of what Platformist doctrine mandated.

Ploughing the union furrow was evidently going to be a long, hard slog and even then we would require numbers to make an impact. A solid grassroots base around four or five people isn't going to amount to much even if they are the reincarnation of Jim Larkin himself. We needed to recruit.

The sentiment was widespread and the anti-globablisation movement and the colleges provided fertile territory. Apart from the unions, other areas we were involved in during this period were various referendum campaigns against restrictions on citizenship and abortion, anti-war (2002–2003), the Bin Tax (2001–2003), the summit May Day protests (2004), Shell to Sea (2005 onwards); indymedia (2002–2008); the Social Solidarity Network and the 1% Network (both of which were reincarnations of the networks that we co-operated with in the anti-war and May Day periods).

In addition there was an inexhaustible supply of minor protests attendance at which is the dreary fate of the left-wing activist. The sheer number of coalition networks involving non-WSM libertarians was notable: The Grassroots Network Against War, The Dublin Grassroots Network, the Social Solidarity Network, and the 1% Net-

work spring to mind. There were also other projects in which members were involved, e.g. Seomra Spraoi, a libertarian social pace. Mostly they flared up and faded away only to be resurrected under a different name and – I am quite convinced – with the belief by their advocates that each version was a genuinely new phenomenon. At first, this was a plausible stance, but by the fourth or fifth iteration it was looking a bit threadbare, especially when Alan MacSimoin spared no blushes in pointing it out. Importantly, most of these activities were oriented around other political, usually non-Leninist, activists. They didn't involve winning public support at all.

The magnetic attraction to networking with fellow libertarians was coupled with an insatiable desire for stunts. Direct Action is one of the holy tenets of Anarchism and the focus on it as a methodology is a direct consequence of Bakunin's economic strategy. Workers need to learn to act for themselves if they are to emancipate themselves and they can best act for themselves in economic conflict with the bosses since that is where the material basis for the class struggle lies. Political action, i.e. electoralism, is antithetical to that. As with so much of Anarchism, Bakunin's insights were considerable but by the 21st century the idea had degenerated into a parody. The most minor stunt (holding a banner on the roof of Shell's headquarters; chaining oneself to a stairs in a government ministry) was interpreted as direct action. Moreover, the desire to win popular support tends to be obviated by the focus on direct action which even tends to disregard the former. Anarchists have traditionally been contemptuous of electoralism, the conventional measure of public opinion because the spirited minority is of more importance than the passive majority.

Over the decade Anarchists were involved in a variety of protests that involved confrontation with the police: Reclaim the Streets, trespassing at Shannon airport, the MayDay 2004 protests, Shell to Sea demonstrations in Rossport, County Mayo. There was an inarticulate desire to be aggressive and to push boundaries, but

the mark. There was plenty of work to be done in establishing a base so that we would be in a position to take advantage of future class struggles in a way that we transparently weren't capable of at that point. It just wasn't very high-profile work. It shunned media stunts like scuffling with the police or chaining oneself to the stairs in a company headquarters. On the flip side, we considered the majority's interest in libertarian networks, particularly in the unions to be absurd. Any libertarians of any use who were union members were likely to be in the WSM. Who were the ones that weren't? Furthermore, we couldn't see the point of the desire to protest, apart from it being a sort of howl of moral outrage. But that is never enough of a reason for a political organisation; there are, after all, an indefinite number of things to be outraged about. The ones we choose to protest about or organise around should relate in some way to our political vision and concrete strategy or else they just sink into oblivion. In short, if we were condemned for actionless waiting, we had no qualms about criticising in return their mania for action.

One of the key problems, as the minority saw it, was the pressure to constantly be doing something. There was always a demonstration around the corner. There was pressure to respond to the SWP's latest action; to hook up with Eirigi on some stunt; to protest the ICTU leadership's latest "sellout", to support Shell to Sea or Seomra Spraoi, all of which had a very unclear connection with building Anarchism. Whereas in previous years we had gone along with it, with a greater or lesser degree of grumbling, by 2010 the grumblings were getting louder and more coherent with Gavin, Chekov and myself becoming vocal on a consistent basis. Alan was no longer so isolated but the perception of the critics as spoilers continued. There is only so much dissonance an organisation can take and the smaller the organisation the lower that threshold is.

That desire for action was not without reason however. As an organisation, the WSM depended on it for its profile. We didn't

Alan, Gavin, and myself did repeatedly suggest a long-term focus on winning a base in the unions as an alternative, taking a 15 year period as the minimum necessary to succeed. It is hard to emphasise the degree to which that idea fell flat. I doubt many people even noticed it as a choice. Chekov meanwhile was working out, in discussion with others (myself included) a proposal for a political organisation with much looser criteria than the WSM but which would be substantially anti-statist. More on which below.

The old-school syndicalism we had mooted had garnered very little traction, possibly because we were pitching it at a very long-term level, thereby implying that there wasn't much influence that we could have in the short-term. As a matter of fact, we were very pessimistic about our capacity to influence events in the short term; it was the reason we figured we needed to establish a long-term base in the unions.

We felt that criticising the union leadership or putting up posters calling for a general strike, which had been the pattern of our organisational intervention in the trade unions was pointless in and of itself. Radicalism only becomes meaningful if it reflects a real-world tendency beyond the rarefied numbers of the libertarian left. Following Alan MacSimoin, we certainly didn't think that the union base was radical nor that the union leadership were selling them out. A union leadership reflects, in a general way, the opinions of the base, most of whom are, after all, voters for right-wing political parties. If anything, the leadership is substantially to the left of the base and if by some miracle they adopted Anarchist policies they would soon find themselves out of a job. While criticism of the leadership is fair enough, it's very much a secondary consideration to influencing that base.

Andrew characterised this view as spontaneism as it depended on, as he saw it, the spontaneous trajectory of the class struggle for its effect. To an extent this was accurate; we didn't think we could short-circuit that process, but his interpretation that the logical policy to flow from that analysis was actionless waiting was wide of

in reality it tended to be fairly innocuous, with only the protests in Mayo achieving any notable level of violence. In general, the State completely had the measure of the direct actionists and their isolation from the population rendered them impotent in a way that even the much more serious levels of street violence exhibited by, say, northern republicans didn't. What was notably absent from our aims in of these campaigns was the desire to win over large numbers of people, or at least the willingness to do the type types of things that might make such an aim remotely likely. There was an undercurrent of subsitutionism which only Alan objected to in any systematic way.

While I hadn't been averse to the turn to the anti-globalisation movement I hadn't been enthusiastic about it either, seeing it as a necessary, if temporary, tactic. Since we were very small it seemed to make sense to ally with those who were closest to us. At the time the majority of the organisation, with possibly the sole but definite exception of Alan MacSimoin, considered those closest to us to be the consciously anti-Leninist people who were favourably disposed to direct action. Of course there was a spectrum of opinion ranging from enthusiastic embrace of the broader libertarian milieu (or "Grassroots", as we called them) to a skeptical acceptance of the need to grow. Everyone else accepted the milieu's libertarian credentials as signifying a fair degree of similarity in political outlook, although some of us, at least, hadn't bothered to actually examine them in any detail.

I like to think it was my rational assessment of the political gulf between us (socialist Anarchists) and the libertarians that pushed me back towards the advocating a syndicalist (i.e. base trade unionist) strategy. Initially, however, it was probably more cultural distance and direct experience of the limitations, indeed incompetence, of the libertarians that developed my skepticism. Whatever the faults of the WSM, they are the gold standard of competence on the libertarian left in Ireland. To suffer through a Grassroots Network meeting was penance indeed in comparison

to the lucidity of debating inside the WSM. In the former, Quaker consensus decision making was the default mode; disciplined agenda setting and speaking were rare; the capacity to disagree strongly was inherently limited because it would lead to people getting offended, wandering off and never being seen again. In my first years in the organisation, the WSM's relative level of theoretical unity meant there could be quite substantial internal disagreement without fear of splitting because one's opponents might get upset. Over time, however, that changed, as I shall outline below.

The limitations of the libertarian method of organising was graphically demonstrated by the decline of Irish Indymedia, which had been a pioneer of user-generated content on the internet. For a few years it was the place to go for the Irish left but it was limited by its structure and some procedural rules which it had inherited when adopting the global brand. WSM members were involved from about 2002 on, in an individual capacity, and they tended to be the foremost advocates of structures which would, it was hoped, consolidate the site and enable to become much more popular.

Indymedia had a certain glorious chaos about it at that point and the constant encroachment of structure was viewed by some as incipient bureaucratization. Whatever about the correctness of that assessment (and of course I think it is a stupid assessment), the organisation was unable to resolve the issue. The Quaker consensus method is a boon to the status quo, transmuting every attempt at change into a trial by torture. But more than that, the toleration for low quality, hysterical ranting, not to mention the facilitation of the ill-intentioned and the genuinely mentally ill ensured that the site soon plateaued. Amongst the libertarian-left, such toleration was by no means confined to indymedia. What is striking in retrospect is the degree to which many radicals are happy to be protesters and outsiders rather than part of a long-term counter-project. It is as if the image of radicalism outweighs the substance

passed, comfortably, despite the increasingly vocal objections of the minority.

About 200 people showed up at the demonstration, which was called in the name of the WSM and Seomra Spraoi. The Guards, unusually and bizarrely, tried to prevent the march from using the road, which led to some innocuous scuffles and some minor publicity which ensured a third demonstration would take place the following week.

At this point, a major internal debate arose. The minority thought it an utter waste of time: it was isolationist: the only people who partook in it were dissident republicans and libertarian sympathisers, possibly the two groups in Ireland least likely to engender a positive reaction from the public. And insofar as the public even noticed its existence we thought it likely to alienate them; the only way it could gain publicity was through scuffling with the Guards. And that was hardly an end in itself. In fact there was no clear goal at all.

The majority were positive about the protests. They found them energising and felt the people they were close to in the libertarian circle did too. They were also interested in working with Eirigi, a split from Sinn Fein, on similar demonstrations. The prospect of such events becoming the focus of WSM activity was the ultimate nightmare for the minority.

The debate went on for a few weeks, with Andrew again being the leading advocate of organising the radicals, though others such as Grainne Griffin and Mark Malone also pitched in to lend support. This time Chekov Feeney was his primary opponent, with others such as Gavin Mendel-Gleason and that perennial purveyor of orthodoxy, Alan MacSimoin, expressing severe skepticism. For a seemingly innocuous issue, the debate was quite intense. It was the manifestation of the latent differences that had been brewing for years: to orient towards the radicals or to the masses.

A recurring criticism of the skeptics was that we articulated was no alternative. We were seen as naysayers more than anything.

Although the WSM had voted to set up a network with other libertarians (subsequently called the Social Solidarity Network), it turned out to be the dismal failure that its critics had predicted. After some dithering we killed it. I was reasonably satisfied because for once we had a political discussion on not advancing with a project rather than the usual policy of letting it drift along into oblivion. I was surprised therefore when the idea of a network was resurrected a couple of months later.

The immediate reason was a reaction to some shenanigans by the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party. In May 2010 they attempted to "storm the Dail", i.e. to charge past the policeman at the gates and with the probable intention of staging a sit-down protest. The Guards whacked a few of them on the head and the incident got a fair amount of publicity in the media.

So far, so ordinary. The SWP periodically engage in such stunts and I gave it no more thought than anything else on the news. Andrew was very excited by it though and pushed for us to demonstrate the following week both on an anti-capitalist basis and against police brutality.

Specifically, and somewhat unusually, he proposed a separate demonstration to the one the SWP were going to organise. It was novel because in the past when we had pushed for separate libertarian organised demonstrations it was usually when we were pushing the envelope on an issue, such as with the anti-war demonstrations in Shannon in 2003. Generally we didn't attempt to usurp other organisations' demonstrations. If others were at the forefront of some initiative we always partook in their event rather than organising a separate one. The idea on this occasion was to position the organisation as a radical alternative to the SWP and it seemed to some of us that the proponents were concerned – ludicrously over-concerned – about the prospect of them assuming the mantle of being the most militant opponents of the economic austerity programme. In fact it had the air of the cliched Trotskyist obsession with being an alternative leadership. The proposal

of socialism in terms of personal allegiance. Since Indymedia was one of the better of the libertarian influenced projects its failure portended ill for the tendency's ability to actually create a viable challenge to capitalism.

The WSM had 12 members in 2002 and maybe 15 by May Day 2004. Not much different than what it had had in 1997 or 1987 for that matter. After 2004, it benefitted from the influx of a lot of younger members and by 2005 those of us who had been putting in 6 evenings a week began to take our foot off the pedal. Partially this arose from tiredness (and illness for that matter): the pace between 2002 and May Day 2004 was very intense. Partially it was a desire to give room for the new members to organise. Here the Anarchist horror of hierarchy proved to be a weakness. It is doubtful that a single member who joined after 2004 was assessed on their knowledge of Anarchism and of the WSM in particular. Indeed, I hadn't been assessed myself back in 2002 so that should have been a red flag. As it happens I was a fully paid up member of the Platformist orthodoxy and insofar as I considered the matter, which, embarrassingly, occurred only after the horse had bolted, assumed that other prospective members were too.

I can only assume that others thought similarly. In any case, it was a shocking case of the sentries falling asleep at the gate. The WSM was never intended to be a mass party, where vague support for the organisation was sufficient to be signed up. It was an organisation of Anarchist militants and its effectiveness depended on coherency. By 2009 it was apparent that the coherency was sorely lacking. The Bakuninist vision had been that the political organisation would be composed of an active, knowledgeable cadre but that the engine of change depended on the mass organisations. That was where the real action should be and where the supportive but not cadre people should go.

The organisation gained knowledgeable members to be sure, people who had a solid grasp of libertarian socialist basics. But it also gained many members, who however hard-working and

good-hearted they undoubtedly were, were not Platformist, perhaps not even socialist: one member notoriously snorted "We're socialists?" at a branch meeting. The constant round of political activism (protests, leafletting, attendance at libertarian meetings) and the culture of not discussing political fundamentals – hardly necessary since everyone was assumed to be an Anarchist! – hid the reality for a time.

Reality always bites however. The unwillingness of the majority to turn away from protest activism and their orientation to the non-WSM libertarians and the failure to put the increased numbers gained from the post May Day influx to classic Platformist use was a source of unease amongst the minority who had gone along, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, with the anti-globalisation strategy. Unsurprisingly, the economic crash of 2008 brought the divergence to the fore and it played out over a couple of years. "Majority" and "minority", I should note, are shorthand for the two most clearly expressed tendencies which had, for the most part, mutually exclusive strategic outlooks. In fact, neither current was formally organised and both had roughly similar numbers of adherents, with most members not consciously identifying as either. I use the designation "majority" and "minority" because there was a consistent pattern of the pro-activist (or more militant) wing winning a majority for their approach. Given the absence of a formal leadership the fundamental divergence was not explicitly expressed by the membership choosing one or other tendency as a political leadership. The majority's pro-activist orientation did, however, chime well with the mood of most members.

An early manifestation of the dichotomous strategies revolved around a proposal in Spring of 2009 to create a libertarian network involving ourselves, the Revolutionary Anarchist-Feminist Group, Seomra Spraoi and others, which eventually became a reality later in the year as the Social Solidarity Network. Some of us opposed the idea on two grounds: firstly, these other groups were a good deal more marginal than even the WSM and our joint forces didn't

tionals on whatever particular members found interesting. Obviously this was not without value in broadening our horizons, but given the dubious grasp of anarchist fundamentals amongst a good deal of the membership, it wasn't building upon a solid foundation.

The issue over membership illuminated the divisions on the broader question of the role of the organisation itself: the minority thought that, despite calling itself Platformist, the WSM in reality become a radical activist group rather than an Anarchist one; the majority rejected that criticism and argued that a tighter recruitment policy would be return to the stagnation of the 1990s. There was probably an element of truth in that, but there didn't seem to be much point to an Anarchist political organisation that was politically incoherent or directed towards such a marginal layer of Irish society as the milieu of libertarian activists. In addition I had zero patience for the framing of the issue as one of hierarchical power-relations between recruiter and the candidate: it was absurd to take Anarchism in such a direction: I saw Anarchism as an anti-state version of socialism that emphasised economic rather than political struggle, not as an all-encompassing anti-hierarchical philosophy. Previously I has assumed that such views were the provenance of liberal rather than socialist Anarchists but the vehemence with which that view was advanced raised doubts not only about the level of commonality of our understanding of Anarchism but also about the utility of Anarchism as a political ideology itself. Clearly Anarchism throughout its history has been prone to an individualist strain and it began to seem that the WSM's history and nominal adherence to socialism meant less in reality than it did on paper. The proposal eventually passed narrowly, but at the expense of mutual trust and it had been undermined in substance. My own confidence in the good sense of the membership was weakened.

That debate was more vigorous and illuminating of the deep differences than any that had occurred over the previous five years, but it was soon followed by an equally important one.

It became apparent, however, that Andrew and Aileen had concerns that I would vet people in such a way that it would tilt the balance of members towards a more old-fashioned interpretation of Platformism, something closer to Alan's conception. As it happened, the political level in the recruitment document, which I had to follow, was pitched low enough that it shouldn't have been a concern but I was determined to explain the core Platformist strategy of being outward looking and oriented towards mass work rather than towards an Anarchist subculture. I also almost always invited another colleague along to partake in these discussions, partially as a way of policing me, partially as a way of training them up in the art of one-to-one political conversation.

In the interests of clarification I proposed to national conference that the secretary and two other members would be responsible for assessing whether prospective members met the criteria for joining. This provoked a lot of controversy, the crux of which revolved around the idea that Anarchists could sit in judgment over another person's politics and refuse them membership. The opponents of the policy were unhappy with it for a number of reasons: they thought the recruitment process was more or less fine and that any difficulties could be rectified by educational meetings afterwards. They favoured a process which didn't rely on the subjective judgments of a few or even one individual. They were concerned it would frighten off people from libertarian circles who would see it as anti-Anarchist and bureaucratic to have someone being able to sit in judgment on their politics.

A further problem was the haphazard nature of our internal educational meetings. There was no systematic inculcation of basic anarchist doctrine; again the assumption was that the membership was familiar with that and indeed in any new group of recruits there were always some who were extremely well versed. But there were others who were not and there wasn't any expectation that they would become so. It was left entirely up to them to whether that occurred or not. Instead there was a tendency to have educa-

bring much to the table that was of value in building either a working class resistance or a libertarian pole. A grouping of such weak forces signified nothing other than the illusion of moving forward.

The debates that were last heard around the time when the anti-globalisation movement was first getting off the ground returned. The minority thought there was little advantage to be had by expending effort in creating a purely libertarian pole; we wanted to engage directly in mass work. Resources and time are limited, especially for a small organisation. There is a social opportunity cost for political action: effort directed at other libertarians is effort not directed at co-operating with other left forces or in creating a mass base. Of course, in theory they are not mutually incompatible but in practice they are, because of that resource problem.

Secondly, we had been through the experience of libertarian networks a few times by that stage and were utterly skeptical of that strategy's capability of delivering results in terms of anything really. Networks are not well suited to achieving medium-term political aims. They are okay for organising a protest against the G8 or for ad hoc activity on a fairly constrained issue. Their capacity for political discussion tends to be low, their level of organisational structure even lower and their ability to have a sustained impact barely exists. Without an institutional basis the network has no staying power but if it has an institutional basis it is no longer a network but is instead an organisation and one which has to face all the problems that any organisation faces (the basis of unity, policy, accountability, decision making etc). Alan MacSimoin characterised the attempts to forge such networks as a poor imitation of the worst end of Trotskyism, i.e. the SWP, which is notorious for creating and recreating ostensibly independent fronts. To be compared to the Trotskyists is almost the worst insult to throw at Anarchists and the criticism went down poorly but given the pseudo-nature of the Social Solidarity Network it was a barb that hurt because it was accurate.

At this point, Alan was assuming the role of Cassandra within the organisation, leading to frustration for both himself and the leading figures of the majority. Long the voice – the strident voice – of Platformist orthodoxy, not to mention of disdain for the alternative subcultures that orbit Anarchism, Alan developed a reputation for negativity; people complained that he was great at telling you what not to do. Negativity saps enthusiasm. Moreover, he was direct and he upset people who perceived his attitude as personally antagonistic. On occasion he probably did go too far but for the most part his interventions were remarkably political. At a meeting he would ask: what is the aim of such an initiative?; how did it fit with our overall strategy of promoting Anarchism? and a myriad of other questions that if answered, even considered, would have been extremely useful. Still, however reasonable such questions are in themselves, nobody particularly likes being on the receiving end of them, especially if you know that the questioner is hostile to your proposal. Alan developed a reputation for being a bruiser and the more he was perceived as such the more his political questions were side-stepped and his objections treated as a case of him being personally obstreperous.

In retrospect, I am of the view that however direct Alan's debating style was, he focused on political questions and that, ironically enough, his opponents tended to personalise the issue by focusing on his tone. Be that as it may, the underlying differences in strategic conception in the organisation were beginning to take a more explicit form.

Whereas the previous period of debate that resulted in the WSM's involvement in the anti-globalisation movement were resolved with the minority substantially on board, from this point on, the minority were very unhappy and increasingly vocal. Alan may have been the incarnation of skepticism from the start, but others, such as myself, had grown to be entirely pessimistic about the prospect of bringing the wider libertarian milieu over to socialism at all. We regarded them as radical liberals who one

could co-operate with to be sure, but who merited no special treatment, unless it was special treatment of the negative sort. The category of self-described Anarchist was too vague to be useful in tallying up who was a useful ally and who was not. Such a view was not popular at a time when the WSM was moving in the exact opposite direction. The degree to which the liberal conception of Anarchism had affected the WSM was apparent in the Social Solidarity Network. Despite it being our initiative, we had no idea of what we wanted to achieve with it and brought no substantive proposals to any of its meetings. A simple explanation may be that we were simply idiots who hadn't thought of it, but I think the more likely one is that there was a culture of not wanting to pre-empt meetings or be seen to foist policy on networks or campaigns that we were involved in for fear of being hierarchical.

2010 was a crux year in which three major debates clarified the long developing fault lines. The first revolved around the recruitment process. It was clear from some members' surprise at the notion that we were socialists and supportive of the labour movement that there was an issue. The lack of rigour in recruitment was also evident in the establishment of a Belfast branch that had more or less no understanding of our ostensible Platformist basis. Our recruitment process had lost its political content and had become a formulaic fulfilment of the requirement to attend three meetings and agreeing to pay subscriptions. If you agreed to do that it was assumed you agreed with our politics, but that was not actually checked. In fact, I suspect having such a discussion with some members would have led to embarrassment in that they would have been perceived it as a hierarchical move.

As secretary I initiated a process in Dublin of meeting with members before allowing them to attend branch meetings to explain our politics and to gauge their understanding and adherence to them. It was pitched at a very simple level; there is limit to how much information can be absorbed in one meeting, even a three hour one. But it was a start.