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## Points of Unity

Workers Solidarity Movement

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18 May 2006

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We cannot solve a problem with the same level of thinking which produced it. The only adequate solution is to fundamentally transform our societies, re-writing its basic driving forces, and the way we relate to one another. Ecological harmony and sustainability must become the new 'bottom-line'. This is only possible within the direct democratic, co-operative, rational, framework of libertarian socialism.

Some respond to this crisis by blaming technology and large-scale settlements themselves, advocating a return to a much simpler time, often a life within small bands of hunter gatherers. We reject that conclusion both because it is not feasible to return over 7 billion humans to such an existence and because we believe it is possible and preferable to live in a mass, technological, society which is both free and in harmony with the rest of nature, albeit one which would be practically unrecognisable from today.

Neither technology nor human nature are the critical issue. We, of course, recognise the great harm caused by technologies used inappropriately (such as supercomputers used to game the stock market), or technologies which are definite products of a society based on greed, warfare, and control (such as Facebook, the stealth bomber, and tear gas). However, we also recognise the enormous liberatory potential of technology, much of which has been actualised already even within an unfree world (Wikipedia, anaesthetic, prosthetic limbs, central heating). Automation is a clear illustration of these two possibilities. Under capitalism and the state it will destroy jobs, sharpen war, and bolster repression. Under anarchism, it could free us from toil to pursue our highest natures. The choice is ours.

We emphasise that humans are not the centre of the universe, the only species which counts. Humans should use our uniquely advanced capacity to reason, co-operate, and work for an altruistic purpose, to be stewards of planet Earth for the sake of all species, rather than irresponsibly plundering and vandalising the home we share.

## 9 - Ecology and Technology

*'9. Revolution must aim to bring human society into harmony with the rest of nature, for our own basic quality of life and for the sake of other species. This aim is not fundamentally opposed to technological development or mass society, which are always expressions of the current social system. Rather, we strive for a libertarian, ecological, technology.'*

When we consider the billions of barren, lifeless, planets in our universe, it is a stark reminder of how vital the physical environment is to the existence and flourishing of life. The proper balance and functioning of the Earth's climate and ecosystems is the basis of everything good on our planet – access to food, water, tolerable temperature, and shelter from extreme weather.

In recent decades, humans have seriously begun to unravel that crucial balance and functioning, threatening irreversible, catastrophic, damage to both our own societies and to the livelihoods of other species. The threat to humanity is not an abrupt 'bullet-to-the-head' scenario where we quickly go extinct, but a long, slow, painful, decline into barbarism. The primary cause is human-caused climate change. There is a small, closing, window of opportunity to halt and reverse this process, which urgently calls us all to action, action which will involve substantial change both at the highest institutional levels and in our day-to-day lives.

However, we do not accept that this destruction is a 'natural', inevitable, fact of Homo sapiens. Rather, it is the predictable outcome of an irrational social system governed by a small minority, which demands infinite material growth, while having no method of accounting for ecological costs. That system is capitalism, and the state as its sibling institution has been equally incapable of executing the changes necessary to restore balance.

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James Connolly are well known radical elements within the anti-colonial struggle here. But there are others, as far back as 1798 there were organised groups within the anti-colonial movement that promoted a radical, levelling democracy not just a change of rulers. There were also reactionary elements who wanted a 'free' Ireland to have its own colonies or who supported the slave trade or otherwise advanced white supremacist positions. Nationalism insists on blending all such elements together into a single movement and history in which being Irish erases the difference between radicals and reactionaries of the past and present.

We stand in solidarity with movements against colonialism but reject that nationalist project that seeks to erase differences within those movements in the name of unity. Instead we focus our solidarity on radical anti-colonial movements and tendencies in particular those that include elements strongly compatible with anarchism. In the last couple of decades this is why we had a particular focus on Chiapas and Rojava where unconventional national liberation movements had developed an anti-authoritarian and in some respects anti-nationalist project being implemented on a mass basis. Both cases have strong elements of bottom-up decision making structures based on community assemblies.

There haven't been equivalent movements in radical Irish nationalism which instead has tended to focus on the use of armed struggle rather than grassroots decision making structures. Which is not to say such elements have not semi-spontaneously appeared, Free Derry of 1969-72 and the workplace occupations of the 1919-21 war both represented tendencies that went well outside the common terrain of militant nationalism. The task of anarchists is to discover, encourage and help build such tendencies within anti-colonial movements rather than simply lining up behind the leadership of such movements.

Equally we reject the liberal distortion of these ideas, unfortunately also referred to as 'intersectionality', which advocates for fairer treatment of all groups while under the tyranny of capitalism and the state. It's the flipside of the above. Attempting to achieve our freedom by picking away at issues without tying that into a broader project of replacing the economic and political system as a whole will fail. Capitalism and the state function to support and spread all forms of oppression worldwide, keeping us divided, busy, brainwashed, and if it comes to it, incarcerated.

The model of '*bring capitalism down, and the rest will come down with it*' is overly simplistic. Even in the Spanish Revolution, sexism was rife among anarchists and women were compelled to organise themselves separately to advance their rights in the *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women). In Rojava today, this mistake has been learned from and gender liberation is at the heart of the revolution. Considering all of the above, it's clear that we can't wait until '*after the Revolution*' to root out these oppressions or even for them to magically disappear by themselves, they must be worn away constantly in the present. A revolutionary movement which makes these affronts to humanity a low priority is not so revolutionary. The groundwork must be put in today, and after all revolution is a continuous process, to free the whole person.

## 8 - Imperialism

*'8. We oppose imperialism but put forward anarchism as an alternative goal to nationalism. We defend grassroots anti-imperialist movements while arguing for an anarchist rather than nationalist strategy.'*

Many places, including Ireland have a history of being occupied by colonial powers and anti-colonial struggles that included a radical element. For instance the role of the Irish Citizen Army, initially set up to protect striking workers from the police, along with

The WSM regularly discusses, debates and decides on what our collective political approach is. All members take part in this process and the results are preserved in the position papers you will find linked to below. These papers define our collective approach, we don't require that every member agree with every point in them but they do describe the politics the WSM will implement.

All members broadly agree with points 1 to 9 below which outline the core of our collective view of anarchism.

1. Anarchism will be created by the class struggle between the vast majority of society (the working class) and the tiny minority that currently rule. A successful revolution will require that anarchist ideas become the leading ideas within the working class. This will not happen spontaneously. Our role is to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas or, as it is sometimes expressed, to become a "leadership of ideas".
2. We reject the idea that society can be changed through 'good people' gaining control of the power structures. This means we reject both the electoral strategy of the social democratic and green parties and the 'revolutionary' strategy of the various left groups. Instead we advocate for direct, participatory, democratic institutions which will make the state obsolete.
3. We identify ourselves as anarchists and with the "platformist", anarchist-communist or especifista tradition of anarchism. We broadly identify with the theoretical base of this tradition and the organisational practice it argues for, but not necessarily everything else it has done or said, so it is a starting point for our politics and not an end point.
4. The core ideas of this tradition that we identify with are the need for anarchist political organisations that seek to develop:
  - Theoretical Unity

- Tactical Unity
- Collective Action and Discipline
- Federalism

5. A major focus of our activity is our work within the economic organisations of the working class (labour organisations, trade unions, syndicates) where this is a possibility. We therefore reject views that dismiss activity in the unions because as members of the working class it is only natural that we should also be members of these mass organisations. Within them we fight for the democratic structures typical of anarcho-syndicalist unions like the 1930's CNT. However, the unions no matter how revolutionary cannot replace the need for anarchist political organisation(s).
6. We also see it as vital to work in struggles that happen outside the unions and the workplace. These include struggles against particular oppressions, imperialism and indeed the struggles of the working class for a decent place and environment in which to live. Our general approach to these, like our approach to the unions, is to involve ourselves with mass movements and within these movements, in order to promote anarchist methods of organisation involving direct democracy and direct action.
7. We actively oppose all manifestations of prejudice within the workers' movement and society in general and we work alongside those struggling against, for example, racism, sexism, religious sectarianism, queerphobia, intersexphobia, and ableism, as a priority. We see the success of a revolution and the successful elimination of these oppressions after the revolution being determined by the building of such struggles in the pre-revolutionary period. The methods of struggle that we promote are a preparation for the running

race, and a world view). In general, life for a working class woman will be significantly different than for a working class man, not only because a woman is oppressed by sexism but because class itself is experienced differently according to your gender.

This leads to the second point. Being precise, there is no such thing as 'gender' as a free floating thing. As a practical example, note how wealthy women can afford to travel to England for abortions but poor women often cannot. We can see here the effect of class and gender 'intersecting' or overlapping. Notice how this example shows both that gender is different depending on class (wealthy and poor women), but also that class is different depending on gender (cis male workers don't personally need abortions). Gender does have its own independent existence in a sense, but for each person it is coloured by everything else in their world. The same is true of any social system or phenomenon.

The third point says two things: that single issue politics don't work, and that no struggle is the 'most important' or primary struggle. The most common case of single issue politics on the left is socialists stating that we must focus on the 'class struggle' because capitalism, which tramples on all working class people, is our real priority. The reality is that, as described above, class doesn't exist in isolation, people aren't one-dimensional. There is no cartoon worker. In practice, putting a priority on 'class' at the expense of struggles against specific oppressions like patriarchy and racism means side-lining those oppressed people in favour of what is usually the straight, white Irish, settled, cisgender, male citizen. Saying that capitalism is the 'most important' raises the question of 'most important for *whom?*'.

Furthermore, the idea that capitalism can be overthrown without being part of a broader movement against oppression is false. For example, how are the working class to succeed if over half of them (women and non-binary people) are being repressed? All power systems are linked, or overlap, or are part of a greater whole.

*of society along anarchist and communist lines after the revolution.'*

Human beings are complex. We have many sides, many needs, wishes, strengths and weaknesses, many different obstacles and opportunities in life. So while acknowledging the huge harm caused by capitalism and the state, our concerns naturally do not end there. The Workers Solidarity Movement are anarchists because we want the total liberation of humankind, the full realisation of our need and wish to be fed, sheltered, clothed, respected, in charge of ourselves, within a real community, to be our true selves, and the rest of the rich tapestry which makes a good life. And so we recognise that patriarchy, racism, queerphobia, ableism, religious domination and sectarianism, xenophobia, and every way that joy is sucked out of our lives, that we are stifled, attacked, are important forms of oppression and marginalisation in their own right which must be eradicated. While capitalism and the state are instrumental in spreading these oppressions, and while these oppressions are instrumental in sustaining capitalism and the state, they have their own independent existence and reasons to be replaced by healthier relations between people.

The WSM's politics are fundamentally intersectional. 'Intersectionality' is a fancy word for some rather basic ideas. You can think of it as 'overlap-ism' instead, or perhaps a holistic approach to politics. There are three main points, **1)** that each person needs to be seen as a whole, **2)** that no power system exists in isolation, and **3)** that all forms of oppression and exploitation should be uprooted at the same time. These ideas were put together in coherent form in in 1960's/70's U.S.A. by black feminists who faced problems of racism within the supposedly universal 'sisterhood', and sexism within the supposedly class-united left.

The first point refers to the fact that real people aren't cartoons. We are each complicated and multi-dimensional. For instance, a person is not just working class. They also have a gender (and a

of society along anarchist and communist lines after the revolution.

8. We oppose imperialism but put forward anarchism as an alternative goal to nationalism. We defend grassroots anti-imperialist movements while arguing for an anarchist rather than nationalist strategy
9. Revolution must aim to bring human society into harmony with the rest of nature, for our own basic quality of life and for the sake of other species. This aim is not fundamentally opposed to technological development or mass society, which are always expressions of the current social system. Rather, we strive for a libertarian, ecological, technology.

## **1 - Class Struggle and Leadership of Ideas**

*'1. Anarchism will be created by the class struggle between the vast majority of society (the working class) and the tiny minority that currently rule. A successful revolution will require that anarchist ideas become the leading ideas within the working class. This will not happen spontaneously. Our role is to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas or, as it is sometimes expressed, to become a "leadership of ideas".'*

We're usually told that class society is a thing of the past. After all, aren't we all middle class now? But this isn't true, and there still very much exists a severe division between people based on property and work, a hierarchy which is a basic fact of the economic system known as capitalism.

In this society people are divided into the capitalist classes and the working classes - and to some extent a 'middle class' - regardless of how we personally choose to identify. Starkly, we live in a

world of super yachts and starving children. As of 2017 the regime of private property has allowed 1% of the human population to own half of the global wealth and merely 8 billionaires own as much as the poorest 50% combined (or 3.7 billion people). Within every country on this planet people go to bed hungry, if they even have a bed, are consistently denied opportunities in life, and have effectively no say in the society they live in, while others live in ease and extravagance, free to choose their own course in life, and have disproportionate influence over what happens in our world.

This is largely because a tiny minority are in control of what are called the 'means of production', i.e. offices, shops, fields, warehouses, factories, apartment blocks, natural resources, and so on. The vast majority of us don't have the luxury of being able to live out of our bank accounts or returns on property - most of us have to rent ourselves as workers in order to buy back the things that we need. Otherwise we won't survive for very long. We are the working classes: the employees, the unemployed workers, the small farmers and street traders.

This is an irrational situation. Human beings have far more to gain by co-operating than competing in a vicious and endless economic cycle. The WSM fundamentally opposes that regime, in favour of a free society with no classes where property is held by all for the good of all: libertarian communism. The Earth belongs to everyone and no one. This does not mean we think that Society should own your toothbrush, or the Community should own your guitar. That is personal property, your possessions, which you own because you use them. That's a very different kind of property to a businessperson owning a factory where others make money for them, or a property developer renting out a whole estate of houses they don't live in.

People have proposed an abundance of radical and alternative futures in the last few hundred years. However most of them are and were very vague or unrealistic about how to make that really happen. In contrast to these more naive schemes, we draw on the

Shannon, abolishing direct provision, keeping the far-right in its box, or running a social centre, there are so many ways to improve our lives outside of workplace struggle - although of course, they are linked, and unions have a far greater socially progressive role to play than they do currently in Ireland.

In order to affect others who are fighting against power and who envisage a better and fairer society, we should work alongside them and introduce aspects of anarchist organising in practice where appropriate and possible. Through the bonds of mutual respect and comradeship that emerge in working and struggling with another person, a more open ear is given to our perspectives which have developed within the anarchist tradition. This is a perspective which is often not listened to by others due to both the deliberate smearing of the word anarchism, and because of just how different anarchist ideas are to the way our society works today. Both through affecting the thinking of our peers and holding a voice in the organisation and decision making of the group we can influence groups toward non-hierarchical organising and accepting sceptical views of all power systems and coercive institutions. It also helps create useful solidarity between different groups and expands our networks well beyond the WSM

## 7 - Oppression and Intersectionality

*'7. We actively oppose all manifestations of prejudice within the workers' movement and society in general and we work alongside those struggling against racism, sexism, [religious] sectarianism and homophobia as a priority. We see the success of a revolution and the successful elimination of these oppressions after the revolution being determined by the building of such struggles in the pre-revolutionary period. The methods of struggle that we promote are a preparation for the running*



## 6 - (Other) Mass Movements

*'6. We also see it as vital to work in struggles that happen outside the unions and the workplace. These include struggles against particular oppressions, imperialism and indeed the struggles of the working class for a decent place and environment in which to live. Our general approach to these, like our approach to the unions, is to involve ourselves with mass movements and within these movements, in order to promote anarchist methods of organisation involving direct democracy and direct action.'*

While the workplace is of course a critical site of political activity, there is a much broader terrain on which to strive for our liberty, to enrich our shared world. Ultimately, we want a world where all people are free and content. And, of course, we face many obstacles to that free world apart from challenges in our workplace, or that can be solved by our unions. So, everywhere that we are ripped off, suppressed, attacked, sidelined, or degraded, is a place for us to fight back and band together with others. In a social order which thrives on us keeping our heads down and being passive, resistance in its many forms is to be encouraged and supported. Whether or not that resistance is as radical or as 'pure' as we would like, we should engage, of course with our anarchist heads screwed on. While being a purist sect on the sidelines can feel satisfying to the initiated, ultimately it is a redundant way to make change.

Whether it's campaigning for free, safe, and legal, abortion, against Church control of our schools, for free public transport, for decriminalisation of drugs, building support for the Palestinian people and BDS, building greater acceptance of trans people in everyday life, protesting the Special Criminal Court and conditions of republican prisoners, decriminalising sex work, combatting domestic violence and rape culture, getting U.S. warplanes out of

lessons of history to find a feasible route towards freedom. For example, we recognise the harsh reality that the interests of these two classes can't be reconciled. If the capitalists gain, we lose, and vice versa. Bigger profit margins mean smaller meals, smaller rooms, less leisure time, and more stress. That means rather than trying to exist side-by-side in the best possible truce between the capitalists and the masses, we need to transform our society so that the possibility of this hugely damaging social conflict ceases to exist entirely, so there are no capitalists at all. This push and pull between opposing social forces, our struggle for freedom in spite of a social order constantly shaking us down and holding us down, is called the 'class struggle'. We didn't start the class war, but we have to fight it.

Unfortunately, the working class can't rely on the goodwill of the capitalist class to make this happen. The capitalist class works hard every day to keep us in our place and extract more and more profit from our lives. This is not even because those at the top of the economic hierarchy are all individually awful people - they aren't - but because that is how to make money, and the market demands it. Indeed one of the great tragedies of capitalism is how ingenuity, creativity, and hard work, are transformed into destructive activity by anti-social incentives. Really, capitalism is not a matter of the vicious minority at the top and the virtuous majority at the bottom - it is a social machine which pits human against human whether they like it or not.

As the wealth creators of this world, and the overwhelming majority, the working class are positioned to take over the running of society. Capitalism will be dismantled and replaced with a system of democratic worker self-management. *'From each according to ability, to each according to need'* will be our spirit. Enterprises will be owned and operated as by those who work there, with no bosses needed, and will be accountable to the community and the ecosystem. They will federate across large geographical areas to co-ordinate production and distribution. The good things in life

will be for everyone. Consumption will happen according to need, rather than profit. Boring, unpleasant, or dangerous, work will be automated where possible and otherwise shared between people by agreement. Although a globally successful anarchist revolution is yet to be won, these ideas have been put into practice many times, most notably in the Spanish Revolution of 1936, and Rojava, Kurdistan provides a contemporary inspiration.

In getting to this future society, unlike authoritarian socialists the WSM refuses to take positions of power that lift us above the broad movement and give us control over it. Instead we rely on the strength of our ideas and the example we set to convince people. In short, we don't make the revolution *for* the proletariat, we don't direct the struggle 'in their interests', and we don't govern them 'for their own good'. We simply exist as an organisation within our class and attempt to speed up its growth and emancipation. We do this by working within mass movements and spreading anarchist ideas through our publications and events. That is the role of the WSM.

The aim is not for every single working class person to identify as an anarchist, or to join our organisation – that is impractical. Of course it is important that we grow our organisation. But the primary aim is to make anarchist ideas and methods the most popular and respected within the working class, so that in the time of a revolutionary upheaval it is anarchist ideas and methods which will determine the form of the revolution and lead to a bright future.

## 2 - Power Structures

*'2. We reject the idea that society can be changed through 'good people' gaining control of the power structures. This means we reject both the electoral strategy of the social democratic and green parties and the 'revolutionary' strategy of the various left groups.'*

Furthermore, syndicalist unions are deliberately building towards the working class ending capitalism and taking over the operation of society, from providing clean drinking water, to counselling, to designing and manufacturing computers. As the wealth creators of the world, withdrawing our work is one of our most powerful weapons. The aim is to build towards a general strike, threatening to grind the whole capitalist machine to a halt.

The pinnacle of syndicalism was the anarchist revolution in 1930s Spain, where at its peak the anarcho-syndicalist CNT – the largest union in the country – had 1.5 - 2 million members and, to give one example, ran the collectivised transport system of Barcelona. Examples of syndicalist unions in Ireland today are the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Independent Workers' Union (IWU, not exactly syndicalist but radical) which though small show promise.

However, while the WSM advocates for syndicalist structures within the unions, we do not see building revolutionary syndicalist unions as enough to make revolution. We need specifically anarchist political organisations, like ourselves, which will spread anarchism.

Because of all of the above, it is WSM policy that members join a union where appropriate. Not just radical unions like the IWU and IWW, but ordinary unions. Not all mainstream unions are the same, or as stitched-up as SIPTU, and there can be significant room to do good work and influence them to become more democratic and radical. And even when a union is poor locally it's still the case it will be a space where we can talk with our fellow workers and organise for our interests in the workplace - something very much more difficult if not impossible in non-union workplaces.

their role today is still greatly important, as long as there are zero-hour contracts, wage cuts, pay freezes, lay-offs, unpaid overtime, long days, workplace bullying, and capitalism itself.

In a class society, where there is eternal pressure from capitalists to cut costs and increase profits, unions are basic self-defence for the working class. Without them, we are isolated and fully open to attacks on our quality of life. Also, at the most basic level, being part of a union shows a basic recognition of the class nature of our society, the simple fact that the employers are pitted inevitably against the employees, that we have different interests. In fact, this is exactly why the owning class constantly try to undermine the unions and pretend that we're one big happy economic family.

Of course today unions are commonly ridden with bureaucracy and conservatism, and in many cases can be considered part of the system we are fighting against. In the biggest unions, like SIPTU, the leadership largely calls the shots, acting as middlemen between the state and business on the one hand and the workers on the other. Sadly, union members are mostly reduced to apathetic and disenfranchised order-takers who see 'the union' as something outside of themselves. Although even in the most rigid and hierarchical unions there are exceptions to this and popular initiatives.

This is the exact opposite of the ideals and organisational strategy of the WSM, but also people like Jim Larkin and James Connolly who were both staunch 'syndicalists'. Syndicalism (from the word 'syndicate') is basically radical trade unionism. Unions are directly democratic and actively run by the membership - i.e. from the 'bottom-up' rather than from the 'top-down'. All officers are mandated and recallable, and there is an emphasis on initiative and direct action. Workers organise by industry rather than splitting up by trade (for instance, health rather than doctors, nurses, porters, cleaners) to encourage people to stand up for each other and to wield more social power. With this federalist structure, large numbers of people can co-operate over large geographical areas democratically.

The WSM is working towards a free, equal, democratic society. We believe the only way to achieve this is by people taking their destinies into their own hands, forming grassroots mass movements, and creating new truly democratic institutions.

However, the standard political approach taken across the globe is to gain power over already existing institutions and try to use them to change society from above. In Ireland this is seen either in various social democratic, socialist, or republican, parties running for election to Stormont, the Dáil, county councils, and so on, or in some republican groups seeking to stage a coup and take control of the state by force. We reject this strategy simply because it doesn't work. The totalitarian disasters of the USSR and Communist China show the danger of trying to force socialism from above, while the surrender of social democratic, green, and anti-colonial parties to capitalism worldwide demonstrates the weakness of the parliamentary route - regrettably confirming arguments anarchists have been making since the 19th century.

The reasons are simple. The use of an institution can only be as good as the institution itself. You can't make a good meal from rotten ingredients. Under capitalism, the state is trapped by the dictatorship of the market. Further still, whether under capitalism or not, the state is an institution fundamentally about taking power away from people at large and giving that power to whoever the ruling elite is, whether feudalists, capitalists, or even socialists. Lastly, our social problems are built into the very fabric of this society. You cannot simply legislate them away. That work has to be done 'on the ground', so to speak, to get to the root of the problem. That is the essential difference between 'radical' politics and reformist politics.

It doesn't matter how good the people are, seizing power over rotten institutions doesn't work. Having leftist politicians, generals, judges, police commissioners, and union bosses, won't address the root problems of our society anymore than nicer CEOs will.

And moreover, we would do well to remember the wise old saying that 'power corrupts'.

The WSM has the common sense attitude of 'begin as you wish to continue'. If we all want a society of free equals where everyone participates, it makes no sense to start by handing control and leadership over to a small group of people. This way of doing things infects our organising in the present, creating a culture of hero worship, the expectation that 'Someone Else will do it', and politics watered-down for election time.

This is why the WSM will never run in such elections or aim to seize state power for ourselves but will instead work at the grassroots of unions, community, and activist groups, and take direct action. We say imagine if all the energy put into grabbing existing institutions, in electioneering, was put into building the independent power of the masses to make fundamental social changes.

We see the way forward in creating new institutions which are actually democratic. The principles are widespread and frequent participation, that people have a say roughly in proportion to how much a decision affects their lives, and that decision-making is from the 'bottom-up'. Instead of 'representatives' there are delegates who are mandated and recallable - basically they have to do as we say rather than calling the shots themselves. So, we take inspiration from societies which have had success in implementing this real democracy, such as the Paris Commune of 1871, the workers' councils and peasant communes of early revolutionary Russia and Ukraine, similarly for revolutionary Spain in the 1930's, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico today, and more recently in the TEV-DEM system of Rojava, Kurdistan, which is arguably the greatest ever experiment in democracy on planet Earth. A more modest example at home is the community democracy practised during the struggle against the water charges in the mid-to-late 2010s.

in the collective decision-making process and respect the decisions of the collective, and also that the organisation is accountable to the individual.

In this manner we try to tackle some of the problems that have faced the anarchist movement, which we believe are partly due to lack of organisation, while at the same time being consistent with the libertarian ideas of free association, self-management, and democracy.

## 5 - Trade Unions

*'5. A major focus of our activity is our work within the economic organisations of the working class (labour organisations, trade unions, syndicates) where this is a possibility. We therefore reject views that dismiss activity in the unions because as members of the working class it is only natural that we should also be members of these mass organisations. Within them we fight for the democratic structures typical of anarcho-sindicalist unions like the 1930's CNT. However, the unions no matter how revolutionary cannot replace the need for anarchist political organisation(s).'*

Throughout history the trade union movement has been a vitally important mass movement. In the face of bitter hardship and repression - even state murder - the downtrodden have banded together and demanded more, driving society forwards in the process. For instance, in Ireland we can thank the union movement for the end of child labour and for the 'weekend'. However, unions are not a relic for museums. Recent victories for better conditions and pay are a practical proof of that, not to mention participation of some fairly large unions in wider grassroots political campaigns. In spite of the relative decline of trade unions in the past neoliberal decades,

between independence and coherence. This means, for example, that all decisions are made by those affected by them as opposed to centralism, where decisions are made by a central committee for those affected by them. Or that while all WSM branches are united under a common national policy, they can make their own local decisions. It also means that we have no leaders or officials with higher authority than others. Rather, we have 'officers' who are delegated temporary authority to perform certain tasks as mandated by the membership (for instance, to be treasurer).

Theoretical Unity means simply that if you fundamentally disagree with someone, don't be in a political group with them. This doesn't mean that everyone has to agree all the time but there does need to be a certain baseline amount of ideological unity – for instance in the WSM's nine points of unity. Otherwise, basic ideological disagreements will frequently break out and make effective organising very difficult - are we communists or mutualists, do we work in the unions or not, etc. Further to this, theoretical unity also means developing a more advanced collective political understanding which carries over time. The WSM does this formally by producing substantial 'position papers' on certain topics (like racism, or ecology). Though it is not required to agree with every point, these position papers represent the collectively agreed politics of the WSM. This theoretical unity allows us to act more decisively, to concentrate our resources and hence have greater influence.

Tactical Unity means that the members of an organisation should struggle together as an organised force rather than as individuals. Once a strategy has been agreed by the collective all members should work towards ensuring its success, saving resources and time and multiplying our effect as individuals by concentrating in a common direction. For example, making intervening in a particular campaign the main focus of our collective activity, or forming a working group to host an event.

Collective Action and Discipline means that there is a minimum expected commitment of each member, that they should take part

### 3 - Platformism (1)

*'3. We identify ourselves as anarchists and with the "platformist", anarchist-communist or especificista tradition of anarchism. We broadly identify with the theoretical base of this tradition and the organisational practice it argues for, but not necessarily everything else it has done or said, so it is a starting point for our politics and not an end point.'*

Sometimes a person associates anarchism with chaos, with a complete disinterest in organisation, system building, and regularity. This is a critical misunderstanding of the anarchist project. The WSM practices a form of anarchism which strives to be highly organised and coherent, learning as much as we can from attempts in the past to create a free world.

The 1917 October revolution took the world by storm, it was the first great anti-capitalist revolution which survived capitalist repression long-term, and the fact that it degenerated into such miserable despotism disappointed hopeful millions. Following the Bolshevik take-over and counter-revolution in the wake of this revolution, exiled Russian and Ukrainian anarchists asked themselves what went wrong. Two strains of thought emerged on the perceived failures of the anarchist movement in those countries. For the Dielo Truda group (Workers' Cause), which included Nestor Makhno, a lack of organisational principles had led to the general weakness and insignificant influence of anarchist ideas despite not insignificant numbers of anarchists. They wrote a pamphlet on this topic - what is informally called 'the Platform'.

The main contribution of the Platform document was, therefore, to stress the importance of a shared understanding of theory and goals across any future anarchist organisation, and a commitment to discipline and co-operation, so that anarchists could work as a coherent force for change.

The reality is that there is no perfect or pure struggle. Everywhere anarchists will face reformists and authoritarians (from the left and right) who will attempt to control or subdue struggles. Individuals involved in these struggles will also often exhibit contradictory ideas, or have ideas that may seem to conflict with those we wish to advocate (many people are nationalist for example).

Against this, platformists argue that we need to be well organised, we need to have confidence in our own ideas and we need to act on a common programme. Being an organised anarchist means being able to put forward a coherent strategy and enacting a common set of ideals that inspires others to do the same. If this appears to be common sense, that is not unusual, but these ideas remain controversial among many anarchists who prefer looser, informal, methods.

The authors of the Platform encouraged criticism of established positions to avoid a stagnant and conservative political culture. In other words, they argued that dissident and minority positions are to be considered as valuable as, and not necessarily in conflict with, the overarching aims of an organisation that strives for unity.

The Platform is a historical document – in fact it was actually the *draft* of a text meant for discussion. The WSM does not exactly follow it due to the nature of the circumstances it arose from (1910s and 1920s Russia and Ukraine, civil war) and gaps in its analysis (for example, feminism, anti-racism, intersectionality). Anarchist organisation and politics in Ireland must take its own course dependent upon our own particular history and conditions. Moreover, anarchists should not want or need a socialist holy book to quote scripture from. So for us the Platform is a rough starting point, and that's it - however, its basic principles remain vital and relevant.

The *especificismo* tradition of anarchism (think of the word 'specific'), which arose within the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) came to similar conclusions for the need of a specific, political anarchist organisation and, in practice, working in an organised fashion within mass movements. Although the WSM does not

follow this exact line of action (for similar reasons we don't exactly follow the Platform) it is a tradition worth learning from and aligning with.

The Platform was largely an urgent re-statement of ideas as old as modern anarchism itself. The WSM draws upon a long history of organised and anarchist communist politics, from well before the Platform, right back to the formulation of these politics in the anarchist international of St. Imier in 1872. There formed an international workers' organisation after the anarchists and the Marxists split in the First International over the use of state force. Also, we acknowledge the lessons of the Friends of Durruti (in particular 'Towards a Fresh Revolution'), an anarchist group established in 1937 when the Spanish Revolution was in peril due to collaboration with the government.

The WSM is a member of Anarkismo, a network of anarchist organisations inspired by the platformist and *especificista* traditions - living revolutionary traditions which continue to develop and change as the situation requires.

## 4 - Platformism (2)

*'4. The core ideas of this tradition that we identify with are the need for anarchist political organisations that seek to develop:*

1. *Theoretical Unity*
2. *Tactical Unity*
3. *Collective Action and Discipline*
4. *Federalism'*

Federalism is an organisational structure based on "the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards a common objective". It is finding the best balance