

Globalisation from below?

‘‘Ordinary people’’, movements and intellectuals from Seattle to Genova to war

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“Working-class revolutions ... constantly criticise themselves, they continually interrupt their own course, return to what has apparently already been achieved to start it from scratch again. Cruelly and thoroughly they mock the shortcomings, weaknesses and pitiful nature of their first attempts; they seem to throw their opponent down, only for him to draw new strength from the earth and rise up once more against them, yet more gigantic than ever. They shrink back again and again in the face of the undetermined vastness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes any turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: “Hic Rhodus, hic salta! Here is the rose, dance here!” (Marx, *18th Brumaire* (n.d.): 272-3)

“Civilisation will win until its enemies learn from it the importance of the machine. The compact must endure until there is a counter-compact. Consider the ways of that form of foolishness which today we call nihilism or anarchy. A few illiterate bandits in a Paris slum defy the world, and in a week they are in jail. Half a dozen crazy Russian intellectuals in Geneva conspire to upset the Romanovs, and are hunted down by the police of Europe. All the Governments and their not very intelligent police forces join hands, and hey, presto! there is an end of the conspirators. For civilisation knows how to use such powers as it has, while the immense potentiality of the unlicensed is dissipated in vapour. Civilisation wins because it is a worldwide league; its enemies fail because they are parochial. But supposing ...” (John Buchan, *The power-house* (1913): p. 32)

Introduction

It looks like there could be something big happening “out there” – not in the sense of “somewhere far away, in other countries”, but close to hand, within processes of globalisation and resistance which are just as real here in Ireland as anywhere else: “out there” where working-class communities are struggling to take back control of their everyday contexts, where Irish activists are working in solidarity with the Zapatistas, where trade unionists are pushing partnership to the limits, where women are demanding childcare provision, where Netslaves are realising that £35,000 a year really means three and a half hours travel a day and a house in nowhere, New Suburbia.

All of this connects us to the rest of the world. In terms of our own history, perhaps, only the quiet revolution in community politics, along with the “indifference and unease” (Mills 1970) of the new suburbia, mark any kind of qualitative shift. In other areas, popular action is not

doing so well: it's hard to imagine who or what today could mobilise the kinds of numbers that participated in the protests around Wood Quay, Carnsore or CND for a single event¹. But these local shifts exist within a global context which has thrown up something very remarkable: the "new movement" marked by the Zapatistas, Seattle and Porto Alegre, a remarkable development which is not easy to understand or explain. What's going on? Where do we fit into it? And what can we do to help?

In the first part of this talk I want to try thinking about the long history of popular movements on a world scale, to try and get a sense of what it might be that's happening out there. In the second part, I want to try to break down that general analysis into a sense of the different ways things might be working in different places, and to try particularly to think about the odd situation of Ireland. In the third bit, I want to think about practical implications: what do activists and intellectuals do in general, what can we do, and what should we do²?

History, Hunter Thompson said, is hard to know, because of all the hired bullshit (1972: 65). And of course there is no way that one person can reasonably hope to grasp all these different things except at third hand. We grasp the world we're in at first hand, through the politics of our own everyday situations and conflicts, and at second hand, through other people's actions and words. But what they (and we) reflect is the echo of six thousand million people, all working with their own situations and trying to make sense of them in the process. So this paper comes with no guarantees!

¹ At a local scale, perhaps protests against incinerators (positively) or against refugees (negatively) might be comparable in terms of levels of overall participation. If Noel Dempsey goes through with the idea of imposing regional incinerators in the teeth of local opposition, we might perhaps see a real revival of *large-scale* protest.

² Two good points of reference for this paper are Andrew Flood's (2000) talk at the Prague counter-summit, and Peter Alexander's ambitious (2001) paper.

1. Historicising the ‘‘political economy of the working class’’: what’s happening?

Taking the long view

Arrighi and the cycles of capital

Giovanni Arrighi, in an important and massively documented book (1994), undermines the widespread assumption that “disorganised capitalism” (Lash and Urry 1987) is a new phenomenon. We knew, of course, that capitalism had been global for a long time: Marx and Engels told us so (1967), and a bit later, in a different key, so did Eric Wolf (1982). What Arrighi does is to show how over its five or so centuries of domination, capital has constantly cycled between two processes. One, associated with the domination of a particular world power (Genova³, Holland, England, the US) has been a process of productive investment within an increasingly organised regime of production. The other, associated with the revolt of capital against the fetters increasingly represented by that situation, has been a process of investment above all in financial markets, undermining both the regime of production and the world power associated with it.

If so, our current situation, where “all that is solid melts into air” (Berman 1983), is not in itself qualitatively new, except for the question of where on earth capital can go next. Processes of commodification can certainly be intensified (Offe 1984), but they run up against limits, both social (Lynch and McLaughlin 1995) and natural (Strange 2000). Arrighi’s question is what new world power might be capable of imposing a new hegemony on the ashes of the “American Century”; the slender hope he offers is that the East Asian powers, who seem the only possible candidates, may not be strong enough to ensure another round of the same old samsara. So far, so depressing – and so disempowering.

Lebowitz and the political economy of the working class

As Michael Lebowitz (1991) has argued, though, there is more to the Marxian analysis than “the side of capital”. Along with the (necessary) analysis of capital’s own “laws of motion”, there is also, and crucially, the constant attempt on the part of the ordinary people of the planet – those of us who do not own productive property – to meet our own needs, to develop as human beings and not simply machines for the production of profit, to break free from the chains of gendered exploitation and racist divides which underpin the machine, and – who knows – even to develop sustainable forms of living which do not compromise our relationship with our own nature, or the potential of future generations. As EP Thompson (1977) put it, no worker in history ever had surplus value taken out of their hide without finding a way of fighting back.

This “political economy of the working class” is not simply a history of resistance to an overpowering, and increasingly out of control (Giddens 1990), juggernaut. We are not in the world of *Terminator II*. For that juggernaut to continue rolling, we have to continue doing things. It is, after all, made up of our actions: capitalism, patriarchy, racism are things people *do* as they reproduce their everyday lives. When we think this as activists, it presents simply one more challenge: not just large-scale structures, but also everyday routines need to be

³ Is it too much to hope for that what started in Genova could also start to find its end there, this July? If we reach the ¼ million mark - small by Italian standards, large in the terms of this kind of movement - perhaps it is not entirely impossible.

resisted (Lichterman 1996). But when we think this from an understanding of ourselves as being the ordinary people who *do* this stuff, it gives us a remarkable potential.

In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri (2000) argue that capitalism's creativity is largely parasitic: it takes, and feeds on, the creative acts of ordinary people as they struggle with their everyday lives. In their hands, following the Italian autonomist tradition more generally (Cunningham 1999), this analysis is used in a sense to refuse the helpfulness of structural arguments *tout court* and to argue for spontaneity (see Cox forthcoming for a more detailed critique). And yet structure, as Durkheim put it (1973), is how the world confronts us.

I attempted a more historical reading of this problem when I was trying to make sense of how people lived their lives within the Dublin counter-culture (Cox 1999a). In essence, it seems that the challenge to organised capitalism comes *first* from below: it is, in fact, that event called for simplicity "1968" (see Fink et al. (1998) for a recent overview). Disorganisation from above, whose key dates are those of the oil crisis of the early 1970s, is then *The Empire Strikes Back*: ordinary people, in other words, are already actors, not simply victims, in the creation of the current situation. The *Return of the Jedi*, if that is what we are experiencing, is not a miraculous appearance of agency from nowhere, but an ordinary part of the political economy of the working class.

Katsiaficas and world-revolutionary moments

George Katsiaficas (1987) observed, more than a decade back, that global capitalism has systematically given rise to what he calls "world-revolutionary moments", when the coexistence of large numbers of people facing related problems and brought into interaction with each other precisely through the capitalist production process (as the *Manifesto* noted, though on a far greater scale) gives rise to near-simultaneous moments of revolt and attempts at creating another world (see also Arrighi et al; 1989).

These "world-revolutionary moments" would include the "Atlantic Revolutions" that gave birth to the USA and republican France in the late 18th century; the independence movements of Latin America in the early 19th century; that "proto-1968" which happened in 1848 and underlies much of contemporary European nationalism; the revolutionary flowering at the end of World War II in which the Soviet Union and independent Ireland were born, and far more was attempted (Mitchell 1970); the "high tide" of the European Resistance in 1944 (Thompson 1982); 1968 itself, and perhaps, too, the present moment, or one not too far off.

Such times happen, in other words; and they have often had major and long-lasting effects on "structure", for good and for bad. They also, though, have long-lasting effects on movements, on the processes, institutions and cultures through which ordinary people develop their agency. In Ireland we do not need to be reminded of the enduring effects of the long nationalist revolution on structuring everything from land and religion to the left and literature. It is worthwhile, then, having a closer look at the "road from '68" as a way of finding out what is currently happening with popular agency.

How have we learned to do things?

Effects of '67, '68, '69

Revolutionary moments are simultaneously the result of long periods of experimentation and development on the part of relatively few people, of a sudden flowering of creative energy on the part of large numbers of ordinary people, and of rapid processes of learning and making the world anew. They have their pre-histories, but they are greater than the sum of their parts, and

the world after a revolution does not simply collapse back into its earlier components, because people have reorganised the ways they do things and the ways they think about their activity.

In moments of defeat, downturn and depression these new syntheses of course start to come apart: solidarity is among the first things to suffer as “movements from above” reassert themselves, but the new fracture lines are not those of the old situation. “1968” fractured, in its moments of defeat, into three different images of transformation, three separate, equally aborted, programmes (Cox 1999a). The first was that of “1967”, of a cultural transformation aimed above all at the everyday routines of the old society (Stephens 1998). The second was that of “1968”, in the sense of a large-scale anti-authoritarian movement from below. The third was that of “1969”, in the sense of the authoritarian cadre groups that tended to assert themselves as the true inheritors of the programme of revolution.

These three programmes, in the long years of defeat, have very different histories and very different spaces of survival: very schematically, these were found in alternative cultures oscillating between criminalisation (McKay 1996) and co-optation (Storey 1994) for the “1967 project”; in urban “temporary autonomous zones” (Bey 1991) where the “1968 project” could still generate concrete anti-authoritarian projects, particularly in west European metropolises (Katsiaficas 1997, Ruggiero 2001); and ultimately in a certain kind of left intelligentsia for the “1969 project”, which could turn its hard-won skills into academic cultural capital and the skills of institutional infighting.

Epstein, the movements of the 80s and their limits

In the late 1970s and the 1980s in particular, the “war of manoeuvre” of 1968 turned into a “war of position”: on the one side, disorganisation from above rendered irrelevant these projects of transformation in their existing forms; on the other hand, the “learning process” (Vester 1975) of 1968 had not gone away, but had carried on burrowing under the surface to blossom in movement after movement: the women’s movement, the ecological and anti-nuclear movement, the peace movement, movements for Third World⁴ solidarity, community development, regional movements and so on.

These movements of course represented a new kind of connection between activists remaking themselves for a new situation and ordinary people, stretching out to challenge established authorities of all kinds (state, church, science, family power, local government, etc.) As Barker and Dale observed (1997), levels of participation overall were in no way comparable to 1968. These were not, after all, revolutionary moments, even if they seemed so to some of us at the time. They were, however, remarkable moments of popular mobilisation whose effects in defining a certain kind of “social movement” as normal are necessary conditions for the current movement; and their various attempts at alliance and solidarity are theoretically and politically important markers if we want to understand where we are now (Goodwillie 1988, Antunes et al. 1990, etc.)

Barbara Epstein has analysed the political contributions and weaknesses of these movements in some detail (1991). Her conclusion is, I think, important: their experimentation with large-scale participatory democracy represents an important step forwards vis-à-vis the authoritarian politics of the mid-century Old Left (and, it should be said, vis-à-vis the cadre politics of the *surrogate* Old Left of the post-1969 period). At the same time, this is achieved at the cost of the kinds of theory and strategy which are needed to actually transform structural realities against

⁴ It is worth keeping this terminology to remember the origins of the phrase, intended as a parallel with the “third estate” of the French Revolution and Abbé Sièyes’ questions: “Qu’est-ce que le tiers état? Rien! Que peut-il être? Tout”....

determined opposition⁵. The difficulty, then, is to find a way of working which both connects effectively with movement realities and is capable of winning.

Encuentros, PGA and Porto Alegre: a new world order from below?

The “new movement”, for lack of a better phrase, is experimenting with precisely this problem. The Zapatistas (Ortiz-Perez 2000) and the “encounters” they sponsored, the series of demonstrations from Seattle to Naples, Quebec and beyond, networks like People’s Global Action and Via Campesina, and the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre can be understood in this light as attempts to find non-authoritarian ways of working ... which work.

This is not, it should be said, an entirely new problem. The near-total identification of the Left with authoritarian politics, as anarchists and other anti-authoritarian leftists know, is an artefact in particular of the period of “organised capitalism”, above all of the Cold War partition of the Left between Stalinism and social democracy, the Soviet Union and NATO. To go back to 1919, or to 1848, is to glimpse an entirely different set of possibilities.

In this sense, the demonstrations at Prague or Davos are “prefigurative politics” with a vengeance, prefiguring not a future ideal society but a participatory way of practicing effective politics, showing above all that it is possible to work together without a single organisation “owning” the movement, that it is possible to be radical without being sectarian, and most crucially that **we can do it**: we can shut down the meetings of the rulers of the earth, we can get our messages out even over the “hired bullshit”, and we have not been co-opted.

What are the problems?

Practical difficulties facing contemporary movements

A couple of years ago I attempted an “immanent critique” of contemporary movements, starting from the Irish alternative movement (Cox 1999b). The idea behind this kind of thing is to take what movements say about their goals seriously, and to think about movements as learning processes in which people try to find ways of doing things which are adequate to the goals they set themselves. Of course, there are all kinds of other processes which can divert this development (co-optation, repression, insulation, economic interests etc.), but it is nevertheless a useful sort of exercise to think “what would have to be the case if we wanted to do this?”

Taking the three dimensions of interaction with state structures, relations to dominant cultural orientations and self-construction in terms of class and power, I had a look at how these dimensions work in everyday movement practice, how they’ve operated in different movement contexts (to get away from the conventional assumption that the way things are is somehow written into the DNA of the universe), and a range of different attempts at defining and organising the movement, showing that activists do in fact ask themselves these kinds of questions more or less explicitly. Reasonable criteria for adequate strategies seemed to be comprehensiveness (taking as many different aspects of the movement as possible into consideration), scope (taking the potential of the movement for significant change seriously), and emancipatory compatibility (rather than particularist exclusion).

Translating these into counter-hegemonic politics, conflictual cultural strategies and popular self-definitions, it was clear firstly that such a situation is considerably from the existing shape of Irish movements, secondly that change in that direction would require a remarkable (but not

⁵ To understand why this is important, anyone who hasn’t experienced or absorbed the implications of severe repression could do worse than read Gilliland’s (1990) *The free*, set in an Ireland where a popular uprising doesn’t get far enough.

impossible) process of creation, and thirdly that in disorganised capitalism there is scope for this kind of thing. Two years back this seemed a very long-term strategy; today it seems entirely within reach. I don't want to push this particular analysis (though I've brought copies along!), so much as to say that we can and should engage in this kind of thinking: "what would we need to do if ... we were serious about the goals we proclaim and the processes we value?"

Pressures forcing the shift from "object" to "subject" for ordinary people

The "we" in that last sentence is us insofar as we are activists or intellectuals, but we are of course also ordinary people, with many of the same needs that other people are struggling for, the same weaknesses and often the same collusion with existing relationships of power. There is a tendency in that kind of "we" sentence to take on ourselves responsibility for somehow "making" things happen; but of course this is to seriously misjudge the situation. "We", as activists or intellectuals, do no such thing. When revolutions happen, it is because ordinary people, in their millions, their tens of millions and their hundreds of millions, *mobilise themselves* in new ways, challenge large-scale power structures and refuse everyday social routines. "We" cannot make that happen, though we can and should prepare for it, in the sense of developing ideas, organisations, networks, projects and cultures which could make a significant contribution.

Let's look at the situation from the other side for a minute. What defines the "ordinary state of affairs" is that most ordinary people are fulfilling the roles set for them, are experiencing themselves as objects rather than subjects of the social world. (This doesn't exclude insisting on "being an individual", once people treat basic things like their class situation, gender relations and ethnicity as given structures of reality that they simply have to accept). What makes a revolution is when large numbers of ordinary people come to experience themselves as subjects.

Inevitably, given the "object-like" character of people's everyday relations in "ordinary periods", what shakes them out of that is likely to be something they experience as coming from outside, along with the recognition of other people like them coming to act so as to change it. Globalisation of course is an excellent example of the first element, but in itself that is simply depressing and disempowering. The crucial importance of the second element – the "new movement" – is that it gives rise to the second element, the sense of being able to assert agency, to become subjects.

Revolutionary moments as learning processes

As Michael Vester (1975) wrote of EP Thompson's *Making of the English working class* (1963), movements are learning processes. We could add: movements in revolutionary periods are exceptional learning processes. Movements in "ordinary periods" are still hamstrung by the subject-object dilemma: they tend to take much of the social world as given; activists often talk about "ordinary people" as being simply passive objects (of the media, their jobs, peer pressure etc.); and activists tend towards an abstract voluntarism which is missing out the *people* who do in fact reproduce – and are hence also capable of transforming – the structures they experience.

In revolutionary moments lots of things become clear fairly rapidly, above all the constructed nature of the social world. Things once taken as givens are seen as up for grabs, and can be rejected out of hand. The power relations which keep things going appear in all their ugliness as petty tyrants, institutional rules and major power blocs intervene to prevent people from acting in ways that now seem right to them. Cultural codes of deference to superiors, indifference to peers and contempt for inferiors are broken, sometimes for good. People's understanding is transformed: the "lunacy" of the abstract, "masculine" attempt to put order

on the world and the “idiocy” of everyday “feminine” assent to internalised power (Russ 1995) are shaken up into something new.

In many ways this process is similar to that familiar to community educators (Horton and Freire 1990), but speeded up and above all on a broader scale, without the “safe” boundaries of community and with the inclusion – real and virtual – of a much broader spectrum of humanity. “Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive”, was Wordsworth’s verdict: despite conservative clichés, people once mobilised tend to stay active as far as it is in their power (Gottlieb 1987; see Inglehart 1990 for a massive debunking of the “youthful radicalism” thesis) because, after all, to experience ourselves as subjects *is* to live a more “fully human” existence; what else are we doing here? What else keeps us going?

2. Globalising the analysis: where are we?

All of this might be very interesting (to a certain way of thinking), but where does it get us? It *is* important to see this “other history”, of ordinary people struggling to (re)make their world (and themselves) as well as reproducing the status quo, and without that kind of perspective we will fall into several very old traps for would-be activists: elitism, pessimism, spontaneism and so on. But we have to locate the analysis, and ourselves within it, which is the job of the second part of this paper, before going on to think about what activists and intellectuals can do, in the last section.

Omnia Gallia in tres partes divisa est

Movements in the Anglo world: from cultural fragmentation to Seattle

A starting point is to analyse the *differences* in the way this “post-68 process” has been lived through in different contexts. In effect, different definitions of the situation have exercised a significant counter-hegemony on movements from below within different “national-popular” contexts. Borrowing shamelessly from work I’ve already done (Cox 1999a), I want to distinguish three distinct trajectories, without of course assuming that they are hermetically sealed from each other: the “national-popular” is of course itself a construct within a larger “world-economy” (Wallerstein 1987).

Within the Anglo world – the UK and white America in particular, and perhaps other “settler societies” such as Australia – the primary definition of “the Sixties” seems to have been *cultural*, from the “hippie moment” (Hall 1968) through the retreat to the countryside (Pepper 1991) to the politics of identity. A dominant theme is unconventional opposition to a cultural mainstream. The cultural entrepreneurs – from musicians via academics to the niche marketers – who developed both the language and the forms of organisation that structured this way of seeing things thus generated a paradoxically anti-hegemonic counter-hegemony (and, not coincidentally, a deep suspicion of large and abstract organisations with the important exception of that ultra-abstract organisation, the capitalist market).

Whatever its weaknesses, this cultural definition was deeply necessary in shaking popular creativity free from an official Left which had bought deeply into popular culture as shaped from above during the period of organised capitalism, with its attendant patriarchy, racism and nationalism. Fragmentation, like the anti-authoritarian revolt itself, was a necessary step if anyone was ever to learn anything new. The “Seattle moment” starts from the slow interaction between *this* way of doing things (refracted through the cultures of non-violent direct action) and the kind of large-scale popular movements whose absence underlay the initial cultural *dérive* of the Anglo Sixties. In this sense the tendency to fragmentation has been a strength, in its centrifugal distribution of conflicts throughout a once relatively stable cultural setup and consequent enabling of multiple routes into activism - though it poses significant problems once “convergence” becomes possible again.

Movements in continental Europe: ghettoisation and long memories

By contrast, the legacy of the continental Sixties has been above all *political*. This is the case above all for (West) Germany, Italy and perhaps the Netherlands, where long histories of “pillarisation” have continued with the development of extensive “alternative scenes” (e.g. Consorzio Aaster et al. 1996, Cox 1992). This process, where political cleavage structures

(Lipset and Rokkan 1967) hardened into separate and opposed institutional clusters covering everything from culture and the media through trade unions and political parties to sports clubs and youth groups, determined the development of the post-Sixties movements as well as that, earlier, of left and right, religious and secular subcultures covering all spheres of life.

This is in one sense a source of great strength: the alternative scenes of Hamburg or Milan, with their squats, radio stations, magazines, bookshops, pubs and all the rest of it, were in the 1990s (and in some cases at least still are) capable of head-on confrontations with the state, even if the outcome was often a foregone conclusion. In another sense, it seems to have been a source of weakness, in ghettoising new political developments within this relatively small social space and making mobilisation outside the “usual suspects” harder rather than easier.

What it does make for, and what the Anglo world often lacks, is long memories and a sense of what theory is *for*. Not for nothing was it the German Green Party, with its organisers’ roots in the New Left, that galvanised attempts at organisation across Europe in the early 80s; similarly, the Italian contingent seems to have made crucial contributions to the ultimate success of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre, while playing an important role on the Zapatista march and making effective connections between the “noglobol” protests in Naples, the local alternative scene and the peripheral poor of what is still in some ways a post-colonial city.

Movements in the post-colonial world: the long shadow of the State

What, finally, about that post-colonial world which makes up the vast majority of people on the planet⁶ (arguably including Ireland)? It too had its Sixties: in Mexico, for example, or in the North the explosions of “68” were to become literal ones. Joe Foweraker (1995) has developed an important argument about the relationships between social movements and the state which works particularly well for post-colonial societies where the state itself is the product of a nationalist revolution, such as Latin America and in some respects the South.

In essence the point is that in such societies “the state is everything, civil society is nothing” (Gramsci 1975) – the “free spaces” of civil society within which movements can develop their political structures are radically compressed, and at a very early point of their development they must engage with the state – usually entering into relationships of clientelism and co-optation, but on occasion situations of violent opposition. It might also be argued that a similar relationship holds between attempts at cultural radicalism and the hegemonic *cultural* structures of such societies, notably kinship and religion, but it would be difficult to demonstrate. In any case, the net effect of the importance of the state in such societies is that it is extremely difficult to develop large-scale popular movements of any kind whose modes of organisation are independent of the state.

Of necessity, the most effective forms of organisation in such contexts are community-based (Kaufman and Dilla Alfonso 1997): when “the community” comes to see itself as in opposition to the given order very large-scale mobilisations can come about. The difficulty, obviously, is in finding ways of articulating this which do not tend to reproduce that same given order – which brings us to the Irish situation.

Irish community politics and the ‘‘new movement’’

In this section I’m drawing particularly on joint work done with Caitríona Mullan (Mullan and Cox 2000) and with Martin Geoghegan (Geoghegan and Cox 2001), though they’re obviously

⁶ I’m leaving the ex-socialist bloc out of consideration here because of my own absolute ignorance of the area.

not responsible for what I'm saying here. I should have copies of the Mullan and Cox paper if anyone's interested in pursuing the issues (which I'll necessarily be raising here in a very sketchy form).

Development, community politics and the valorisation of everyday skills

In terms of the perspective I developed at the start of this paper, "capacity-building", a key element of community politics in contemporary Ireland, is part of the "political economy of the working class" – ordinary people developing their own ability to act as subjects rather than objects through processes which are becoming part of ordinary life in working class Ireland. In particular, the valorisation of everyday skills, and the stress placed on starting from where people are, are important means of embodying this changed situation within the routines of everyday life.

This is quite a remarkable process, and one which is far outside the experience not only of many activists from other countries, but of a good few activists and left intellectuals here in Ireland. Martin Geoghegan (2000) has explored the reasons why community activists tend to speak (and act) in public in ways which have the effect that leftists with a more traditional version of "politics" do not recognise the significance of what is happening. Despite this, the existence of widespread, popular working-class modes of organisation which are in working-class hands and organised in non-authoritarian ways is rare in contemporary Europe.

That would not of course be a universal perception of what is happening among community activists (not all of whom see themselves *as* activists), and of course there are widespread forms of "consensual" community development in other parts of Irish society which are much less radical. But the fact remains that across working-class Ireland something remarkable *is* happening, not just in Irish terms but in European and perhaps global terms. If "the new movement" is to have an effect in Ireland it will need to make links *here*; but it is hard to envisage what that might mean in practice.

To concretise this briefly: the community activists I know, in Dublin or Waterford, would have no difficulty in making the mental connection between their own situation and practice and the new movement, at least in some of its aspects. The reverse is likely to be more problematic: I know many Irish leftists and eco-activists who find it anything other than easy to fit community development into their view of the world. What is hard to imagine, though, is a situation which might see effective practical alliances developing between working-class community *groups* and the "new movement". This failure of the imagination, if it isn't just my own, is a historical one: as we move towards the possibility of such an alliance, its outline is likely to take shape, perhaps in discussions like this, or in joint solidarity campaigns on the ground (in anti-racist work? against incinerators?) Until this kind of link can be made, though, "the new movement" will suffer the critical weakness in Ireland of being divorced from one of the two largest movements in the country (after the labour movement, where some links do exist). From Ballymun to the World Social Forum is perhaps not such a great step, but it still has to be made.

Nationalism, partnership and the fragmentation of the grassroots

One reason for this difficulty in making connections at present is the relationship of "community" to nationalism – not so much the (potentially) radical nationalism of the "unfinished revolution" as the conservative nationalism of the actually-existing independent state. Here the issue may not be so much the limits of what was achieved as its extent: to bring about the remaking of Ireland which occurred in the century that includes emancipation and independence, a massive level of popular mobilisation was involved (Eagleton 1994). In a

sense, Irish people learned to organise *then*, and that repertoire, not just of forms of protest (Tarrow 1998) but also of institutional structures, has remained dominant since then, despite (or more likely because of) its tendency to reproduce the kind of thing we already have.

This relationship is particularly important in terms of relationships with the state, in particular the structures of partnership with the “voluntary and community sector”. It is not in itself remarkable that a small state like the Irish seeks a level of partnership which allows it to play *Standortpolitik* much like a big city might on the continent, nor that a particular kind of organisational elite finds the proposal attractive. It is remarkable, though, that (despite widespread cynicism about the motives involved and the actual gains to be made) there is so little support or interest in the kind of anti-partnership struggles we have seen in the unions. One part of the explanation must surely be the sense that the state is, or should be, or could be, in some way “ours” – a sense which working-class activists in Britain or Germany, for example, would find it hard to swallow.

The process of partnershiping, though, has important consequences which parallel developments within the environmental movement. The more obvious is the way the process enables the state to put its shape on the movement, defining who is in which “sector” (youth work, for example, being separated from community work) and setting people who should be close partners in competition for funds with one another. Less obvious, perhaps, is the sheer organisational challenge of “keeping up with the state”: going to all the meetings, reading the material, making the funding applications, and all the rest of it – raising the individual cost of participation in ways which tend to separate off a skilled elite from an increasingly fragmented grassroots, and provoking the famous “end of volunteerism” even where unemployment is still a major problem.

Populism, the “movement society” and self-limitation

This analysis could be extended to other kinds of movements in contemporary Ireland. For the moment, I want to point to three common kinds of weakness associated with this situation, which are certainly not particular to community politics. The first, crudely speaking, is populism. In essence this consists of a process that starts from taking people where you find them and finishes by leaving people where you found them. There is of course a tension within any movement between the immediate issues that provoke mobilisation and the broader potential that is opened up at an individual level and for the movement as a whole. What is damaging though is when the two are not effectively linked, and particularly when it is felt to be “radical” to insist on “concrete needs” *at the expense of* broader questions of power and economics. The net effect is of course to win ha’pennies and lose pounds.

The second is what is becoming called “the movement society” (eg della Porta 2000). Where movements are legitimate actors in the eyes of state and media, the process which happened with NGOs a long time ago – of organisations existing *because* they have an interlocutory role – can become dominant. This can happen even where those organisations engage in acts of stylised protest (consider the IFA!) As Peillon (1998) has documented, low-level but widespread protest is a fairly general feature of Irish society, and can as easily be used against immigrants as against incinerators. If populism fetishises “concrete results”, the movement society runs the risk of fetishising “stepping out” in the most ritualised forms (the Mind-Body-Spirit festival at the RDS is hardly going to have the cardinals shaking in their boots, let alone the TDs....)

The third is self-limitation as a taken-for-granted assumption. The way things are is the way things are, so the logic goes (ah sure...), and so there is a massive disjuncture between the way people *talk* and what they actually *do*. A combination of verbal radicalism and practical conservatism is the result, and of course when the two part company it is the practical habit

which wins out. And yet, and yet – despite the comforting view that Ireland is a deeply conservative place, it is one of the few countries in western Europe where the peasants won the land, where a national revolution had any success, or where nuclear power was decisively defeated. Popular action can and does on occasion win out, even on major issues.

Movement as landscape

Mobilisation structures as barriers to transformative alliances

As action becomes sedimented, it turns into the preconditions that structure further action. One point where this becomes a particular kind of problem is around the shift from an “uptime” of movement activity into a “downtime”, when movement practices, organisations and cultures developed for optimistic periods of large-scale mobilisation turn out to have unexpected weaknesses in pessimistic periods of defeat and minimal participation (Armstrong 1998). The same is also true in reverse, and this is closer to our situation now: the tools that have enabled us to keep going through the long defeats of the late 1970s and the 1980s can turn out to be problematic when we start to be able to win again.

This should be least of a problem for those movements with a sense of movement history (Barker 2001), and most of a problem for those movements which fetishise their own historically peculiar *modus operandi* as a universally valid method (which, apparently, other people were too stupid to hit upon). In fact, however, the relationships are not that linear. To mention one particularly important point: long-standing activists in movements with a developed self-consciousness have often “learned” that various things are impossible. In “downtimes” this can be developed to the point where in practice the whole spectrum of actually-existing movement activity is ruled out of order as insignificant, defeated in advance, and in general futile. It is not to deny that a sense of history *is* useful, handled properly, to note that there are sometimes advantages to *not* knowing that certain things are impossible, to *not* knowing that “we can’t do that”, and to *not* having learned the apparent “lessons” of defeat.

In particular, the mobilisation structures developed in “downtimes” are likely to be geared to limited scales: to the survival of sectarian organisations, to once-off pragmatic coalitions around specific issues, or to low levels of actual participation: the cadre party, the single-issue group, or the professionalised “social movement organisation”. These are useful and even necessary preconditions for the possibility of future “uptimes”, because they enable the continuation of activity under unpropitious circumstances. But at the same time, they can get in the way of the kinds of transformative alliances that are needed in the very uptimes that they lay some of the groundwork for.

Thinking defensively and thinking holistically

One way of expressing this is in terms of “thinking defensively” and “thinking holistically”. To survive the downtime, we need to learn to think defensively. We are conscious of the effort involved in sustaining movement activity and participation, of the limits of our own potential effectiveness, and of the potential mistakes that we can make. All of this can very easily turn us – and I include myself in this – into arch-conservatives of movement practice: schoolmasters who demand absolute submission to our own hard-won lessons before we will even deign to consider worthy of our attention new kinds of popular activity.

This logic works, necessarily, through a very sharp focus on “what is”; an awareness of structures and ideologies, of pressures and limitations, and so on. But to develop a movement capable of winning, we need to think in effect counter-factually (at least with relation to our

own experience): to imagine what has never been done before, to develop a strategy capable of transforming ourselves and things, we need to think in terms of a *potential* movement which does not yet exist. Marx famously observed that it is in these situations that we “call up the ghosts of the past to [our] service” (n.d.: 269).

But he also went on to say:

“the beginner, who has learnt a new language, always translates it back into their mother tongue; but they have only appropriated the spirit of the new language, and can only produce freely in it, when they can move in it without thinking back and forget their inherited language in it” (n.d.: 270).

This, I think, is part of our challenge: to start creating that new language, despite the immense difficulties involved in even knowing what it is (and despite the boosters who assure us that they *do* know). After 10 years of networking among activists on the left, in the ecology and community movements (see appendix), the challenge of this task seems to me to loom larger than it did at the start.

Communication, co-operation – and intellectuals

One important reason for this is that the relevant knowledge – of where the movement is going – is not held by individuals on the basis of a scholastic appropriation of information. That elitist model, rooted in the culture of the service class and a fixation on the state as *the* instrument of change, is flawed at its root. What *is* important is what Lukács described as the bearer of orthodoxy in Marxism (1971): the principle of totality, the attempt to grasp the whole, and the sense – grounded in both our own practice and that of previous movements – of where we might be able to find contributions that we do *not* yet have names for: how to reach beyond ourselves.

This kind of communication is best developed in co-operative processes geared towards practical action, of course; but the practical action itself then needs to be “at the level of the (potential) movement” – we need to set ourselves tasks which enable, to use a horrible metaphor, a “highest common factor” rather than a “lowest common denominator” to emerge. This is of course part of that learning process which Marx described as characteristic of working-class revolutions: *because* they do not come “from above”, they are not simply the headbirths of intellectuals, there is a constant process of grasping for the skies, falling back, and trying again, perhaps in another place.

Working-class revolutions are not the headbirths of intellectuals; and yet intellectuals have an important role to play in them. If not as schoolteachers, then perhaps as community organisers; if not as planners, then perhaps as activists; if not as the conservative guardians of “correct strategy”, then perhaps as the creative agents who help develop situations in which people can work out strategies of their own. But what does this mean in practice? Why is it worth our while being here, and talking to each other, in the first place?

3. What do activists do when they activate? What should we do?

So far I've tried to answer the questions "where are we?" and "what is happening?" All this puts me in the awkward position of having to think of an intelligent answer to the question "what should we do?" Here I'm taking "we" as meaning intellectuals, in Gramsci's sense (which I'll discuss in a minute) – and intellectuals who are in some sense actively committed to (some part of) the movement process I've been talking about. In other words, if what I've said is more or less accurate, what difference would it make to what we do?

Getting clear about hegemony

"Directive" and "theoretical" activity as two sides of the one coin

The English-language reception of Gramsci's formulations on intellectuals and hegemony suffers from a tendency to idealism (about intellectuals) and pessimism (about hegemony) which is obviously linked with its history of reception through a primarily academic left intelligentsia in a period of defeat. To take the idealism first of all: "hegemony" is routinely understood as a matter of the articulation of ideas, of "theoretical" activity. But Gramsci (1975) puts this side by side with (and ultimately, as a good materialist, subordinates it to) "directive" activity, in other words practical organising and leadership.

His ideal models here are the kinds of worker intellectuals he knew from the PC d'I, from the *Ordine Nuovo* days and from prison: working-class activists in the party and the unions. Other examples of "organic intellectuals" that he offers include managers and engineers; the "traditional intellectuals" belonging to earlier strata are primarily village notables – the priest and the doctor. To miss this foundation in *practice*, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) do, is to fall into the silliest kind of "anything goes". Not anything *does* go, because (as we know in daily life) we cannot simply impose ourselves on the world "just as we like".

To grasp sensibly what is meant by "intellectual" in Gramsci's formulations, it can help to recall, as Peter Mayo (19XX) does, Gramsci's continuous interest in adult education (people only familiar with his work via cultural studies might find it hard to imagine that while he was writing the *Prison Notebooks* he was also organising educational activities with and for other prisoners). It might also help to recall the stress that *everyone* is to some extent an intellectual: everyone organises and reflects on their own life, to a greater or lesser extent.

The everyday organisation of hegemony: naming the enemy

What *professional* intellectuals do is to dedicate themselves to the organisation of social activity and the articulation of social ideas as a more or less full-time activity. The hegemony that they orchestrate is not a matter of uniformity or conformity, rather a convergence of a broad spectrum of social forces and modes of thinking behind a particular social project (Peillon 1982 offers some interesting points of reference for this in an Irish context). In the process, *some* of the needs of the groups they organise and speak for are met, others are not; *some* practices find themselves integrated into the social structure, others are not; *some* forms of thinking are developed and ratified, others are not.

"The enemy", then, is this process of organising everyday participation in and consent to the structures of capitalism, patriarchy and racism. In individual terms, it is those people who devote their lives to this activity, and who will find it hardest to remake themselves, who are the *de facto* opponents of the new movement. The ordinary people who participate in those structures and consent to "the way things are" but do not dedicate their lives to keeping them

that way are, by contrast, precisely the people who we are seeking to engage with if we are serious about changing things.

This is possible because of the selective and uneven nature of hegemony. Selective, because only a part (usually a limited, and limiting, part) of ordinary people's needs are met by church attendance, racist protests, the micro-politics of whose kids go to which school, late-night talk shows, and all the rest of it: hegemony consists of organising *one* possible expression of people's needs and practices. Uneven, because some groups do rather better out of the current situation than others, so that levels of commitment are more or less tenuous; people have more or less solid connections to the traditional intellectuals who seek to keep them in their place.

Anti-hegemony and counter-hegemony

One common response to the notion of hegemony is the fetishisation of anti-hegemony, the fracturation of the world into non-cooperating, and non-communicating, pieces. One practical difficulty with this is that those pieces are not themselves self-sufficient, but are products of particular hegemonic modes of organising things like the world market, ethnicity, gender and so on. Hence the withdrawal can rarely, if ever (perhaps on the part of some "fourth world" peoples) be real; in practice, anti-hegemony means a failure to understand or transform the reason for one's own existence in the fetishised form, and in all probability a particularist corporatism which strengthens the overall "system", as those taken-for-granted reasons write themselves into "who we are".

A second difficulty is that – true to its elitist origins – it assumes that people's participation and consent is down to simple stupidity or gullibility; it fails to recognise the (limited) rationality involved. Hegemony *works*, to the extent that it works, precisely insofar as people find (some of) their needs met and (some of) their responses developed in it. To oppose hegemony, then, is to develop new forms of proto-hegemony: new ways of living together which are closer to these needs and responses and less partial in selecting which find a space in the world we share with others. The responsibility for forgetting this is not only that of the movement entrepreneurs of "identity politics"; it is also, and crucially, that of an authoritarian left which forgot that historical working-class movements had always created "unity" from a very wide "diversity" (see Rowbotham et al. 1979 for an account of this failure).

A crucial element in this is *talking to each other*: not treating the state as the only object of love / hate relationships, the only source of (possible) action and the only cause of what is wrong, but (as at this event) making "transversal links" (Yuval-Davis) which do not depend on being part of a single "sector" as defined from above or leave it to our own "notables" to do the talking for us. This is usually an effort – at least as much as talking to funders and policy-makers, but without the instrumental carrots that push our buttons so effectively when talking to the latter – and so many such conversations result in simple incomprehension. How can we get beyond this?

One way of thinking about the new movement is as a kind of prefigurative politics - prefiguring not so much "the new society" as a new way of doing politics, and in particular new alliances. One aspect I have found particularly interesting is a sense of a move away from comparing "cookbooks for the future" and "red / green" debates on theology - characteristic both of periods of defeat and of elitist approaches which start from where a popular movement might finish - and towards discussions of strategy and "red / black" debates⁷ which are about "what do we do?". This suggests at least the possibility of allowing people to learn from and through practice, and that agreement on where to go might emerge out of the process of struggle -

⁷ I am indebted to Paul Routledge for this point.

which is, after all, where movement intellectuals derive their understandings from in the first place, albeit sometimes through circuitous routes.

Building movements

Traditional intellectuals, organic intellectuals and ordinary people

The work of traditional intellectuals in building and maintaining consensus for the status quo through the constant organisation and reorganisation of everyday life (work practices, financial structures, domestic routines, medical self-discipline, leisure habits, religious behaviour etc.) and via the ongoing building and rebuilding of “common sense” (thinking in clichés, taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world works, moral rules, ways of talking, etc.) is not going to stop. Nor, since it is what gives shape to (most) ordinary people’s attempts at meeting their felt needs and developing themselves as individuals, would the sudden absence of “traditional intellectuals” lead to a spontaneous outburst of freedom – unless “organic intellectuals” were able to help people develop everyday alternatives that “worked”, grounded in people’s own needs and in movement skills (see Cox 1998).

To approach the same reflection from another angle, consider that a “world-revolutionary moment” consists of a sizeable proportion of the population of the planet – currently around six thousand million people – abandoning routines which reproduce current social relations in favour of new ones which directly challenge them. The “organic intellectuals” – activists – of new movements cannot remotely hope to bring this situation about through their own unaided efforts (though it says much about the residual elitism of some participants that they apparently believe just that: see McBride 2001 for interesting reflections on these issues).

What they can perhaps do is develop *tools* that ordinary people can learn to use when and if they feel the need strongly and clearly enough to be able to act on their own behalf: modes of organisation, processes of self-education, ways of talking, which are appropriate for the new purposes that people give themselves in such situations. Such tools are badly needed: without them, people who have not had a long experience of autonomous activity, of head-on confrontations, of working together in cooperative ways, will “reinvent the wheel” in the shape of some of the most basic mistakes of past movements (see WSM 1998 for some important reflections on this).

Structures, communication and self-sustainability⁸

Three kinds of things are particularly important here. One is the development of autonomous institutions. It is in the nature of contemporary capitalism, which has commodified or otherwise colonised so many of the needs met in previous generations by movement institutions, that there is (notoriously) little space for developed movement organisations. Nevertheless, if they are thought of not as “the new society in the shell of the old”, but rather spaces within which we can learn how to interact with each other in new ways around practical tasks, to sustain even marginal institutions is a useful act in itself. (One important example, not so marginal at present, is the demonstration: the extensive participatory planning processes behind the current “global demos” and the widespread discussions after the events are quite remarkable in these terms.)

A second need is communication (see Gillan 2001). There is much concern about “media perception” of the current protests, as if *any* revolutionary movement had *ever* had the

⁸ This section draws heavily on Cox (1999b)

mainstream media on its side. And yet, despite state control of the broadcast media in May 1968 in Paris, or 1989 in Eastern Europe, people manage, time and time again, to make their choices and take action nevertheless. Again, the alternative and underground media were small prior to the events (see e.g. ID-Archiv 1991, Dagron 2001), but their existence made it relatively easy to “get the word out” – through flyers, posters, small magazines, pirate radios and the like – when the situation changed. A movement which does *not* develop autonomous means of communication is a movement which expects never to challenge the status quo except in marginal ways (see Cox 1997 for more on this).

Thirdly, and perhaps most neglected, is the question of self-sustainability. Movement activity puts people under pressures which are often quite outside their everyday experiences; it makes demands on people which go far beyond the *modus vivendi* that most people attempt to establish with their world; and it does this as something which people feel to be more or less voluntary, rather than the extreme *unwilled* situations of everyday life. Given this, a culture of organisational *machismo* or backbiting bitterness is a recipe for disaster. Movements which do not invest in their own participants, which do not have cultures of emotional solidarity and tools for sustaining the self, are at best parasitic on mainstream institutions, and likely to lose participants to them when the pressure becomes too much; at worst, unsustainable *en bloc* (see Anon. 1999).

Clarity, groundedness and thinking forwards

What does all this mean for movement intellectuals? Firstly, **clarity** is a crucial quality: not just (or even not mainly) clarity of thought, important though that is, but above all clarity of actions. To be clear about the difference between the social relations involved in maintaining the status quo, those which are potentially opposed to it and those which are already opposed to it and to act accordingly is to make life choices that matter: what we do and why, who we associate with and how, the ways we talk and under what circumstances are not neutral choices. Autonomous institutions and autonomous individuals cannot ultimately be separated.

Secondly, **groundedness** matters. An Italian saying has it that “we should act according to what we think, or we will wind up thinking according to what we do”. There is something in this – in the sense that across our lives, what we do (not “who we are”) ultimately tends to win out over what we think. In the long run, then, we tend to be grounded one way or another, even though at any given point in time there may be immense contradictions. Given this, it is important to struggle towards a groundedness – a way of living our lives – which is consistent with our understanding of the world. In doing this, that understanding may even change.

Thirdly, **thinking forwards**. One of the great weaknesses of the Irish left is its tendency to project a deep conservatism onto the rest of the world: to assume, despite all the evidence, that “things never change” and hence to come to a more or less comfortable arrangement with a world and a culture which has always had a more or less comfortable space for “cynics”. Any effective educator knows that it is important to respond to people’s *potential*, not simply to how they currently present themselves (in circumstances not of their own choosing). Similarly, to base our thinking in terms of possible futures, futures already present *in nuce* within the present, is to act quite differently from an approach which takes the present as an eternal given. In particular, at the present time, it is crucial to “push the boat out”, to say things which couldn’t be said in given contexts 5 years ago - not to let the experience and needs of defeat block us from trying to connect on a basis of solidarity and commitment to change.

Nationalism, Irish intellectuals and the state

Our “post-colonial” history creates a particular kind of relationship between intellectuals and the state. On one hand, the general identification of more “traditional” kinds of intellectuals – literati, historians, priests etc. - with the national project structures a particular kind of practical conservatism while legitimating some very abstract modes of thinking indeed. On the other hand, the intellectuals organic to the new situation – civil servants, politicians, and managers on one side, trade unionists and community activists on the other side – have tended to take the state for granted as the situation within which they operate.

“Globalisation” involves a slow withdrawing of consent from this process on both sides, and this is no bad thing. One way of thinking about the right-wing domination of Irish politics (which is, both in terms of voters and parties, consistently the furthest right system in western Europe over the last few decades) is in terms of the deep *effectiveness* of the modes of popular mobilisation and consent developed within the nationalist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To see these breaking down is to see new possibilities opening up.

Irish political élites at present tend to take popular consent *in general* for granted, even while recognising the need to maintain it *in the particular* in relation to local issues. The actual mechanisms of consent and hegemony are perhaps rustier than they think; but this will not become clear until it is actually put to the test on a large scale. What will “return the penny” at that point is the extent to which oppositional movements have managed to create any significant and effective alternative form of counter-hegemony.

Revolutionary moments, counter-hegemony and intellectuals

One definition of a revolutionary moment (see especially Barker 1998 and Barker and Mooers 1997) is as one when the ruling class is no longer capable of governing and the people are no longer willing to be governed. Arguably, this situation is starting to develop across the globe, as the “leaders of the free world” can no longer meet in public in any city in that free world and the range of interests represented in the protests grows. The *pensée unique* of neo-liberalism is not what you might call a wonderful tool for organising hegemony; historically, it has usually depended on a populist authoritarianism or the support of religion to develop mass support. In this respect at least Ireland is not particularly unique, as both elements appear significantly less well-grounded in everyday practice than even two decades ago.

The extent to which the people are no longer willing to be governed is another matter, though. It is a great step forward that the protests against capitalist globalisation can enable the development of new connections in Ireland, within the traditional (and traditionally sectarian) left, between “social” and “ecological” interests, and so on. At the same time, these connections are still weak and largely *ad hoc*; although they are giving rise to new thought processes among activists, they are not yet giving rise to new realignments. Nor are they very broad in scope: in particular, little effort has been made to connect with community activists, with feminists, or with ethnic minorities.

And yet, and yet ... things can change rapidly. One of the most encouraging aspects of the *Tools for change* workshops I ran at the Convergence fair last weekend was seeing people from “red” and “green” backgrounds capable of discussing practically issues of strategy and tactics, while at *Ireland from below*, only two years ago, we found it possible to discuss seriously about problems and visions, but not practice. The discussions around planning the Genova event, organised by *Gluaiseacht*, Globalise Resistance, etc., seemed similarly to mark a qualitative step forward by comparison with the discussions after Prague.

A normal element of revolutionary moments is the irruption onto the political scene of huge numbers of people who have not previously been active participants in politics. The danger in

the Irish situation is that this happens via the media, as a reflection of events abroad, swamping existing on-the-ground organisations. Perhaps the most important contribution we can make here and now, then, is to build links with each other, find ways of cooperating and communicating, and start putting the networks in place that might be able to offer people some supports in this learning process. A purely televised revolution would be a disaster, as the experience of the “Summer of Love” or of “prairie power” in the American SDS suggest. The antidotes are organisation, communication and human sustainability.

Taking action

Whether or not we judge a revolutionary moment to be in the offing is obviously a difficult question. Most of us have probably been inoculated against false hopes by bitter experience, and this can be one of *our* weaknesses. Where that bitter experience works itself out in a lack of connection to the new movements – and hence an information feed controlled by the mainstream media – cynicism and withdrawal are normal, socially acceptable, and readily commodifiable (think *film noir*) responses. To dive into the actual variety of participants in the new movement, to explore the processes of alliance, cooperation and discussion going on⁹, and to take part in some of its activities, is to get a very different, and more hopeful, sense of it¹⁰.

To return to the quote from Marx at the head of this paper, there is no linearity to working-class revolutions. The substance, he writes in the same piece, outstrips the form: we should not expect that we know what such a thing would look like. After all, there are few enough points of reference, and often the circumstances are vastly different. We should, though, expect to find a wide variety of groups coming together around challenges to important elements of the status quo; an inability of ruling groups to co-opt or defuse the movement; the rapid mobilisation of large numbers of people who have not previously participated; and at least some of this is starting to appear, in particular perhaps at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and I hope in Genova in July.

Despite the reference to Marx, there is no book that tells us “how to do what’s never been done, how to win what’s never been won” (Dylan). As “intellectuals” we shouldn’t offer ourselves primarily as experts, because we aren’t. What we can offer ourselves as, is people who spend a lot of our time *organising* things, *communicating* ideas, *connecting* needs – as activists, in fact. It is time to start taking appropriate action: making connections, building networks, developing cooperation, deepening communication. The Convergence festival in Dublin last weekend and the William Thompson school this weekend are both attempts at doing this, and important ones. As a different Thompson (EP) put it, “we must learn to be loyal, not to East or West, but to each other” (1982).

⁹ See for example the discussions around June 18th and Mayday in London:

http://www.infoshop.org/octo/j18_reflections.html

<http://www.freespeech.org/mayday2k/reflect.htm>

http://www.geocities.com/pract_history/reflections.html

¹⁰ Another straw in the wind is represented by the (mostly) activist / academics who populate the *Alternative Futures and Popular Protest* conference in Manchester. In April 2000, there was an animated backstage conversation about the new movement, but no follow-up. In November 2000, there was an excited plenary discussion which was closest to a brainstorming or awareness-raising session. By April 2001, there were four papers on the subject and a widespread “common sense” about the nature of the movement - this despite only limited personal continuity from one conference to the next. Over this brief period, well-informed activists moved from seeing the movement as an interesting thing happening “off there” to a development of major significance but with little clarity or agreement to a shared practical interest, and often involvement.

Conclusion

Movements are ultimately shared learning processes: everyday attempts at finding ways to meet our needs feed into “movement knowledge”, which in turn can give people new ideas for daily practice (consider the women’s movement, for example). It’s important not just to reaffirm this basic grounding for solidarity, but to act from it, so that we can hope not to “be” activists for ever, any more than we want to see other people remain “ordinary”: in other words, to overcome the gap between “subject” and “object” together, and to learn things ourselves from that enormous reservoir of as-yet uncoded action which is constituted by ordinary people’s everyday struggles to meet their own needs and develop as people.

Writing this paper has been an interesting experience. Like Andrew Flood (2000), I hope to be able to produce a better spoken version than this written one. The habits of periods of defeat - focussing on apparently given “structures” - are strong, the language of “makeability” weak. Fear also pushes towards a “safe” approach - to relate to each other as potential threats rather than potential allies, to find a boring but non-risky approach, to try to recreate an academic space. It is not easy to learn to trust each other’s potential, to think forwards rather than to think defensively; but when we think defensively we remain behind our barricades and fail to communicate or to develop solidarity. Perhaps the starting-point for movement development is here: refusing to terrorise each other with our own defensive (sectarian, academic, particularist) strategies and finding ways of acting as if we might be able to build a new world, together.

Appendix

Anyone who turns up at an event like this and takes it on themselves to talk about “what’s happening, where we are and what we should do” can reasonably expect to be asked “says who?” So in that spirit, here’s a 3-minute bio:

I’ve been involved in movements of different kinds (in 5 different countries) since the Falklands War, and in various networking projects among activists - left, ecological, community, alternative press - since 1991. I’m also one of the few people in the country lucky enough to be able to study social movements for a living. Current projects include the Ballymun Oral History Project, the *Tools for change* workshop series at Convergence, the MA programme in participatory research on social movements practice, the community/ research forum, the Buddhafield Ireland open-air retreat and discussions around a possible follow-up to the *Ireland from Below* workshop. There’s about 10 MB of material from these and other projects on the Web pages listed below.

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Postscript (Jan 2002)

The last refuge of scoundrels, or The road to permanent war

The *pensée unique* of neo-liberalism has a serious weakness, in that its routine operation undermines the consent it depends upon: a fact highlighted by the absurdity of Tony Blair having to act as a substitute foreign minister for George Bush. Coercion comes more naturally to it than building hegemony, but without hegemony its ability to exercise coercion is strongly constrained.

This is nowhere clearer than in its response to the movement. On the one hand, there has been a consistent "retreat to Versailles", as summits have hidden behind walls (Quebec, Genova), been withdrawn to isolated locations (Qatar, Rockies), and abandoned (Barcelona, Naples II). On the other hand, there has been an increased militarisation of its response: from Naples I via Göteborg to Genova, geared towards the criminalisation and repression of the movement.

War is of course a godsend in this situation. At least within the US, it revives nationalism as an answer to the shaky legitimacy of the Florida election, the onset of recession and the rise of the movement, as well as detaching much of the labour movement (as at Washington last year). Whether it works remotely as well outside the US is rather more open to doubt.

It is a risky strategy in other ways: Rumsfeld's stated strategy is one of prolonged war geared towards citizen mobilisation, but once people have become mobilised they may set new goals for themselves, not those their leaders identify. It is perhaps no coincidence that the three revolutionary waves of the 20th century were closely associated with major wars.

In the immediate, war provides the scope for a peace movement, which in this case links the left and peace activists with third world solidarity and immigrant groups: it has not been difficult to build this movement, although as usual the timescale is not one of our own choosing. Nor has the peace movement in general been in competition with the anti-globalisation movement: organising continues, around the summits in Brussels and Washington, around the World Social Forum, around local and national issues (Italy is particularly strong here).

In Ireland, the movement is developing, but faces three significant problems, linked to the place of intellectuals and movements in Irish life. One has to do with peripherality: learning to mobilise and network more effectively on the ground, "bringing it all back home". A second has to do with making connections, in particular linking opposition to neo-liberalism to opposition to partnership within the labour and community movements. The third has to do with moving away from simple "pessimism of the intellect" (as in much academic commentary) and equally simple "optimism of the will" (as in many "instant solutions" presented on the alternative lecture circuit) and starting to think concretely in terms of building the kind of movement that will be needed to get from A to B, where the social potential for such a movement might lie, and what activists can effectively contribute to the process.

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