Popular responses to the Irish crisis and the hope for radical change: organic crisis and the different meanings of counter-hegemony.

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Abstract

From being the "Celtic Tiger" poster child of neo-liberalism, Ireland has moved first into recession and then into an IMF-EU bailout entailing massive cuts, with unemployment at the highest-recorded levels ever, the historically dominant Fianna Fail party alternatively in third or fourth place in polls and an unprecedented level of withdrawal of trust. Yet by contrast with the political upheavals in Iceland and Greece and the dramatic protests in countries like Britain, France and Italy, Ireland has seen remarkably little by way of active protest. The few large events have been determinedly single-issue or thoroughly corralled by conservative unions, radical attempts at organising coordinated movement resistance let alone alternative social directions have failed comprehensively to mobilise popular support, and all the indications are that the election will lead to a relatively routine alternation of power with Labour as junior partner in a government committed to a modified version of neo-liberal austerity.

While the Irish left has discussed the economic side of the crisis ad nauseam, little serious attention (in politics or academia) has been given to understanding this situation, which is rather taken as a given. This paper attempts an answer to the question of why responses to the crisis have been so restricted to organisational fixes. It starts with a broad analysis of the shaping of popular agency in Ireland via the long-term effects of nationalism, the channelling of popular hopes through state-led modernisation and the institutionalisation of self-organisation, with particular attention to the unresolved issues of "carceral Catholicism" in the South and war in the North.

Discussing left parties, unions, community activism and social movements, the paper explores Ireland's "Piven and Cloward" moment in the failure of organisational substitutionalism through electoralism, social partnership, clientelism and populism. If modernisation and social partnership together represented a form of passive revolution, constructing a new hegemony in the wake of the collapse of nationalist autarky, the underlying relations constructed in this period seem remarkably unshaken by state withdrawal from this programme. In this context it argues that casual reference to counter-hegemony as a simple collection of moments of cultural opposition is a wilful misunderstanding of the problem, politically and intellectually, and that the real challenge is to construct a coherent alternative which has the capacity of becoming hegemonic in its turn in both these dimensions.

Given this analysis of the context of Irish movement activity, what can or should organisers do, in the historically new situation created after the end of the "Celtic Tiger"? The paper argues that simple alliances between the leaderships of organisations which in practice privilege their engagement with existing institutional arrangements over popular self-organisation will not be enough, and explores the outcomes of attempts at alliance-building in three arenas: unions, social movements and community groups; electoral politics; and street protest.

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Draft only!

Introduction

How do we know?

This paper bites off considerably more than it can chew; but the problems we are facing on the Irish left are now considerably more than we, or Irish movements, or the broader worlds we come from currently know how to tackle. Some at least of the silences in theory here are due to our silences in strategy, and some of the disruptions in the thinking and writing process come from the disruptions in our lives.

On a less profound level, this paper is a very sketchy draft for which I have not been able to do as much work as I would have liked; it is offered here simply as a draft by way of a contribution towards further thinking rather than as anything more profound. I hope in time to do something more substantial with it.

Resistance, bailout and elections: how much defeat, how much victory?

Over the years 2008 - 2011 (roughly) the Irish capitalist class (there is no other word for it) dismantled social partnership, introduced a wide-ranging programme of cuts to pay in both public and private sectors and cut the "social wage" in all its aspects, while rescuing banks and bondholders at astronomical cost and "tying its hands" on pay and the social wage by accepting the EU / IMF package in order to make the bailout possible. What was the response from movements?

In essence, I want to suggest, two things happened. Firstly, movements attempted to find an organisational, institutional response and discovered their essential weakness. The high point of this was demonstrations aimed at reversing cuts to service delivery in the community sector, which failed to mobilise any significant numbers beyond those actually employed in the sector. Much the same was true, however, for the various projects around building resistance to the cuts through linked demonstrations.

There were only two areas in which we saw substantial popular mobilisation. One was at the most basic, defensive, level. People came out to the two ICTU demos to show opposition to cuts, and voted Labour and Sinn Féin for much the same reason. In neither case did this translate into any greater degree of action on the ground; of course, given that ICTU are loyal supporters of Labour's "there is no alternative" line, the net effect is likely to be demobilisation. The other area is in demos around pensioners, university fees and hospitals, where protestors basically demanded special treatment with little or no sense of solidarity for anyone else.

If we are looking for any kind of popular basis for serious resistance, never mind reconstruction on another model, we need to be thinking in terms of much more active, "deeper" popular mobilisation and radicalisation. Manifestly, though, if this comes it will not come *through* existing organisations and institutions, though it may (we can hope) wash over into and transform them.

Secondly, the "organic intellectuals" of the left and social movements - at many different levels - failed to meet the challenge. This is clear, of course, in the "business as usual"

model of actions like pre-Budget submissions focussed around NGOs' trademark issues, in defensive action to maintain service delivery, in the inability to get people to take action beyond coming to the "big demo" and then going shopping.

It is also clear, however, in the various attempts at "critical" responses to the cuts. Half of these remained at the clever-clever level of demonstrating exactly what was wrong with the budget, the official economic analysis, etc. without noticing that *nobody was listening.* Had being right been enough, the crisis of financial neoliberalism over the past few years and its massively destructive effect on Irish livelihoods would have provided a mass audience for the critics of neo-liberalism. As it was, however, neo-liberalism has remained unruffled.

This is tied to the problem of the other kind of "critical" response, which is equally naïve about distribution, reception and agency. If the goal of criticising the budget is to make it clear that alternatives are possible and mobilise people to do something about them, the critique needs to be put at a simple, agitational level and *then* backed up with the technical analysis, not left at the latter level. If the purpose is serious mobilisation against neo-liberalism, it is pointless to do so in conjunction with people whose institutional loyalties tie them to a Labour Party which has made it clear that loyalty to neo-liberalism, IFIs and European institutions comes first under all circumstances and at whatever cost.

In other words, local organisers and "critical intellectuals" have been all too focussed on their own, local situations while the world has shifted around them. As the dust settles, some will no doubt find jobs where they can continue to make the right noises as a political figleaf to the new order, while others may find themselves out on their ear and - perhaps - start to think more seriously about *how can we win?*

Back to business as usual?

The main point I want to make in this paper is that while in one sense we are back to business as usual, in another sense everything has changed. Our movement context has now shifted dramatically from that of boom and social partnership, in which the critique of partnership, neo-liberalism or even straightforward corruption and incompetence was essentially irrelevant - occasionally provoking outraged responses from those criticised but with little purchase on large numbers of people - to a situation of recession, the collapse of social partnership and (to all intents and purposes) direct rule by the EU and IMF over our economic policy. Within this latter situation, levels of popular anger have grown exponentially, and movement participants are willing to voice criticisms which a decade ago would have been made behind closed doors. Showing Naomi Klein's *The take* to first-year sociology students at the end of the boom, it seemed a different planet to them. Now those same students, two years later, say that the parallels to Ireland are too obvious to need mentioning.

We do not, however, know what is possible - and what are the limits - in this new situation. Certainly in one sense the left is in a good situation. With the Labour Party utterly loyal to its role as junior partner in a super-majority coalition dedicated to the implementation of austerity politics with only the most token attempt at softening the blow, it is clear that there is political space and to spare to the left: those who believed that by voting Labour they would moderate Fine Gael are set to get a very hard reality check indeed.

Similarly, with the anti-bailout parties a small minority, there is great space for real politics to turn in the direction of social movements; recession is already "freeing up" smart and angry people to take a more direct role in politics; and it is clear that such a

broad coalition is liable to make exactly the kind of mistakes that lead to greater radicalisation and mobilisation. The long trend of NGOisation, partnershipping and blanding-down of social movements, finally, is set to go into reverse as organisations dependent on the state find themselves without a sponsor and new groups organise on a mass, self-funded basis around campaigning rather than service provision.

Yet of course the immediate result has been the opposite: with the exception of two very conservative union demos, *all* the attempts made to build broad coalitions against the cuts, before and after bailout, have been failures. The only large protests have been single-issue ones (students, hospitals, pensioners) in which those calling for alliances with other movements have been drowned out by those seeking a special deal for their special interest.

The most important point, I think, is that *we do not know* where we stand; but we are acting as if we do. We don't know how bad things are going to get - or how good we can make them. Yet.

Ireland as conservative province?

In this section (as yet unwritten – but a fuller attempt is made in the paper "Gramsci in Mayo") I want to discuss where we start from in terms of existing hegemonic structures in Ireland. Firstly, I want to explore hegemony in the construction of the independent Irish state and the ways in which the remarkable levels of self-organisation visible in the Land War, the cultural nationalist project and the dual-power structures of the War of Independence were channelled, along with the ways in which the working class, women and small farmers in the 1910s were split by nationalism and the First World War, used as footsoldiers for the nationalist cause and by the mid-1920s put firmly back in their various boxes. Here I want to highlight particularly the dramatic scope of the popular struggle for land reform and the achievement of political independence, and the ways in which these energies were contained within an ultimately conservative political project.

Secondly, I want to discuss "coercion as the armour of consent", and the ways in which "carceral Catholicism" and anti-Republicanism were used to police the boundaries of what was acceptable. The latter, together with anti-communism and attacks on atheists etc., was a very effective tool for much of the 20th century in containing popular movements within a broad framework of loyalty to the established order (and in particular self-policing on demos etc.)

By the former I mean the combination of Magdalen asylums, industrial schools and institutionalised abuse - the systematic targeting of the most vulnerable children as part of the maintenance of a particular regime of "biopower" - together with the broader situation where the shift from multiple inheritance to primogeniture created vicious power dynamics *within* families around inheritance and the right to have relationships, marry and start families - denied to the vast majority of Irish people by the post-famine combination of primogeniture and large families. The net effect of this sharply imposed situation was to inscribe sexual control as the primary *content* of religion along with ethnic and political identification, and to construct a situation where the long-delayed family founder (after the father had retired) was able to do so at the expense of their siblings who acquired religious vocations defending the arrangement, became "relatives assisting" on their brother's farm, or were forced into emigration. Both in this broader situation and in the sharper carceral complex, the property relations of Irish life were inscribed on the bodies and psyches of the losers.

The popular struggles for modernisation against this led to dramatic effects: most particularly the defeat of nuclear power and the rise of the second-wave women's movement. These movements, in some ways, found themselves by the 1970s pushing on an open door in that their politics were roughly in line with the *direction* aimed at by modernisers since Lemass; their cultural radicalism came in for severe resistance because of fears that it might fragment the broader "national-popular" consensus on which the power of the neo-liberal modernisers ultimately rested.

Social partnership, from the late 1990s on, represented a "passive revolution" taming these movements in the aftermath of a series of successful struggles - most obviously the election of Mary Robinson as a symbolic alternative (it is hard to remember) to the provincial conservatism of the power-holders. From this point on, previously radical "outsider movements" found themselves having to curry favour with precisely the kind of petty-minded, provincial bureaucrats who had always opposed them, in order to gain or retain funding - funding which entailed a retreat from radical politics as a more or less explicit condition of being granted.

This section as a whole should seek to grasp the peculiarity of Ireland as at one and the same time "conservative province" - like Bavaria or northeast Italy, a party system consistently skewed far to the right and closely tied to religious and rural conservatism - and at the same time capable of achievements like the destruction of an aristocratic land-holding system by popular direct action; the breaking-apart of the core state of the world's then-largest empire; and the defeat of nuclear power. It needs to do so by showing that the hegemonic relations constructed in the national process are not simply repressive but also involve widespread co-optation and offers to (partially) meet some of the needs expressed by social movements.

The multiple failures of the Irish lefts

This section (also as yet unwritten) needs to ask in some ways how we got it so wrong: how the social movement left (understood in the broadest sense) made so little real use of the long period of economic boom and social partnership in any strategic way. One aspect of this is undoubtedly state-centrism and the downgrading of other fields of struggle: the lazy belief that because the state is the greatest visible locus of power, a focus on the state alone can achieve what we need. This is tied to an at times obsessive focus on elections, policy and even state personnel, at the expense of an analysis which can hold together *both* relationships within the state (including at EU level and those involving the movements and radical parties of other countries) *and* relationships within society.

A common manifestation of this among professional thinkers is what can best be called intellectual substitutionism: the search for "the right analysis" (of policy, of economics, of the party system) as a goal in itself, devoid of any real theory of *what kind of agency* might be able to push these in other ways. There are other comparable intellectual manifestations - a deferential "Europeanism" which is a million miles away from any serious engagement with radical Europe, for example; or an equally deferential consumption of political texts from Anthony Giddens to Slavoj Zizek - but they share this "theological" situation of analyses for which *actual organised human agency* is cut out of the analysis, and the focus is somewhere else, with no serious sense of how to achieve it.

At the level of movement participants - in unions, community groups, the women's and environmental movements - a kind of "internal nationalism" is the practical counterpart of involvement in "social partnership". "Participation" has been sought at any cost, as a good in itself, regardless of the mounting evidence of its ineffectiveness at bringing about substantive rather than nominal change. This links to movements' inability to believe in themselves and their own strength (despite the aforementioned achievements), and leads back to the kind of "theology" discussed earlier, where the "real" agents of change are seen as those parties who are apparently eternally in control of the state but who - if petitioned in the right way - might just do something in contradiction to their basic interests. Another way of putting this is internal nationalism - not loyalty to the nation as against others (or indeed against other nationalities), but rather the earnest belief that the failures of the system are not really *meant*, that the king is somehow badly advised.

At the level of formal left organisations, the past few years have seen an endless proliferation of "united fronts from above", as they would have been called in the jargon of earlier years - agreements between institutional leaderships around common projects. While the United Left Alliance has been relatively successful at doing this *at an electoral level*, all attempts to take these united fronts "lower" - in the organisation of demonstrations, for example - have failed miserably.

The common theme of all these analyses is that movement organisations and activists at all levels have tended to take the institutional structure constructed by their more powerful enemies - parliament, the media, social partnership, "policy debate" and so on - as their own centre of gravity. In so doing they have consistently tended to seek institutional and organisational solutions, both internal to their own organisations and within this hostile terrain - at the expense of popular mobilisation and the building of *real*, independent popular capacity to take political action. As institutions constructed during the boom years of partnership start to collapse, this self-inflicted weakness - the tendency to substitute an organisation for the movement, and the official institution for the organisation - is coming around to bite us.

We need to think very differently, and in a longer term, if we are to get out of this mess.

Towards counter-hegemony?

Hegemony and the possible meanings of counter-hegemony in Gramsci

Gramsci uses the word hegemony in quite a specific sense, by analogy with its previous use in international relations where it referred to the mixture of military might, alliances, tributary states etc. controlled by a superpower. In social terms he defines it around the way in which society is organised, not by a government but by a social group (not necessarily a whole class, but often in his analysis a combination of class fractions with particular intellectual groups etc.)

To construct society in a particular way this group gives not just theoretical leadership but exercises "directive" functions, in other words organising roles. These include (of course) political and legal leadership, but also the reshaping of everyday life in the workplace and outside (for example through "Fordism") and the way in which people seek to meet their needs, redress grievances, etc. Hegemony, in other words, is not simply a matter of controlling the airwaves (as many regimes throughout history have discovered). This hegemony is organised as "consent armoured by coercion", in other words the combination of a particular structure of repression (including social repression directed at certain groups) with a particular structure of the cooptation and consent of other social groups, mediated via the intellectuals (e.g. doctors, priests, managers, peasant leaders, union activists etc.) who are professionals in organising other people's lives and articulating their needs. It is not simply a long word for popular support.

To the best of my knowledge, the phrase "counter-hegemony" never appears in Gramsci. Certainly he would have had little interest in its most common meaning today, that of "celebrating resistance" for its own sake. Of course some people resist, and some people manage to stand outside the official way of being and way of thinking. This is no bad thing; but (he might have said) it is far from sufficient. Left to itself, all that will happen is that such groups will be crushed; or they will be allowed to continue precisely to the extent that they do not threaten anything substantial.

The concept of counter-hegemony used sensibly, however, is Gramscian even if it does not appear in his corpus. His analysis of social change is very clear that a change between regimes and ways of organising the world begins with the construction of what can best be called a "proto-hegemony" outside the existing hegemonic alliance. This may take the form of a "passive revolution", the coming-together of a new alliance of elites around a new socio-political project (fascism represented this, for example). Or it may take the form of the development of a new "national-popular" alliance combining social movements from below around a particular programme for change.

Such alliances are necessarily "proto-hegemonic" in the sense that there are a wide range of social powers which cannot be exercised substantially in advance of a revolution - or whose exercise in and of itself constitutes a revolutionary challenge to the established order (generalised land occupation in an agricultural country, for example). The accent needs to be on *hegemonic*, though - because once they have reached the point of posing this kind of challenge, they need to have constructed alliances which are strong and broad enough to resist what the old alliance will throw at them.

In the Irish case, then, if we are serious about getting beyond neo-liberalism (we can hardly afford to be otherwise), we need to think in terms of how to construct an alliance which is not simply limited to a given sector (trade unions, radical social movements, community organisations, the traditional left) but (a) includes elements of all of these; (b) is if at all possible not dependent on the success or failure of a single organisational project; and (c) is capable of gaining widespread support from *other* social groups and movements which are not involved in leading roles but nevertheless recognise themselves in it. Broad platforms at demonstrations, electoral alliances, movement networks and so on may all be part of this; but in themselves they are not enough.

The organisational *simulation* of an alliance which does not exist on the ground and is not recognised by those who are supposed to be involved in it (which is what we are talking about) *may* at times be a step in the right direction, but should not be mistaken for the achievement of hegemony: if movement organisations, parties, unions etc. were actually *heard* by the bulk of their members, let alone seen as speaking for them, never mind having their proposals accepted, it would be remarkable.

What does a "national-popular" alternative mean and where do you find one?

In the broadest possible terms, Gramsci saw the nation-state as the central location for the formation of modern citizens: not only politically but also culturally (including linguistically), economically and so on. We do not have to accept that this is always and everywhere the case to get the point that we need to be asking ourselves about the different levels on which political agency (of whatever shape) is constructed - as well of course as the point, evident in Gramsci's own life, that one can organise on a range of levels.

In the Republic, there were quite self-evidently processes of national-popular organisation in the process of the Irish revolution; indeed, to some extent this is what the revolution consisted of - the forging of alliances between urban intellectuals and strong farmers, the successful assertion by the latter of rural leadership vis-à-vis subsistence farmers and "relatives assisting", the marginalisation of landless labourers, the subordination of (Catholic) workers and women to this national project, and so on. Its effects are powerful, and deep: not universal (it depends of course on the exclusion of Protestants, immigrants, travellers, cultural radicals and so on - or their willingness to try to position themselves within this alliance).

In the shift towards neo-liberalism and into the Celtic Tiger, substantial changes were made in this alliance, but more by way of modification than complete transformation. Thus a wealthier Ireland was increasingly positioned as part of "the west", with a shift (still incomplete) away from popular identification with liberation struggles elsewhere and towards identification with the US or NATO; racism rose as "we" became "part of Europe" (ie white, rich and hostile to the migrant poor); aspirations towards national unification were increasingly marginalised and Irish involvement in the British empire and WWI increasingly celebrated while the nouveaux riches flocked towards the imitation of what they understood to be a British or American upper-class lifestyle; large sections of social

movements (women's, community, environmental movements and the left) bought into a new version of modernisation theory in which it was the EU (in other words, the indirect effect of movement struggles elsewhere) rather than popular struggle here that could bring about progressive change; and so on.

As can be seen from this list, neo-liberalism in Ireland put less effort into developing new forms of popular consent than might be expected, in part because it was felt that popular consent was not a problem: and indeed with 80 - 85% voting for parties of the right, similar proportions declaring themselves Catholics, the bulk of social movement *organisations* thoroughly enmeshed in partnership arrangements, this analysis probably did hold up to about 2008. We can add to this the broader effect of aspirations to social mobility (more of course in terms of credit-fuelled consumption and educational tokens than actual equality), "sophisticated" cultural consumption, racism and the "English-language dividend" whereby the products of increasingly conservative Britain and the US are aggressively distributed to the Irish population "for free" from the point of view of Irish elites.

Two questions now have to be asked. One is how much of this loyal support for "the national programme" is solid among those who are no longer benefitting from it. No doubt there are groups (e.g. the service class) for whom neo-liberalism, in its plan B austerity form, is all there is[1]. But the 15% or so of the electorate which switched from right-wing to "left-wing" (ie including Labour and Sinn Féin) parties in the 2011 election represents part of a broader trend: the collapse of the situation where Fianna Fáil was once the number one party of the Dublin working class in return for the various concessions and fragmented social wage it offered. More broadly, very little of what was once on offer in return for loyalty now remains so, other than the hope that by remaining loyal to international financial institutions homeowners and petty speculators will eventually be rewarded.

Secondly, what alternatives can be constructed, and among whom? Who is plausibly able to represent their interests as being in the general interests of the country in a direction other than that sketched out by Dermot Desmond and his partners in sheer brass neck?

A perspective for the next ten years?

What I think we need to face is that we are now in some ways in a qualitatively new situation, which we do not understand at all. In large part this is because what little intellectual energy we have been able to spare from the tasks of survival and resistance has been wasted on political economy and on policy, in other words (following the analysis above) on the play-acting "as if" we were in a different kind of world. This deliberately wishful thinking - part of the Irish intelligentsia's constant desire to live somewhere else - means that we have basically nothing more than anecdotes with which to grasp the *power* relations that now structure our existence.

To start with the most basic: while neither Fianna Fáil nor the Church has "gone away", they are no longer dominant actors, nor likely to be, for the foreseeable future (let us say ten years, and hope longer). While the agenda of liberal modernisation still has a way to go, this marks a decisive turning-point. Among other things, we might hope that it will free up

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[1] It should not be forgotten here that - just like the Anglo-Irish in the 19th century - much of this class's *personal* and *family* aspirations depend on the possibility of working for multinational corporations and European institutions, and on international mobility.

some of the intellectual energy on the left which has always gone into doing the liberal work that actually-existing liberals were too lazy to do, for more genuinely left-wing tasks. Of course, it is equally likely to result in such leftists realising that they now live in an Ireland where they are perfectly comfortable to be liberals.

More substantially, clientelism and religion have historically been two central pillars of popular consent in this little province of ours, and they are structurally unsound. This has been coming for a long time, with the decline of FF and FG from the mass-based parties they once were, and the same with the decline in participation not only in weekly Mass and so on but also the collapse of the religious sodalities which were once central to Irish life. Unsurprisingly, as the ability of such organisations to "deliver" their members declines, we are seeing a rise in attempts to import cleavage issues from the US or Britain, and the growth of "opinion politics" as a way of generating consent.

Along with this collapse in the traditional structures of consent, we are also seeing a massive weakening of the major structures of coercion: religious control of bodies and anti-republicanism. The ability to threaten the use of force has certainly not disappeared, but it has been severely constrained over the past decade or so, and it is not yet clear what effects this will have. Attempts to involve Ireland more fully in NATO and EU military adventures have to be seen, in part, in this light.

Thirdly, the collapse of partnership is a dramatic turn of events. For the 15 years of the boom, partnership kept the natives in line, demobilised social movements, and managed the distribution of minor concessions. As corporatism comes to an end, the full rigour of neo-liberalism bites and there is no longer a continually growing cake to redistribute, there can be little doubt that the ability of movement leaderships to contain their memberships has declined precipitously.

This does not, however, mean that we will see full-scale rebellions within those movements as we currently know them: for one thing, partnership has been all about demobilisation. Those left loyal to organisations have often remained so following the instrumental logic partnership establishes, and such support may melt away like morning dew in some cases.

We should rather look to see the growth of new struggles which established movement organisations and leaderships can barely understand, let alone ally themselves with. The real lesson of the failed mobilisations of 2009 - 2011 is that there is no *organisational* way out of the crisis, nor is there a *party* one. If there is a *movement* one, it is in finding open ways to communicate between struggles whose forms we can expect to be often ephemeral, surprising and even hard to recognise as such.

The purveyors of business as usual will, *of course*, continue to rule the roost in most movement organisations and parties: this is, after all, the basis on which people have associated themselves with those bodies, and it will be a rare organisation which is genuinely able to return to its principles and ask how it can realise them now, in the new situation.

Beyond the crisis?

In the May 2011 seminar "Beyond the crisis: global justice, equality, social movements" we have set out yet other questions to explore, these ones even more lateral (we might think) or tangential (critics might say) to the problem of where we are now. The idea in so doing is to ask big enough questions that we can get a handle on the ways in which the world has changed under our feet, behind our backs and in our own minds as the generation of activists which has been politically socialised over the last two decades has come to inhabit

its own, more or less accurate, more or less imagined, version of those two decades, with the combination (characteristic of Ireland) of tacit "good sense" of what our world is actually like with imported ideas (from Britain, the US, the Continent, the majority world) which somehow resonate with some aspects of our experience or seem to offer hope.

Among those questions are the meaning of revolution today, how we can learn from popular struggles, why people *don't* revolt, how the changing nature of work affects radical politics, what our goals should be, the commodification of culture, and the conflict between development and social change. More than enough to be getting on with, no doubt; and in any case these are really just tools that we can use to help us grasp the situation we are now in and think how to respond to it.

In place of a conclusion

If I had to offer a conclusion, it would look something like this:

- The balance of popular feeling has swung somewhat towards the left in the crisis, and we need to capitalise on this with a clear awareness that the neo-liberal solution (in its new, FG-Labour colours) is unlikely to work on its own financial terms and will almost certainly bring a greater immiseration of large sectors of the population. In other words, we need to have the confidence to oppose it directly and argue for other ways forward.

- This arguing does not consist of tomes on political economy or the institutional shape of an imagined new Ireland; it consists, above all, of identifying key struggles and building radical alliances around them. The most obvious of these is, of course, Rossport: thanks to the intransigence of Shell and the corruption of the Irish political process, it makes possible an immensely wide alliance in which people can see the State using massive violence on behalf of multinationals; where it is clear that decision-makers were bought and sold; where a huge natural resource is being given away at the very time that the country is being plunged into debt; and so on.

- More broadly still, we all need to be thinking about the struggles we are involved in in these terms: *not* how to justify them in terms which will cause fewest wrinkles to cross the brow of Middle Ireland, but how to show each other - and everyone else who is opposed to the current direction the country is taking - why in fighting for one thing we are fighting for everything. In doing this, of course, we look for different allies: not the local notables and institutions but our own movement peers.

- We need to be working hard at building links of a non-organisational nature. Of course organisation accrues around these; but at the moment routing things through existing organisations is almost always a practical and political mistake. This is not to say that individuals and networks in such organisations (parties or otherwise) should not be welcome; but it is to say that we should all try, whatever our allegiances, to start from an orientation of nurturing struggles rather than coralling them for our own purposes. Or, as EP Thompson put it in another context, we must learn to be loyal to each other if we want to create the kind of counter-hegemonic movement that can win.

- We should not be afraid to be completely unrespectable, whether in terms of our tactics, our allies or our ideas. In particular, journalists and academics have colluded massively in bringing us to where we are today - and have invested heavily, in terms of their career capital, in a particular kind of "business as usual". Few will

love us when we act outside their terrains of respectability; which makes doing so all the more urgent if we want to speak to those who do not feel spoken for by those elites.

- We have to learn to demolish simulations: be they simulations of radical-democratic processes (Claiming our future), of theory for struggle (political economy as educated opinion, "civil society" as good little citizens etc.), in the broadest sense of popular agency. Or in other words stop being thankful that people are making the right noises and realise that the simulation is the worst enemy of the real thing: those who preach civil society are horrified when it actually happens.

Beyond the crisis: global justice, equality, social movements seminar

<http://ceesa-ma.blogspot.com/2011/03/beyond-crisis-global-justice-equality.html>