

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

November / December 2011

Twenty-Eight Years of Irish Anarchist News

The Household Tax: Organise to Win

Across the country, communities have begun to organise to resist the new household tax. The government have introduced this tax, due to be levied from 1st January, at €100 per year in a bid to sneak in what will within a couple of years amount to a bill of up to €1,300 for every household, combining a property and water tax.

Gregor Kerr

They claim that the revenue generated will go to develop local services. But this is a lie - every penny raised will go straight to paying off the gambling debts of international bankers and financiers.

If this tax is successfully imposed it will open the way to the privatisation of our water service, just as has happened with our bin service. Private companies are already lining up to attempt to generate profits from our water supply.

Refuse to pay

The only way to prevent this is to stop the charge being implemented now. If everybody refuses to pay, the government's ability to impose this tax on us against our will is very limited.

They will threaten us with fines, and maybe even with imprisonment. But if we build a campaign that involves hundreds of thousands of people refusing to pay, they simply cannot take us all through the court process. We proved this in the 1990s when, despite their best efforts to beat a massive campaign of people power, the then government was forced to abolish water charges.

In communities across Dublin and throughout the country ordinary people refused to pay and then organised to defend non-payers. When the councils attempted to disconnect water supply, we rallied to make it impossible for them to do so. In the few cases where they did disconnect,



campaigners re-connected the water supply within hours.

When they changed tactics and began to take people to court, neighbours and fellow non-payers turned up in their hundreds to support them. The campaign challenged every single case in court and completely tied up the legal process. It quickly became apparent that it would be impossible to take court cases against even a minority of non-payers and the government was forced to concede defeat.

Defend non-payers

The same challenge faces us now and by organising in the same way we can again be successful. Supposed defenders of working people, the Labour Party are implementing this tax while Sinn Féin, although opposing the tax, are refusing to support non-payment. Our strategy must be that, firstly, nobody should pay. Secondly, we should organise for the defence of non-payers so that when the government dares to take action against one of us, they will be taking us all on.

This cannot be left to politicians, trade union leaders or community leaders. No matter how well intentioned any of them are, it is only the tactic of mass participation in the campaign that can win. That

means that everybody who makes the decision not to pay should then decide to convince as many as possible of their neighbours, friends, family and workmates to do the same. The campaign needs to be spearheaded by ordinary people operating as leaders in their own communities.

The campaign has already begun in some areas. If there is a campaign in your area, get involved. Go to the meetings, sign the non-payment petition, put an 'I'm not paying' poster in your window, get copies of the Campaign newsletter and distribute them in your area, talk to your neighbours and workmates and get them involved. By standing together we can defeat this tax. A victory in this campaign will teach a hard lesson to the government but more valuable is the lesson we learn ourselves - organising to win.

If the campaign has not yet been established in your area, then get in touch with it by emailing contact@householdtax.org or by ringing/texting Greg on 0861501151. You will be put in touch with others in your area and helped to get the ball rolling.

See inside for regional updates on the campaign

New Government, Same Cuts - Crisis Continues

Another budget looms. The Irish public again find themselves with their head under a guillotine looking up at this budget wondering about the weight behind the blade. We are subjected to daily media leaks of what they are going to do to us in this: Less dole, more job losses for those who have them, stopping medical cards for a few months, all the wild and fearful possibilities of a worse life for many people are being floated. What is different this time when you compare it to the previous three or is it four austerity budgets? We've been in crisis for some time now but this time the government is different.

Dermot Freeman

We are being told that savings of €3.6 Billion need to be made. We all know that this money will go towards paying the interest on that huge loan which we received from the troika of the ECB, EU, and the IMF. It will not go towards Education, Health, Transport, Social Housing or any of the other areas that all too evidently need investment. We all must suffer to cover the 'losses' of our betters.

Whilst people went out and used the last election as a referendum on the last government, delivering a cut of our own to Fianna Fail and recycling the Green party to oblivion, it was inevitable that the others would get their go. Now we have Joan Burton (Minister for Social Protection, ha ha!) ably taking the baton from Mary Hanafin's hand as she chases down dole fraud whilst Bankers play golf and NAMA works hard to maintain the lifestyles of the developers. We have different coloured deck chairs on this ship of fools, but we're still sinking.

What did the Unions get for supporting the Labour party into power? You get Pat Rabbitte posturing and saying that they are keep the cuts down to a mere €3.6 billion and no more even though the blue shirted Fine Gael boys want to do better and be seen as top of the class for the IMF. We also have state assets like ESB being privatised, which is like selling your house at the bottom of a property crash. At the same time over 240,000 people are having difficulty paying their electricity

bills with ESB and have entered into a payment plan with them.

The more things change the more things stay the same. New Government, same austerity budget, new department of Social Protection, same attacks on the most vulnerable in society, new President, same platitudes, new need for more money by the defunct banks, the same boys show up for their four ball at the K club. Jim Larkin said the great were only great because we are on our knees. Let us arise. People are arising from Wall Street to Tokyo, from Cairo to Rome, from Damascus to Dame. Street. Health and Education workers in the North went on strike on October 5th in protest at frontline cuts. Sometime soon they (the Government & the Troika) are going to come to you and ask you to pay another tax, to go towards paying off the gambling losses. It will be called the Household tax and it will be our collective chance to arise. Let's grasp it with both hands because the only way to fix a bully is to stand up to him.

solidaritybooks



43 Douglas St., Cork

Solidarity Books is a radical bookshop in Cork open for the past 2 years. It has a wide selection of books on anarchism, socialism and Irish history. It also holds regular radical film nights and is a meeting space for progressive groups in the city. It is run by WSM.

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<http://derryanarchists.blogspot.com/>

Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group
PO BOX 10785, Dublin 1.
<http://ragdublin.blogspot.com/>

Indymedia Ireland
Alternative user-generated Irish news.
<http://www.indymedia.ie>

Seomra Spraoi
Dublin Social Centre
10 Belvedere Court, Dublin 1.
<http://www.seomraspraoi.org>

Just Books
Belfast Radical Bookshop
13-15 Clarence Street, Belfast.
justbooks@rocketmail.com

Shell to Sea
Campaign to move Shell's gas pipeline offshore from Co. Mayo.
<http://www.shelltosea.com>

Hands Off the People of Iran
Anti-imperialist network for solidarity with Iranian trade unionists & the women's rights movement.
<http://www.hopoi.org>

Choice Ireland
Abortion rights action group
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<http://www.choiceireland.org>

Residents Against Racism
Opposing racism and deportations.
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01-6770253 | info@ipsc.ie
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Free Education for Everyone
Active in colleges around the county, North and South.
www.free-education.info
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JobBridge: Intern or Slave?



Over the past five months, the Labour/Fine Gael coalition has rolled out its JobBridge internship scheme. This scheme sees thousands of unemployed people taking 6-9 month “work experience placements” in various jobs in exchange for €50 per week in addition to their social welfare payment.

Aidan Rowe

The purported aim of the scheme is to “assist in breaking the cycle where jobseekers are unable to get a job without experience, either as new entrants to the labour market after education or training or as unemployed workers wishing to learn new skills.” However, the reality is that

the scheme offers opportunistic bosses a mechanism to exploit the unemployed, particularly those crippled with debt, employing them at far below the normal cost for jobs that would otherwise have to be filled in the normal manner, driving down wages, and expanding the role of precarious labour in the Irish economy (what is known as “increasing competitiveness” in official jargon).

The pretence that the scheme is intended to offer “opportunities” to the unemployed is belied by the heavy uptake of the scheme by employers offering low-skilled or unskilled jobs - including supermarket shelf-stackers, shop assistants, fast-food workers and the like - making only the most perfunctory and ridiculous attempts at appearing to offer a training component. Most famously, Tesco is employing a number of interns to work for six months “filling shelves according to merchandising plans and ensuring that customers do not have to queue”, claiming that the intern “will gain skills such as rotation of stock, customer service skills, management of waste and damages, merchandising to plans routines” (the same skills a teenager would gain during a summer job, but at much higher cost to Tesco).

However, we should resist the urge to focus only on those that are obviously taking the piss, and to ignore the exploitation underlying internships that have a genuine training element, which can be more easily spun as “legitimate”. Whatever the content of the internship, the fact remains that employers are only required to contribute €50 to the intern’s pay, with the rest coming out of workers’ tax. Employers pocket the difference as extra profit. Additionally, since there is no obligation on employers to offer an actual job at the end of the internship period, they are able to continually cycle through disposable interns without ever actually employing any of them in fully paid work.

This is not an oversight, or a result of governmental incompetence, but rather cynical opportunism by the government. The unemployment crisis is being exploited to further several longstanding goals of neoliberal governance: cutting wages, undermining job security, and using welfare as a mechanism to provide cheap labour for business. It’s an issue that affects all workers in Ireland, not just those who will be directly involved in the scheme, by lowering the accepted threshold for exploitation in the economy as a whole, underling the organising power of unions, and normalising insecure and precarious labour.



International Anarchist website with news & discussion from all five continents.

Find out more - Check out www.wsm.ie

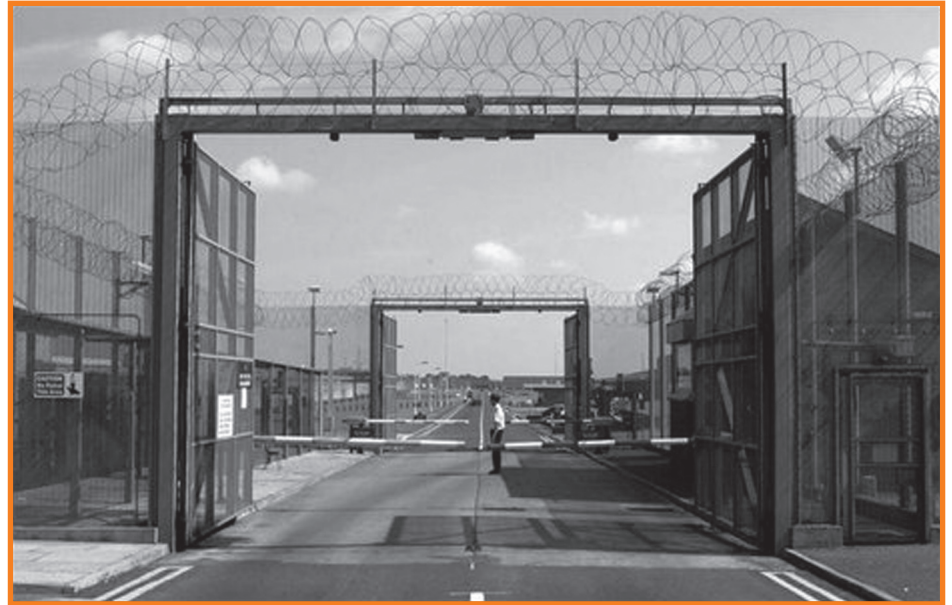
Prison Torture Continues in the North

The temporary release of terminal ill prisoner Brendan Lillis from Maghaberry prison, following a mass support campaign across Ireland, marked an important first step in the battle for prisoner rights. However the wider policy to punish, brutalise and isolate republican prisoners continues. Regular beatings, brutal strip-searching, denial of legal rights and recreational activities constitutes a callous disregard for the lives of political prisoners.

Sean Matthews

In May, the family of republican prisoner Harry Fitzsimmons, including his 4-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son, visited him and were traumatised by what they saw.

In their words: “We were shocked by the state of his face - multiple cuts and bruises, he could not be hugged because his ribs were so sore, his jaw and chin is swollen as is his wrist, but it can’t be said if they are broken because he still hasn’t had medical attention, no x-rays, no painkillers, nothing.’ At the moment over 30 republican prisoners are engaged in various actions including a dirty protest. They are demanding full implementation of the August Agreement last year between the Prison Officers Association and republican prisoners which was supposed to bring an end to controlled movement and strip searching. Despite intransigence from the prison administration and NIO, republican prisoners have tried to break the political impasse by proposing the ‘Portlaoise model’ which has thus far been rejected. This model, based on Port-



laoise prison, includes replacing complete strip-searching with airport style detectors.

In recent years Maghaberry prison has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. Consistent reports from ‘independent’ watchdogs including criminal inspectorate reports have highlighted the ongoing repressive conditions, neglect, overcrowding and abuse within the prison, pointing out that it is not fit for purpose and one of the ‘worst in the UK.’ Prison kills and rates of prison suicide are staggering and are directly related to the above-mentioned problems, which is akin to torture.

The North’s prisons are no exception, both at home and globally we are witnessing a gradual erosion of prisoners’ rights and conditions, which were often achieved by militant demonstrations and riots. The gradual privatisation of prisons and repressive legislation using the pretext of ‘war on terror’ or ‘war on crime’ is about creating a prison industrial complex driven by profit

and fear, where prisoners are no better than slaves.

As anarchists we recognise that the criminal justice system’s first priority is to defend the status quo and the bosses. Prisons are an integral part of the class system and vital to the survival of capitalism and the preservation of wealth and privilege.

While the WSM is opposed to state repression we are also opposed to the cul-de-sac of armed republicanism which only serves to further divide the working class in the service of a narrow, militaristic and all too often sectarian nationalism. We support the prisoners’ demands on a humanitarian basis and call for an end to prison censorship and repression of all political prisoners or otherwise. We need to build one campaign and one voice, linking with wider prisoner struggles at home and abroad based on the ‘relatives action committee’ model free of party political control.

Thinking About Anarchism: Neoliberalism & Education

In mid-August, Labour Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn announced both further increases to the “registration fee”, which currently stands at €2000, and the return of tuition fees, which will be payable at point-of-entry, for third level education. Coupled with the massive cuts already to the grants system, this will make it prohibitively expensive for many students to enter and complete third level education, and impose a substantial financial burden on those that do. The implications of this will be further falls in the standard of living of ordinary families and increased indebtedness for young people as they begin their adult lives. For many prospective mature students, their hopes of getting back to education will be ruined.

Aidan Rowe

The public debate on education has settled into a familiar pattern over the course of the crisis. The issue, we are told, is that the country is “broke” and the cost of funding third level education is “spiralling”, therefore students must be prepared to pay more, either through the reintroduc-

tion of tuition fees in a formal sense, or through continued hikes in the registration fee (backdoor fees). The issue of fees is framed as an apolitical technical one: what is the best mechanism of implementing this policy? The fact that the Labour Party promised the electorate that they would not reintroduce fees, and indeed to reverse the most recent increase in the registration charge, has already been rationalised as naive idealism crushed by economic reality - yes we believe in free education, but we didn’t realise how bad things were - rather than a cynical and shameless lie. Concerns like social justice and the right to education are reduced to nice ideals, luxuries for boom times, which must now take a back seat to pragmatism.

Ignoring the broader political context of the issue serves an ideological function: to obscure the role of class and power. “Harsh economic realities”, which are cited whenever ordinary people object to attacks on their standard of living, their wages and conditions and their public services, disappear whenever wealthy bankers and investors demand that their gambling debts be taken on by the taxpayer, or whenever senior bondholders demand that their bonds must be honoured whatever the human cost. Similarly, “harsh economic realities” are never employed in order to redistribute the enormous wealth of the capitalist class.

Crucially, far from being a reluctant necessity of the economic climate, the dismantling of the right to education is a decades-old process that has been taking place across the West, particularly since the beginning of the ‘Bologna Process’ around the turn of the



“We’ve decided to support you for the rest of your life. It’s cheaper than sending you to college.”

millenium. The erosion of the right to education and the imposition of a service-provider model of third-level education, in which students are consumers of a product who must enter increasing levels of debt for the privilege, has long been a goal of the neoliberal project. All of the establishment parties of this country subscribe to this aim, and more broadly, the eradication of the ‘public good’ from political discourse, with varying degrees of zeal and varying rhetorical accents. What we’re witnessing is an acceleration of an already-existing process now that the ideological weaponry of an impending economic apocalypse has made itself available to those in power.

A key part of this process is the reshaping of the priorities and goals of education to those of capital. In Ireland, DCU appears to be leading the charge on this project, with it’s recently-announced plans to become a “university of enterprise”, with students

building up an electronic portfolio which will monitor their learning activity over their time in college and will be used by employers to pick out graduates with the right kind of skills and attitudes. The premise underlying this, which has increasingly become an unquestioned truism of public discourse, is that the purpose of education is economic rather than social: to build the ‘knowledge economy’ rather than to impart knowledge as a personal and social good. The Department of Education’s plans to remove History and Geography from the core subjects at secondary level should be seen in this light also: both are subjects that provide fewer direct benefits to industry, and can thus be safely sidelined regardless of the impact on learning. Anarchists support a genuinely free education system freed from the demands of capital, whose goal is the intellectual and personal development of the individual and the benefit of society as a whole.

Anarchism & the WSM

Despite the distraction of the presidential election charade, the past couple of months have been busy ones for WSM members as government spending cuts continue to bite.

One manifestation of this has been the massive reduction in Special Needs Assistants (SNA’s) in the education system. Our members were present at the Alliance Against Cuts in Education protest held on September 14th last (see <http://www.wsm.ie/c/sna-cuts-education-march-sept11>), while we have also been involved in the campaign to save Loughlinstown Hospital A&E services (<http://www.wsm.ie/c/loughlinstown-24-hour-ae-due-reduce-hours-1st-novemeber>).

WSM members continue to be active in organising the anti-household tax campaign, which is ongoing countrywide, following a successful national forum held in Dublin in early September (see article elsewhere in this edition for further details). We also supported the ongoing Occupy Dame Street and Real Democracy protests (see article elsewhere).

Solidarity activity forms an important part of anarchist practice and, to this end, we supported a couple of pickets of the British embassy in support of the Dale Farm residents in the UK who are

battling attempts to evict them by Basil-don Council (see <http://www.wsm.ie/c/dale-farm-families-travellers-eviction-dublin>). Keeping with the spirit of internationalism, we attended the London Anarchist Bookfair in late October, where the latest edition of our magazine, Irish Anarchist Review, made its traditional debut.

Anti-Fascist activities have also formed an important part of anarchist history and thus the invite to Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party (BNP), to speak in Trinity College by the Philosophical Society posed a challenge. We supported a successful Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) “flash-mob” of the society’s meeting a week before Griffin was due to speak which led to the banning of him and any other BNP members from Trinity grounds.

On foot of a number of expressions of interest in Anarchism, we commenced our “Conversations about Anarchism” series of meetings in Dublin in October, an open discussion about anarchism in the form of a conversation around a set of questions. The idea is to create a space where people interested in finding out about anarchism can have a relaxed conversation with each other. (See <http://www.wsm.ie/c/dub-conversations-about-anarchism-no-1-basics>).

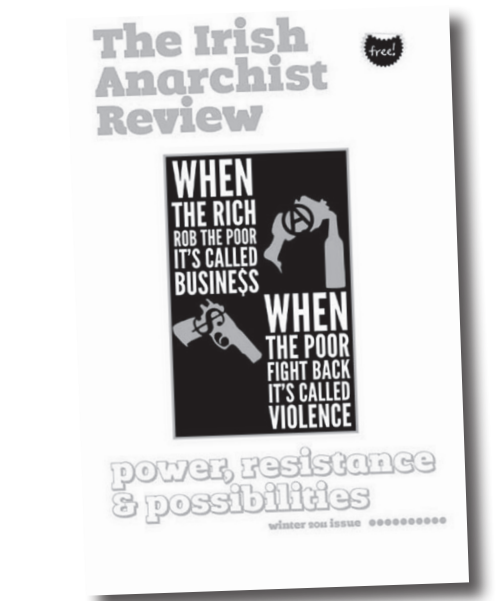
In the West, our members travelled to

Mayo for a further Shell 2 Sea day of action in September, while in Galway, our branch mobilised for a Free Education for Everyone (FEE) picket of the Fine Gael “think-in” in the city in advance of the reopening of the Dail (<http://www.wsm.ie/c/galway-action-against-fine-gael>), while we also held a public meeting on anarchism in the Imperial Hotel in late October.

Our members in Cork remain busy running Solidarity Books on Douglas St, where, in addition to book-selling, the film night series also came to a conclusion with showings of “Listen to Venezuela” and “Debtocracy”. We also had a presence on a Free Brendan Lillis protest in the city (see article elsewhere) and are active in Independent Workers Union campaigns in the city (see www.union.ie).

The ongoing Euro zone debt crisis and the further massive attack on public services to come in the December budget will continue to keep WSM members busy in their unions, voluntary organisations and communities. If you would like to learn more about us or get involved then we would be very happy to hear from you.

For further information on the above and other breaking news, check out www.wsm.ie



Irish Anarchist Review

The Workers Solidarity Movement is very pleased to announce the fourth issue of The Irish Anarchist Review. This magazine is dedicated to understanding the contemporary political, economic and social situation that confronts us, and finding ways to advance alternatives.

Contact us with your postal address if you would like to receive a copy or download a PDF from <http://www.wsm.ie/c/irish-anarchist-review-4>

www.anarchistblackcat.org



A friendly and respectful online discussion board for anarchists of all stripes and those just interested in seeing what anarchists think.

Household Tax Campaign Kicks Off

Cork

The campaign against the household and water charges swung into life in Cork during September. Left group representatives and independent activists met up and agreed to work towards building local groups in as many areas as possible across the city and county. The end of September saw public meetings in Ballyphehane and Dublin Hill / Ballyvolane and between them these attracted close to 80 people. The mood of anger and the eagerness to get stuck into a new campaign was the signal for people in other areas to go ahead and begin organising there; meetings were planned for October and November in Cobh, South Parish, Mayfield and Mahon / Blackrock.

Every community that gets organised over the next 4 to 6 months becomes a huge block to the government's hopes of milking workers for hundreds of millions more than we've already given. The campaign in Cork is operating on the basis of organised mass non-payment of the new charge and on the understanding that we can't sit around waiting for someone to fight this for us - we all need to get involved and win it for ourselves. Workers Solidarity Movement will be active in parts of Cork where we have members; help get things into gear wherever you are.

Dublin

The background work to establishing the campaign in Dublin has been ongoing since late August. An interim Steering Committee was set up consisting of representatives of the various left political parties and organisations, residents' associations and independent activists. This committee will exist on a temporary basis and has taken on the task of getting the campaign established in every area.

Public meetings are currently being organised across all communities in the city and counties. From these meetings local campaign groups are being established, and groups of people are going out knocking on their neighbours' doors encouraging them to join the campaign. The campaign in Dublin has the potential to be one of the biggest political campaigns in many years and will in coming months spread into every neighbourhood.

Workers Solidarity Movement members will be active in building the campaign in their own communities and we hope all our readers will do likewise. Please contact us and we'll put you in touch with your local campaign.

Galway

The Galway campaign against the Household Charge began in August, where a small group of around sixteen activists from the Socialist Workers Party, Workers Party, United Left Alliance, Socialist Party and WSM came together to discuss the setting up of a campaign in Galway. From the outset it was decided that the campaign would not be affiliated with any specific political party or organisation. It was also decided that meetings would take place all over Galway and that each area of Galway would form its own resistance and support network against the charge.

A lot of effort was put into advertising the meetings. The first of these was held in Westside and was a tremendous success. Over sixty people attended and the speeches were well received. People were given the opportunity to ask questions and to voice their own opinions on the household charge. Much opposition to the charge was voiced, and a strong emphasis was put on talking to friends and neighbours about the campaign. Two other meetings have been held, in Ballybane and Knocknacarra, with turnouts of around 40 people at each. The meetings continue, with several more planned for Salthill and other parts of Galway.

Review: A Wee Black Booke of Belfast Anarchism



Irish anarchism is a relatively new movement. We do not yet enjoy the popular understanding of anarchist ideas that can be found among thousands of militants and the wider working class in countries like Spain and Italy and across Latin America. However, this is slowly changing, partly as we begin to uncover forgotten events. This pamphlet provides a small glimpse of the history of Belfast anarchism, an idea that continues to grow, spreading the message of radical working class direct action on the streets of Belfast.

John Creaghe

Historian Mairtin O Cathain pulls together reports of anarchist activity in and around Belfast from 1867 to 1973. The author is clear from the outset that this is only part of the picture and more research needs to be done. The pamphlet looks at the lives of working class militants, both anarchists and those sympathetic to anarchist ideas, whose political activity merited mention in the media of the time. O Cathain's work stops before the emergence in the late 1970s of the groups from which contemporary anarchist organisations and collectives can trace their roots such as Just Books.

Some readers of the pamphlet will be aware of Captain Jack White born in

Co. Antrim, who supported workers during the 1913 Dublin lockout, later became an anarchist after participating in and witnessing the Spanish revolution in practice. Other names will be unknown to most mainstream historians and even anarchists, including Bolton Hall and William Baillie, who later emigrated to the USA. Hall was involved in communal experiments, propaganda, and union organising. Baillie was more of an individualist, though he still realised that "personal freedom was tied inexorably to collective and economic freedom."

John McAra was a Scottish anarchist who came to speak in Belfast in the early part of the last century, where he was arrested and jailed for a few months. A small group emerged from his activity, but appears to have died away after the First World War. Jack McMullen was a public speaker with socialist with anarchist sympathies, who campaigned against slum housing and unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s.

Finally there is John McGuffin, a founder member of the Belfast Anarchist Group, who was involved in the early Peoples Democracy and the civil rights movement. From a Protestant background, John was interned and later wrote a famous book based on his own experiences called 'The Guineapigs' which exposed the torture and abuse of prisoners by the British Government.

The pamphlet would not be completed without covering the impact of nationalism and sectarianism on the marginalisation of the left. The author touches upon these divisions amongst Irish anarchists, with a small

number, such as John McGuffin, becoming sympathetic to the republican movement while others maintained a devote opposition to nationalism and armed struggle.

In 1973 the Belfast Libertarian Group released a hard-hitting booklet, "Ireland, Dead or Alive?" in which they criticised groups on the left who 'in the excitement and action that the Irish political scene engenders' have occasionally been swept along with the flow of events. They said this left-wing delusion was because they naturally supported those fighting the state and were lulled into the belief that the IRA were socialist and 'working for the freedom of the people, not only in the colonial sense, but in the social and economic sense'. This is a question that is still relevant today.

This work covers an area of social history that is often neglected given the north's competing green and orange tendencies. The author acknowledges 'the marginal status and relative unpopularity of the movement, though people's misconceptions about anarchism have long been a difficulty in popularising it. It nevertheless has attracted a number of extraordinary people over the years from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, and the message, method and spirit of anarchism has rang out in the streets and halls of Belfast at times of great social radicalism and in periods of inveterate reaction.'

Mairtin O Cathain's 'Wee Black Booke' on Belfast Anarchism from 1867- 1973 can be read online at <http://www.wsm.ie/c/belfast-anarchism-wee-black-booke>