

Organizing for Anarchism in Ireland

Fifth Estate Interview

Fifth Estate Collective

2008

The *Fifth Estate* sat down with Andrew Flood from the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM), an Irish anarchist group, who was on a 43 city speaking tour of North America. Walker Lane conducted the interview April 16 at the Baile Corcaigh Irish Pub in Detroit's Corktown district.

The talk Andrew gave later in the evening described the group's involvement in anti-war and abortion rights organizing, opposition to a gas pipeline, and participation in community based movements. Descriptions of these struggles and more information are at their web site, www.wsm.ie

Fifth Estate: Describe your group for us.

Andrew Flood: The Workers Solidarity Movement is an anarchist-communist organization, set up in 1984. It has grown in the last ten years to about 70 members which, in a country the size of Ireland, is quite significant. We are involved in a pretty central way in a lot of social struggles.

FE: Describe one of your community-based campaigns.

AF: In the 1990s, we successfully fought a water tax where the government was forced to cancel it, but they came back with a tax on refuse pick up, basically a trash collection charge figuring it was easier to force people to pay since if refuse isn't collected you have a problem quite quickly.

We were part of a coalition of groups that built a mass-based community campaign against a switchover from progressive to flat-rate taxation. In 2003, at the peak of that struggle, we brought city refuse collection to a halt for a couple of weeks. It involved thousands of households. The Dublin campaign peaked when the council stopped collecting the bins of non-payers in 2004.

Across the city, the campaign said, "All bins or no bins." Trucks were blockaded and held for as long as ten days and collection ground to a halt. Court injunctions were issued against anyone interfering with collection and allowed police to throw anyone blockading a truck directly into jail. Twenty-two people, including a nursing mother, were jailed, and dozens more brought before the courts.

Under this pressure, the campaign fragmented, although in my area of Dublin, four years later, most people are still not paying and the council has not dared to impose non-collection. We had to do a lot of day-to-day, door-to-door organizing to get this level of involvement.

FE: What is the nature of the anarchist movement in Ireland?

AF: Because of our rapid growth in recent years, a lot of our members are young, but we don't have the same generation gap that appears to be the case in the U.S. The groups I've spoken to in North America have mostly members in their late teens, twenties, and some in their thirties, but that's it.

FE: Much of the North American anarchist movement is very youth oriented and is often culturally separated from the larger community. What allows Irish anarchists entrance into popular, non-anarchist movements and struggles of ordinary people in Ireland?

AF: Most significantly is that we set out concretely to do that. That's our ambition, so we try, and because we try, it's possible to succeed. It helps being part of an organization that's been around for a long time. Irish anarchists

are an outward looking movement, in general, not just our organization, that seek ways to communicate with the average person or worker. A lot of the U.S. movement seems quite obsessed with intra-movement discussion and everything very much more inwardly directed.

It's not necessarily simple to involve yourselves in community struggles, but it's not that difficult. Particularly when people are involved in struggles that are entering into confrontations with the state and have moved beyond lobbying politicians. People are often looking for allies and are quite open to any half-way sensible approach regardless of one's political label.

FE: Do people in popular struggles react negatively when you say you're an anarchist?

AF: Nowadays, no. Fifteen years ago, I probably would have said I was an anti-state socialist because the word anarchist then would have meant punk rock or something like that, and people wouldn't have understood what I meant. But, over the past ten years the media has often focused on anarchist involvement and used that to attack struggles. But people can also get a positive thing out of that if they are identifying with the same campaign the anarchists are.

FE: Do you think your group can act as a model for anarchist organizing?

AF: The goal of my tour is to inspire local anarchists to get things a bit more organized. The situation we have in Ireland is all very positive since if you go back a decade the anarchist movement was tiny, less than twenty people. Today, the movement is comprised of a few hundred people involved in numerous struggles. I think a lot of U.S. anarchists are feeling dispirited at the moment, having retreated in the post-globalization period that crashed after 9/11. The message is that even with relatively small numbers, you can build something quite meaningful in a short period of time.



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