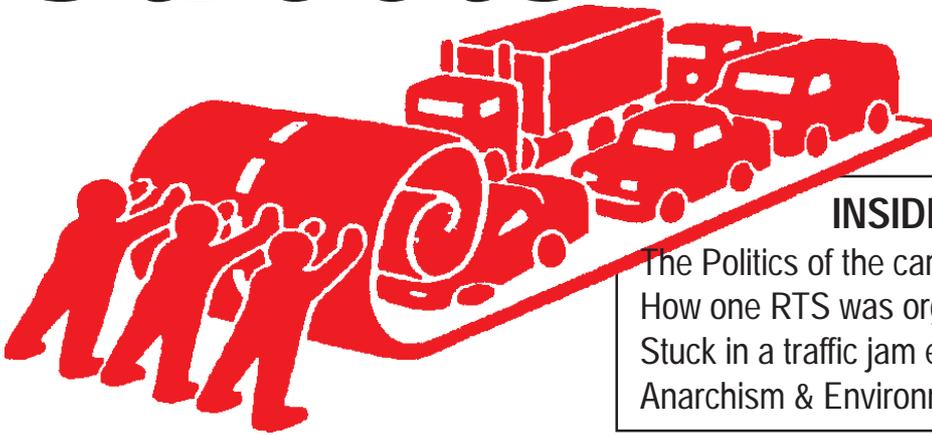


# Reclaiming OUR Streets



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Much as Critical Mass makes the statement *"we're not obstructing traffic, we ARE traffic,"* so too does Reclaim The Streets make the point that people and community are more important than cars. Unfortunately, instead of being the center of creativity and autonomy that it could be, the city is merely a focus for maniacal consumerism and profiteering, and the streets nothing but car pipelines facilitating all this madness.

And so car culture becomes a focus for these two types of demonstration: not because we are all so anti-car, but because cars are only the most visible and tangible representatives of an inhuman consumer society. The car represents the ecologically detrimental capitalist system that has usurped the person and the environment in the incessant quest for profit.

Of course we could register our indignation at this whole process by marching up and down O'Connell Street with black + white placards that read *"Down with the oil companies,"* and *"Boycott the automotive industry,"* but that wouldn't be very enjoyable. For the most part, direct action as a form of protest embodies the ideal that we must live and be the change we wish to see. I think I'd rather be laughing and dancing when the revolution comes than be standing around po-faced listening to somebody deliver a speech. Like Emma Goldman said - *If I can't dance I don't want your fuckin revolution.*

This idea of 'fun,' like all spheres of human activity, is increasingly subject to capitalist control. Having undergone one's weekly dose of exploitation, and returned most of one's earnings to the capitalists for subsistence, one is then permitted to 'recharge' one's batteries through a procedure of 'entertainment,'

and this is procured by relinquishing one's remaining wages to the capitalist class, who also own the means of entertainment. A wonderful remedy to this miserable cycle is a massive free street party.

When it comes to strategy, the principle of non-hierarchy is one of the movement's greatest strategic attributes. There is little that irritates the authorities more than being unable to finger ringleaders. In the Angry Brigade communiqué of 1970, they declared *"we were invincible because we were everybody. They could not arrest us for we did not exist."* And, as one organizer of the J18 demonstration in London commented, *"the state is completely unable to grasp the way fluid 'disorganizations' work. They are so used to hierarchy, orders and centralization that they just can't see us, let alone catch us."*

Another promising element of the movement is the diversity it can and does encompass. Herbert Read wrote in *The Philosophy of Anarchism* that *"progress is measured by the degree of differentiation within a society."* This element must be encouraged if RTS and the movement as a whole are to grow. As one of the main aims of RTS is the protection of community space, more contact needs to be made with local groups, for example community clean-up teams and support groups

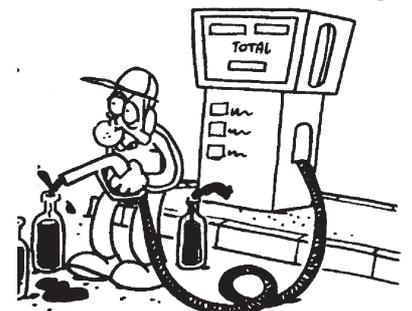
for families bereaved through road accidents. There are myriad 'single-issue' campaigns and causes that do, on further inspection, have much in common ideologically with those who organize and participate in Reclaim The Streets. Connecting and working with groups also at work on the same project spreads the workload and increase the diversity.

Problems besetting the execution of RTS include lack of adequate dispersal techniques for the inevitable end of the party, and insufficient direct communication between organizers during the event. Those involved need to liaise successfully, and be in such positions

and to be readily contactable, as well as being intermittently obvious to the crowd in a pre-established way. Thus if panic arises or there is need to move, people are already aware that a plan has been made and they can choose whether or not to follow that plan. Another problem that be encountered is a lack of spontaneity among the people who arrive at the party, expecting to be entertained. This is due to the monoculture of passive entertainment that we are enveloped in once we leave childhood. Instead, every single person could bring one item - be it a football, a piece of carpet, or a huge papier maché dragon. Anything to contribute to the party atmosphere.

It can only get bigger and better as people are coaxed out of their cars, office cubicles and TV rooms into a liberated space where they have the chance to practice life as they'd like it to be. And we already have that tantalizing aura of infamy

*Based on a talk by Roísín O'Donovan at the WSM's 'Ideas and Action', May 2002. Roísín was involved in the organisation of RTS and Critical Mass events in Dublin.*



A PDF booklet from the Struggle site [www.struggle.ws](http://www.struggle.ws)

# The Politics of the car

**Cars are a problem. Transport, particularly road transport, is a major contributor to the production of greenhouse gasses which contribute to global warming. It is estimated that for every gallon of oil used about 19 pounds of carbon dioxide go into the atmosphere. Cars can make you sick. They produce polluting gasses, at certain concentrations these irritate the eyes and nose and respiratory system and can be carcinogenic.**

Cars are noisy. Traffic is the major source of noise in cities. The noisiest of all are the heavy goods vehicles and the number of these are expected to double by 2015. Noise can damage hearing, disrupt sleep and increase stress and blood-pressure.

Cars take up a lot of space. Up to 10% of the arable land in the US is taken up by car transport. It's estimated that in the 1960s in the US up to 50,000 people each year were displaced by cars. In heavily populated developing countries such as China, Egypt and Bangladesh there simply isn't room for cars. In cities, where space is even more limited, the problem can be worse. It is estimated that roads take up 25%-35% a cities land.

In some parts of the world this is worse than others. Average Australian cities have four times and average US cities have three times more roads than in Europe. In Los Angeles two thirds of the city's land is taken up by cars. The difference in these figures indicates that there is nothing automatic about how much space cars should take up. Different policies can result in different transport systems. The UK has seen greater growth of suburbs than other countries and also has a greater level of car dependency. In Germany more people own cars, but they are used less.

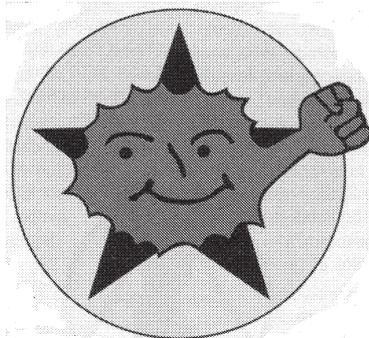
The people who are least likely to have a car, are most likely to die because of one. In the UK 40% of the population do not have a car. Of that 40%, 65% come from low income groups. The number of children injured or killed in car accidents is highest in deprived areas. Children of the poorest families are five times more likely to be hit by a car than those of the richest\*. This is because

these children are more likely to walk to school, to live in high traffic areas or in communities that are severed by wider and thus more dangerous roads.

Behind the car is a huge and powerful car industry. In the US from the 1930s to the 1950s General Motors and other automobile manufactures bought 90% of the tram networks in 45 US cities. These were then dismantled and replaced by busses (which were manufactured by the car companies). In 1991 the auto industry in the USA spent 10 million dollars defeating legislation aimed at tougher fuel efficiency standards. The only solution often being offered is to build more roads, it's a solution that benefits industry not people. More roads into the countryside surrounding cities, leads to the growth of suburbs, which leads to more traffic (and calls for more roads). The solution leads to more problems, and it also leads to great wealth for the developers who build the suburbs and those who own the land they are built on.

Take the example of the Liffey Valley shopping centre. This superstore is located nine and a half miles from Dublin's city centre. It advertises itself as being "where the M50 meets the N4". The M50, a ring-road around the city, was designed to help traffic avoid the city. Most traffic is not caused by long distance journeys between cities but by short regular journeys within cities. Liffey Valley contains 23 acres of car-park. The super-market attracts routine shoppers, which means routine drivers onto the

M50. In the UK the building of huge shopping centres in the middle of nowhere has lead to 'donut' cities. Shops in the centre go bust forcing people to drive to the outskirts for their normal shopping. Out of town shopping is impossible for those without cars. A UK report on poverty indicated that these centres contribute to poverty. The Citizens Organising Foundation discovered that the cheapest groceries cost 69% more in the poorest districts compared with shops in the same chain in the richest parts\*. Before the councillors were 'lobbied' by the developers the plan for the area was very different. It was planed to create a town-centre at Neilstown for Lucan and Clondalkin. This would have been accessible to local people, instead they have been left with minimal facilities.



Ensuring that cars can travel more easily is not necessarily going to solve our problems in the long term. We have to think about alternative ways of travelling and look at why we need to travel. There are more people using

bicycles in Asia than there are cars in the world. Irish cities are not designed with either bikes or public transport in mind. Changes to public transport are hotly debated in the press and by the media, changes that benefit cars are rarely discussed. We have few bicycle lanes and those which exist are often poorly designed and dangerous, an afterthought rather than an important component of city transport.

We need to ask ourselves, what sort of cities do we need to live in? Cities need to be designed differently. We need cities where it is possible to walk, cycle or get public transport to work. Cities in which shops, schools and doctors are easily accessible to those without a car.

Information in the article from a research project on cars at [www.tcd.ie/ERC](http://www.tcd.ie/ERC)

\* Captive State, George Monbiot, p127, p186

Based on an article by Aileen O'Carroll published in *Workers Solidarity* No70, June 2002

# How one RTS was organised

Dublin. Sept 22nd 2002

**One of the major points of an RTS is that it is a DIY event. Those who organise the event are really just organising the basics for the party - people turning up need to bring their imaginations along and not just expect to be entertained. But the basic organisation is also DIY, just about any group of people, anywhere should be able to organise an RTS and indeed they have happened in cities across the globe. Below is a report from one such party that gives some details on how it was organised. It took place in quite difficult circumstances as the previous Dublin RTS had been attacked by the cops (Gardai) with 24 party goers hospitalised and a dozen arrested.**

Over 1,000 people took part in the four-hour party. Despite attempts by the Gardai to whip up a panic because the organisers refused to meet with them in advance of the party the day was trouble free and very good humoured.

Planning for this RTS had been going on for months with a group of organisers meeting on a regular basis. In the weeks before the protests this involved a few meetings a week as all the different things that needed to be organised for the day were sorted out. Dozens of other people helped out by spreading word of the party and by attending the fundraiser; a few weeks back that paid for the equipment, used on the day.

After the last Reclaim the Streets when the Gardai attacked party goers, arresting 24 and hospitalising others they were very much on the defensive. In the last weeks they were making increasing desperate attempts to contact the organisers and when these failed telling the papers that RTS would be responsible for any trouble on Sunday. Seeing as there was none this must tell us something about who was responsible for the trouble last time! The partygoers proved quite capable of looking after themselves and having a good time without the permission of the boys in blue.

Of course this is one of the central points of Reclaim the Streets. It is as much a statement about the freedom of people to organise themselves free from state control as it is one about traffic. As the leaflet distributed on the day said *"RTS is not anti-car, we are anti-car culture"*. RTS parties are statements about the way the city and the street is viewed purely as a mechanism for allowing business to function and of extracting money or labour from the population. It's ironic how those attacking RTS echo this in complaining that the party might have delayed people getting to work!

There were several components to the RTS on the day. In the weeks beforehand a meeting point (top of Graton St./Stephens Green) had been advertised all across the city by posters and graffiti. In the days beforehand as the newspapers ran stories about RTS most also included the meeting up point. At the point on the

day the organisers had divided the two sides of the road into a black group and a green group. This was to allow us to take different routes to the party point if needed. Leaflets were given out to people assembled at the top of the Green saying they should follow the flags that were the colour of the dot on the leaflet. They also gave a brief explanation of what RTS is and some legal advice. The back page had contact details for a range of campaigns people should be involved in.

Meanwhile a Critical Mass (cyclists) was in progress down at Heuston Station where they were demanding more bicycle parking spaces. This then made its way across town, also heading by its own route to the party point. Something like one hundred cyclists took part in this.

As the Critical Mass was getting near the party point RTS organisers on it contacted another group actually at the party point whose responsibility it was to initially halt and divert the traffic so cars wouldn't get trapped in the middle of the party. They in turn contacted organisers at Stephens Green and told them to start heading towards the party point.

At Stephens Green we triggered air horns to tell people we were about to move off and people with RTS flags and banners moved out to the front of the crowd and started to lead it down towards the party point (at Baggot St.). Meanwhile the road blocking group waited for the lights to change and then put a row of traffic bollards and a diversion sign across the road diverting traffic out of the party area.

Critical Mass arrived just after this was happening swelling the number to over 100 at the blockade point and then a couple of minutes later the head of the march appeared coming from Stephens Green. As the march arrived the sound system was taken out of a nearby van and assembled in a lane way entrance facing onto Baggot St. Within a few minutes we had music blasting out and the party could begin.

Other people were reading to carry out other tasks which were fortunately not needed on the day. This included a legal group in case anyone was arrested and a medical group in case the police injured



anyone. People also brought and distribute free food, groups and individuals distributed free literature.

Spacecraft who are putting on an Irish adaptation of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* based on the police riot at the last RTS staged the first act of the play on the street. Elsewhere on the street there were jugglers, skateboards and the unavoidable drum players. The crowd was mostly young but also included a fair few older people, parents with young kids and even the parents of some of those taking part. People had travelled from all over the country including of course many of the 'direct action' activists so there were lots and lots of informal discussions going on up and down the street with various ideas for the future being floated.

The police just had to stand back and watched the day's proceedings although we did have to put up with a low flying helicopter over head all day. They had obviously been told to leave their batons at home and even the dismounted motorcycle cops replaced their helmets with soft caps. One of the more amusing things was the protracted political discussion that went on between one of the people they had battered at the last demonstration and the senior cop present. As this went on more and more cops were drawn in until he was addressing six or more of them.

One thing RTS had learned from the last time was that we needed to set an end time in advance of the event and a method of getting the participants dispersed to avoid the guards attacking the crowd once the numbers dropped. So at 6pm the music was turned off and as the sound system was dismantled we marched back down to Stephens Green behind the RTS banner. Some people stayed behind with bin bags and tidied up any litter left behind.

This RTS was a good success. Despite the scare stories being printed in the newspapers more people turned up then for the May 6th one. We demonstrated that, with police interference removed, we were quite capable of having a high spirited but trouble free day. The nature of the event allowed a lot of people to meet up with each other and exchange ideas, which will hopefully bare fruit in the future.

Originally published on the WSM web site with several photos which can be viewed at <http://struggle.ws/wsm/news/2002/rtsept.html>

# Stuck in a traffic jam every day? It's... Carmageddon!

**There's nothing worse than waiting for a Dublin bus at 8.10 on a rainy November morning. Well possibly one thing, getting a nice big muddy splash from a passing 00 D Volvo or Merc as it trundles by to join on to some tailback on the Rock Road or the Firhouse roundabout.**

The last few years or so of rapid growth by the Celtic Tiger has not been particularly fruitful for most working people. Two problems, for many of us, have been spiralling house prices and near gridlock in most cities. According to the bosses' association, IBEC, roads carry 97% of Irish passenger traffic and 86% of freight (This contrasts with only 59% of French freight by road and 44% in Germany)[1].

The number of cars on the roads is rapidly increasing. The number of new private cars licensed per year in the state has almost trebled from 60,792 in 1993 to 170,324 in 1999. This trend is accelerating - there was an increase of 41% in private cars registered in the first 3 months of 2000 compared to 1999![2]. Car ownership in Dublin increased from 275 per 1000 people in 1991 to 357 per 1000 in 1996[3]. We can be almost certain that the improvement in the economy combined with the government's scrappage scheme have combined to further accelerate these figures.

The government's answer to growing traffic has been simple - more roads. Millions of pounds of tax payers money, including money from the EU structural funds, have been poured into Irish roads. This has certainly led to some improvement in the main arterial routes between cities and towns. But within these urban areas the roads have clogged up and everywhere else (e.g. where there wasn't a major amount of freight traffic) the roads have disintegrated. Business's desire to transport goods from A to B is prioritised over people's movement within their own areas.

So cars are on the increase and more roads are being built; what's the problem with this? Many people would reckon that this is not a particularly bad thing. Firstly, as anarchists, we

are not down on cars per se. Any technology offers possibilities, though under the capitalist system these are usually not fully realised or are but mainly for the benefit of a few. Cars promise freedom of movement and a certain amount of independence for the individual. On the other hand they waste resources and are certainly major polluters. The proliferation of cars in urban areas has led to congestion and delays, and both air and noise pollution.

Over the last few years deaths through road traffic accidents have rapidly increased. According to the CSO there were 429 deaths from road traffic accidents in 1998. This was the biggest cause of death in the 5-14 age group at 32% and the second biggest for those aged 15-24.

Cars are wasteful in terms of how they use space compared with bikes or public transport. A single person driving a car at 10 kilometres an hour uses six times as much space as a cyclist travelling at the same speed. The entire German car population commandeers 3700 km<sup>2</sup>, 60% more than that occupied by housing. Cars put those who depend on public transport and cycling or walking at a disadvantage, leading to delays for public transport and a high risk for pedestrians and bicycles.

The bosses have no bother with us whinging about traffic, gridlock and the spiralling increase in road fatalities (mostly foot and cycle passengers). In fact, as ever, they would be delighted to throw more of our money into their solution to our problem. IBEC wants £555 million a year to be invested in roads (three times current levels of spending by both the government and the EU). According

to their own 1998 survey "certainty and reliability in distribution is crucial to success" (no mention of gridlock, pollution or road deaths here). It is the 86% of freight traffic that is carried by road that is at issue here. There's no percentage in trains or buses for them.

We get to live with the delays and the brunt of pollution, road accidents and traffic jams. So it is in our interests to demand change. We must demand a transport policy that is people and environment friendly. In Dublin, for example, this might include a ban on cars between the canals with a free bus system to help us get around the inner-city, more and cleaner public transport, and repairs to the existing road network.

These are only suggestions, you could probably come up with more and better without even trying. Of course the problem isn't one of formulating the correct demands but about who makes the decisions. It isn't just that you're stuck in traffic or half an hour waiting for the bus, it's that you have no say in how your money is spent.

We don't make the decisions, a small minority do it "on our behalf". There are vital decisions to be made in terms of pollution and quality of life versus production and consumer goods. At present all these decisions are being made by a tiny minority in their own short term interests.

1. Irish Times February 10th 1998
2. Central Statistics Office (www.cso.ie)
3. 'Business Contact Magazine', Dublin Chamber of Commerce

Originally published as part of an Anarchist News for the Dublin RTS in August 2000



More articles on RTS at  
<http://struggle.ws/wsm/rts.html>

# Anarchism & Environmental Survival

Alongside the classical anarchist structures of unions and traditionally 'political' organisations, anarchists are increasingly to be found in the environmental movement. This is hardly surprising given that, although one wing of the green movement has entered mainstream parliamentary politics, there is still a wide base of grassroots activism some of which, in its methods and organisation, is very close to anarchism. What's more, the more radical environmentalists are becoming aware that their demands cannot be accommodated by capitalism, and are beginning to make connections between their campaigns and other issues. Why then are the links between anarchism and environmentalism not much stronger? And what are the issues that still divide them?

## Mutineers on the Titanic?

Most anarchists have some idea of the serious state of environmental degradation caused by capitalism. You don't have to be politically active to know about the hole in the ozone layer, or the chopping down of the rainforest, and the pollution caused by a transport system based on cars is obvious to anyone who lives in a city. Anarchist groups rarely see these as issues to be campaigned on, like women's rights or trade union struggles. But environmental issues effect the working class disproportionately. They are the least able to escape the effects of environmental damage, and the most likely to bear the brunt in terms of disease, malnutrition and so on. We know that poverty-level wages and poor housing in the developing world are a result of capitalism. The fact that the slums this creates are the hardest hit by flooding, for example, is another symptom of capitalism putting profits before people. But campaigns against this sort of indirect oppression are thin on the ground.

One possible reason why anarchists don't campaign as much on environmental issues is the gradual nature of environmental problems. Unlike other struggles where there is a clear line that is crossed, an obvious point to focus on - whether it be a repressive piece of legislation or a strike - pollution, for example, is incremental. The problem is generally not that one factory opens and suddenly the air is visibly polluted. The level of pollution tends to increase steadily over time, and it is hard to get excited over a difference that you can't see. Of course there are exceptions - a few years ago in Cork a particularly bad toxic spill led to calls for stricter controls on chemical production and safety (see *Workers Solidarity* 41 for details). But, in general, we become accustomed to the degradation of our environment if it happens slowly enough.

The final, and most important problem, for anarchists in tackling environmental issues is that we disagree with most of the solutions on offer. The mainstream green line on the environment is that we are all, more or less equally, to blame for its destruction, and we must all, again more or less equally, make sacrifices if the ecosystem is to survive - this when the poorest 20%

of the population produce only 3% of carbon dioxide emissions. Even more radical greens, though they do realise that corporations and capitalism are doing most of the damage, insist that we must all reduce our consumption and simplify our lives. They also say that industrialisation, in itself, is a bad thing, no matter who is in control. Anarchists, on the other hand, think that everyone should have more of what they want, not less. There are problems with how production is organised, and certainly if things are produced for need and not profit a lot of waste will be cut out. But most of the world has a standard of living far below what westerners would take for granted and, as an absolute minimum, this has to be addressed.

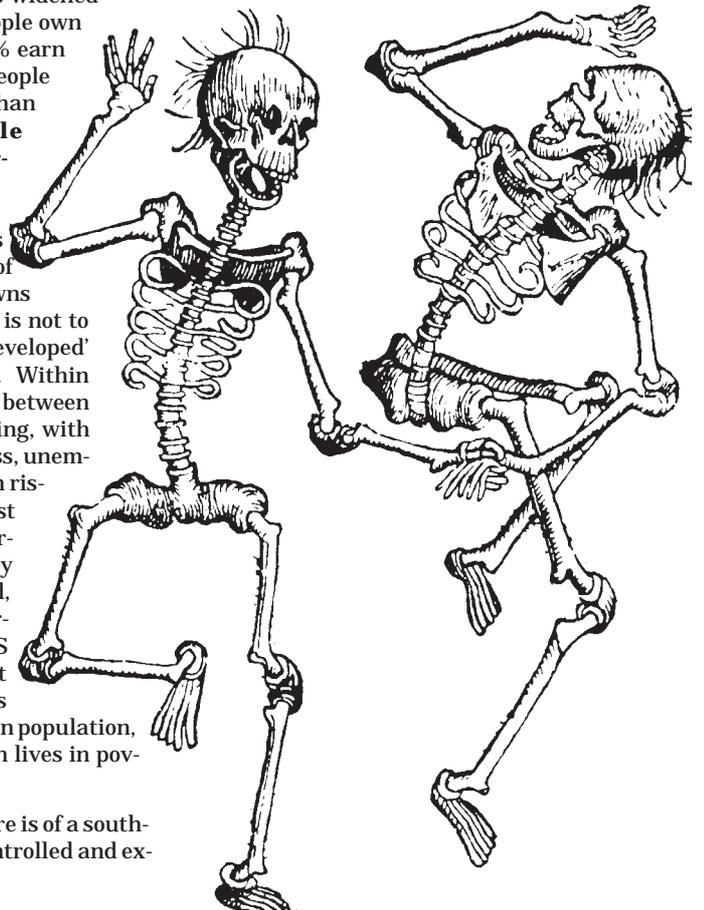
## A World Divided

The history of this century has been of deepening divisions in humanity. The gap between rich and poor has widened enormously, today 225 people own more than the poorest 50% earn in a year. **Eighty four** people are together wealthier than China, **three people wealthier than the poorest 48 countries.** The wealthiest 20% of the global population consumes 60% of the energy, 45% of the meat and fish, and owns 87% of the vehicles<sup>1</sup>. This is not to say that everyone in the 'developed' world is well off, of course. Within the richer countries the gap between rich and poor is also growing, with the figures for homelessness, unemployment and malnutrition rising all the time. In the last decade, diseases like tuberculosis, caused essentially by poverty, have reappeared, having been eradicated earlier this century. The US may be the world's biggest consumer, but it also has the highest per capita prison population, and 16.5% of its population lives in poverty.

On a global level, the picture is of a southern hemisphere owned, controlled and ex-

ploited by the north. Raw materials - minerals and food - are produced in the south and consumed in the north. The environmental problems in the north/west are mainly those caused by over a century of industrial production - pollution has become a fact of life. The earth, the air, the rain, all have been contaminated.

The south may not have as long a history of industrialisation as the north, but as far as environmental damage goes it is gaining rapidly. When a corporation shifts production to the developing world, it does so to escape not just trade unions, but also environmental regulations. Workers in the south are not just lower-paid, they're subject to much more dangerous working conditions, and much more damage to their environment, than workers in the north. As well as industry, agriculture is made more damaging. Leaving aside the use of insecticides and fertilisers that have been banned in the north, the trend towards large-scale monoculture farming means the soil becomes exhausted and prone to erosion. The need to expand the area of land under cultivation means the destruction of wilderness areas and deforestation, which also causes soil erosion. This in turn causes flooding, which destroys people's homes and crops under cultivation, leading to more pressure on the land.





## anarchist news on the internet

It's not surprising that the national media - owned by the state or by the super rich - refuses to advertise anarchist news or activity. But now you can bypass the censors if you have access to the internet.

In your web browser go to <http://struggle.ws/wsm.html>

This page, designed to be friendly for new internet users shows you key sites on the internet linked with Irish anarchism, international and Irish radical news and a huge variety of anarchist history and theory.

To get regular news and announcements from the WSM by email visit <http://www.struggle.ws/mailman/listinfo/ainriail>

This free service is a low volume list with an average of only 4 posts/week



The worldwide increase in the human population and the level of (industrial and agricultural) production means that the potential impact of humanity on the environment continues to grow. At the moment, this impact is enormous because, often, the people who are making environmentally sensitive decisions are shielded from the results. Whether this is because of money or distance, the end result is that, no matter how damaging their decisions may be, they can be sure the damage will be to someone else, and so are free to continue their pursuit of profit.

### Making the Connections

Graham Purchase's book, *Anarchism and Environmental Survival*, is an attempt to bring anarchist and green theories together, and propose a model for a possible post-revolutionary society. His anarchism is based on the idea that decisions must be made by those who are effected by them. The basic social unit of society, then, is the community. Your community is where you live and work, the particular area you identify yourself with. Depending on the context, this could be your immediate



surroundings - a village or suburb - or an extended area - a county or city.

Each community is linked to a particular place, although the borders of this region are rarely clearly defined. You could draw the limits of a town where its buildings end, or include land cultivated by its inhabitants. Sometimes these are useful definitions, but the people themselves, when talking about 'their land' may include nearby forests, lakes or mountains (and again, since the size of a community varies depending on the context, this region can also vary in size). Communities are made up, then, not just of relationships between people, but of the relationship between the people and the land. This, Purchase feels, is the key to environmental protection.

With the globalisation of the economy, and society in general, the current trend is to tackle environmental problems on a global level. This appears to make sense with an issue like the destruction of the ozone layer, but it can often become ridiculous - as when the Earth Summit's decision to fix the level of global emissions merely led to the crea-

## Meat 'n' Veg 'n' Microlivestock

Vegetarianism and environmentalism often go hand in hand. This is partly because the consumption of large livestock has itself an effect on the environment. It takes seven pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef - if we were all to become vegetarian, so the argument goes, much less land would have to be used for agriculture. This is true to a certain extent, but the grain:meat ratio leaves out many things. For example, a cow produces not just meat, but milk, leather and dung (a fertiliser, soil stabiliser, and even fuel source). Wool, feathers and eggs are all useful 'by-products' of animal husbandry that have to taken into account.

Even so, raising animals is not the most efficient use of agricultural land. But a lot of land is not suitable for other forms of agriculture. Animals can be raised in forests, or on the side

of mountains, and in areas where the soil is too poor for crop production. Many animals can be reared alongside crops, and others, like poultry, are well suited to small scale farming. Turning over whole prairies to cows for grazing is certainly inefficient, but that's not the only way to farm animals.

The tendency in agriculture (as in industry) in the last century has been for specialisation, and for the production of smaller herds, made up of larger animals. Purchase goes into some detail on the virtues of microlivestock - smaller, more adaptable, and generally hardier versions of the more common modern animals. Such animals are more productive - the greater number that can be raised on a given area of land makes up for their small size - and it's easier to match the size of the herd to the land

available. All of these factors make them ideal for the kind of small-scale mixed farming he proposes should be (re-)introduced to our cities.

The question of efficiency is not the only reason so many environmentalists are also vegetarian. After all, the battery farm is perhaps the epitome of efficiency, and that has few friends in the green movement. There is also a moral argument, that we should try to reduce the effects of humanity on the planet, and on the animals that live alongside us. Purchase quotes Elisee Reclus, a well known anarchist of the 19th century, "for the great majority of vegetarians...the important point is the recognition of the bond of affection and goodwill that links man to the so-called lower animals, and the extension to these our brothers of the sentiment which has already put a stop to cannibalism among men"<sup>1</sup>. You will have to judge the merits of this argument for yourself, Purchase shows

tion of a new market. Developing countries can now sell some of their 'pollution quota' to richer countries. Most problems, says Purchase, are better tackled at the local level, but this means some changes in the way production is organised. Earlier I talked about how money can shield you from the effects of environmental damage - the same is true of distance. Those of us who live in urban areas know the problems that industrial concentration has caused locally, but only get second or third-hand reports of the problems of intensive food production, for example.

### Small is Beautiful?

If you think of the global economy as a factory, with each worker/community making only one part of a complex machine, and depending on the others to make all the other parts, you can see how difficult it is for one worker/community to change what they're doing. Purchase proposes that we shift from the current, locally specialised and globally interdependent society, to a society made up of more balanced, self-sufficient communities (individual artisans, if you like). Thus we would immediately deal with some of the problems overconcentrated production has caused, like pollution and soil erosion. We would eliminate some, at least, of the costs of transport between these production centres. We would also make it easier for each community to deal with the problems that arise in their own region.

When Purchase talks of increasing local independence in this way, he does not mean these communities would be entirely self-sufficient. The fact that some areas are richer in minerals, or more suited to growing certain foods, means there will always be a certain degree of specialisation. Nor does it follow that, if there is a shift towards food production in urban areas, for example, that each rural area has to include a certain amount of factories. Finally, self-sufficiency should not be confused with isolationism - the communities Purchase describes are starting points for federations, not a return to feudalism. Even if it is just on the basis of common environmental influences, a shared river, or mountain range, or coastline, communities would obviously come together to discuss things that affect them in common. And in an anarchist society, based on the idea of our common humanity, there would surely be an abundance of regional, continental and global projects, covering every aspect of science and culture.

### Equal Wealth, not Shared Poverty

There is still a clear sticking point in any attempt to integrate anarchist and environmental positions, and that is the question of levels of production. Depending on how far down the path of self-sufficiency you go, you rule out more concentrated, specialised production, and so reduce the possible output. (Or at least, reduce efficiency - you can build a train in a workshop, but it's a lot easier to do it in a factory). In an anarchist society, a lot of work will be recognised as socially

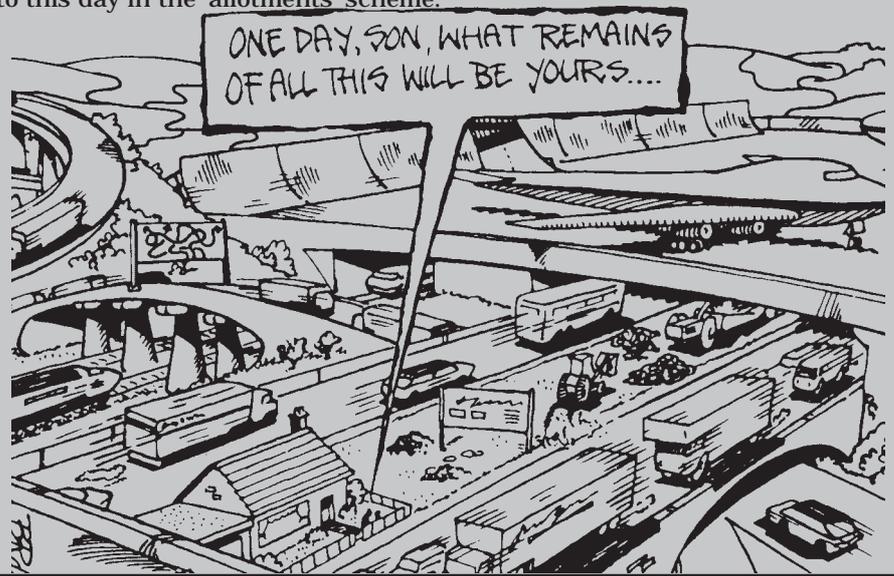
# Cities of the future?

Purchase's proposal for more ecologically integrated communities usually meets with most scepticism when it is imagined applied to cities. Even a relatively small city, like Dublin, is almost completely dependent on food from neighbouring regions, and its ecosystem is made up of cars, people and concrete. If a city like New York or Mexico was sealed off from the rest of the world, it would die within days; the only question is whether it would be from starvation or asphyxiation. Given the number of such large cities around the world, and the fact that, even if it were possible, given the size of the earth's population, for everyone to live in small towns and rural communities, many would not want to, how can cities be accommodated within an environmentally sound anarchist society?

It's an obvious point, but cities did not spring into existence fully formed, with all their support networks intact. Like any community, initially they produced most of their food themselves, but as the industrial base increased, the demand for land for industry and accommodation for the workforce grew, forcing food production into the hinterland. Most cities, even up to recently, would have had small farms comparatively close to the town centre. The supercities of today are only possible because of advances in food preservation (through chemical additives and refrigeration) and transport. Before these advances, the pressure for a city to grow in size was met by the necessity to have enough farms, near enough, to produce the food. Nor is the ejection of agriculture from the city irreversible - during the Second World War, for example, food shortages in Britain led to an immense drive towards small-plot urban farming, something of which has continued to this day in the 'allotments' scheme.

Cities, in Purchase's model would continue to exist, but agriculture would be reintroduced to the residential/commercial mix. There are different ways of doing this - you could divide the city into sectors, with each concentrating on a particular use of the land, aiming at sufficiency on a city-wide scale. Or, and this is more in line with the overall project, each sector would be a community in itself, diversity being brought down to a more local level. ('Sufficiency' is used here as an ideal, not expected to be reached. Cities would still be more densely populated than other areas, and so more likely to be a base for industry and other labour-intensive activities, the aim is to reduce the dependence on other areas for food.) Food production would be integrated into the city - cattle grazing on green spaces, lawns turned into vegetable patches, small neighbourhood farms. Between the demands of industry and accommodation, argues Purchase, there are spaces which in a properly planned city could be filled with life.

The immediate question is whether this could ever be more than a gesture. Sure, some farming could be integrated into urban life, but could it ever come close to meeting the needs of those who live in the city? If we are to continue to have the same population density, and the same concentration of industry in our cities, can these urban farms ever be more than a supplement to large-scale farming elsewhere, a token 'greening' of the city? If cities were to seriously approach self-sufficiency, wouldn't this necessitate a huge expansion in their size, or a fundamental change in the nature of urban life? Do we want, or need, such a change?



unnecessary, and it's hard to overestimate how much effort goes into keeping the apparatus of international capitalism and the nation state going. When money goes, we get rid of the banking industry and financial exchanges. Without states, there is no need for armies and the whole weapons industry - a sizeable part of most western economies - becomes defunct. When production is based on need, we will be rid of most advertising, and the useless duplication of identical goods it was created to hide. There will be no more built-in obsolescence, because who would build something they know is going to fall apart rather than something that will last, if it wasn't for their boss's desire for higher profits.

The production that remains will be changed. No rational society would base their transport system on cars. A good public transport system would improve the quality of most people's lives immeasurably. The benefits in terms of lives saved, public health, and countless other areas are obvious, and well-known. Over-dependence on cars is a result of the pursuit of profit, and it is profit that makes our industries so polluting. Cleaner sources of energy, like solar and wind power, are available but not profitable. Scrubbers and filters for chemical outflows, biodegradable, recycled and non-toxic materials, all of these could be used in most of our factories. But as long as control of production is in the hands of those who do not feel the effects of pollution, they will be overlooked in favour of the cheaper, more profitable alternative.

By eliminating, or greening, all of these processes, we would go a long way to reducing our ecological footprint. But eliminating useless production is only part of the story, an anarchist society would also increase useful production. Even in the developed West, far too many fall below the poverty line - we need more homes, more schools, more hospitals, enough to meet everyone's basic needs - and then we must go further. An anarchist society will want to have more than just the bare essentials, surely we want to improve everyone's standard of living. Some may choose to live a life of austerity, but most of us want a new world because we want more of the good things in life, not less.

In the developing world, the gap between what people have and what they need is even bigger. The southern hemisphere has been exploited ruthlessly by the north, one of the first priorities for an anarchist society must be to redress that balance, and the enormity of that task cannot be underestimated. Millions of people don't even have a clean source of drinking water, we want **everyone** to have a standard of living *beyond* the current average for an industrialised country. There is no way this can be accomplished without *increasing* current levels of production.

These are major problems with the idea of self-sufficient communities. On the one hand, we need a globally integrated economy, for the foreseeable future at least, because of the vast gap between the wealth

of a community in Namibia, for example, and one in Oregon. At the same time, we can't afford the relative inefficiency that small-scale, localised production implies. Even if we decide that decentralising production is a good thing, it can't be our first priority. And is it necessary?

### A World Without Borders

Anarchism has always been international, has always stressed the importance of our shared humanity over all those things - nationality, language, race, religion, gender - the ruling class tries to use to divide us. We stress the importance of democracy, of people having a say in the decisions that affect them. We also realise that some decisions are too far-ranging in their effects, too intertwined with the situations of others to be made at a local level. That is why large anarchist groups often operate as federations, and a lot of thought has gone into creating structures - like mandating delegates, rotating positions, minimising the need for full-time bureaucrats - that allow decisions to be made democratically, with mass participation, involving thousands, or millions, of people.

After all, there will always be a clash between the needs of society and the needs of a particular area, the only question is about how to balance them. Factories have to be built, and food grown, somewhere. Nuclear power may be unnecessary, but gold isn't<sup>2</sup>, and you can't mine it without damaging the local environment. We will always have to walk the line between decisions being made by groups far-removed from their effects, and the NIMBY tendency - do what you like, but not in my backyard. The difference, in an anarchist society, is in who makes the decisions, and why.

Capitalism is notoriously short-termist, decisions are made based on their immediate profitability, thinking even a few years ahead is unusual. What other kind of society would build nuclear power stations without knowing how to dispose of the waste safely? Why else would the economy be based on non-renewable fossil fuels, when the only question is when, not if, they will run out? If the earth is an uninhabitable wasteland in 100 years, what does it matter, as long as the profits are good? All the green consumerism in the world won't fix this insane system, if

we want a rational economy we're going to have to run it ourselves.

Agriculture and industry need not be as damaging to the environment as they are at the moment - we already know of cleaner and safer ways of doing things, that aren't used because they aren't profitable. How much can we change things if, as well as using the technology we know of now, science is directed towards cleaning up pollution instead of weapons research? If research was done on minimising the damage of intensive farming, instead of developing 'Terminator' genes? We don't have to believe that science has all the answers to know that there is a lot of room for improvement.

As anarchists we have always argued that, from union struggles to environmental protest, from community organising to revolution, the best way to victory is through mass participation and democracy. Whenever they seize the opportunity, people are well capable of organising their own lives, and their own movements, better than any 'wise' leader, or 'benevolent' dictator. We should be more confident that a free and democratic society will handle the problems of environmental damage, and the questions of local autonomy and global interdependence, in a just and fair way. After the anarchist revolution, do we really need a green revolution?

Ray Cunningham

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Human Development report, 1998

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Gold is not just decorative, it has many important industrial uses, but you must use cyanide in the mining and purification process.

*Originally published in Red and Black Revolution No4, Nov 2000 as a review of the Graham Purchase book, 'Anarchism and Environmental Survival'. Graham Purchase is one of the most prolific writers in the Australian anarchist movement, and in books such as 'Anarchist Society & its Practical Realisation', has made a serious contribution to the debate on the future of the anarchist movement, and how our ideas can best be put into practice today.*

"ER — HEEL?"



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