

introduction of water charges in Northern Ireland by pledging to refuse to pay. Water charges and bin tax were fought and defeated in the South using direct action – anti-water charge campaigners in the north can learn valuable lessons from these victories. Civil disobedience and direct action also defeated Thatcher’s Poll Tax in Britain.

Across Europe thousands of students have come out against the hiking of fees and the attacks on allowances, many of whom have broken from the strait-jacket of ‘peaceful’ a-to-b marches.

Direct action is harder to ignore than a short dander round our cities!

## A REJECTION OF ‘POWERLESSNESS’

Direct action is a rejection of the notion that working-class people are powerless to change their conditions. Improvements to our lives are not handed down benevolently from above – they must be fought for. For libertarian communists direct action is more than an effective means of defence or even of going on the offensive and changing something for the better – it is, for the working-class:

*“A continuous schooling for their powers of resistance, showing them every day that every least right has to be won by unceasing struggle against the system”* (Rudolf Rocker)

Direct action is an essential preparation for the free socialist society that we strive to create. Through engaging in direct action, even when we made mistakes, we have the opportunity to learn from experience that there is no need to leave things to ‘experts’ or professional politicians. We should have learnt by now that that course offers us nothing but disempowerment, betrayal and broken promises, and results in a pervading sense of powerlessness. And yet we are far from powerless!

Direct action teaches us to control our own struggles while building a culture of resistance that links with other workers in struggles. Solidarity and mutual aid find real expression and as our confidence grows so too does our ability to change the world. It is needed now more than ever, and we also need a campaign which opposes all cuts and fees, which is controlled by its members & participants, which is ready & willing to promote direct action and is willing to fight. Such a campaign of must be geared towards escalating the struggle to the point of a general strike against austerity – anything else is likely to fail, and we cannot afford to fail.

## DIRECT ACTION GETS THE GOODS!

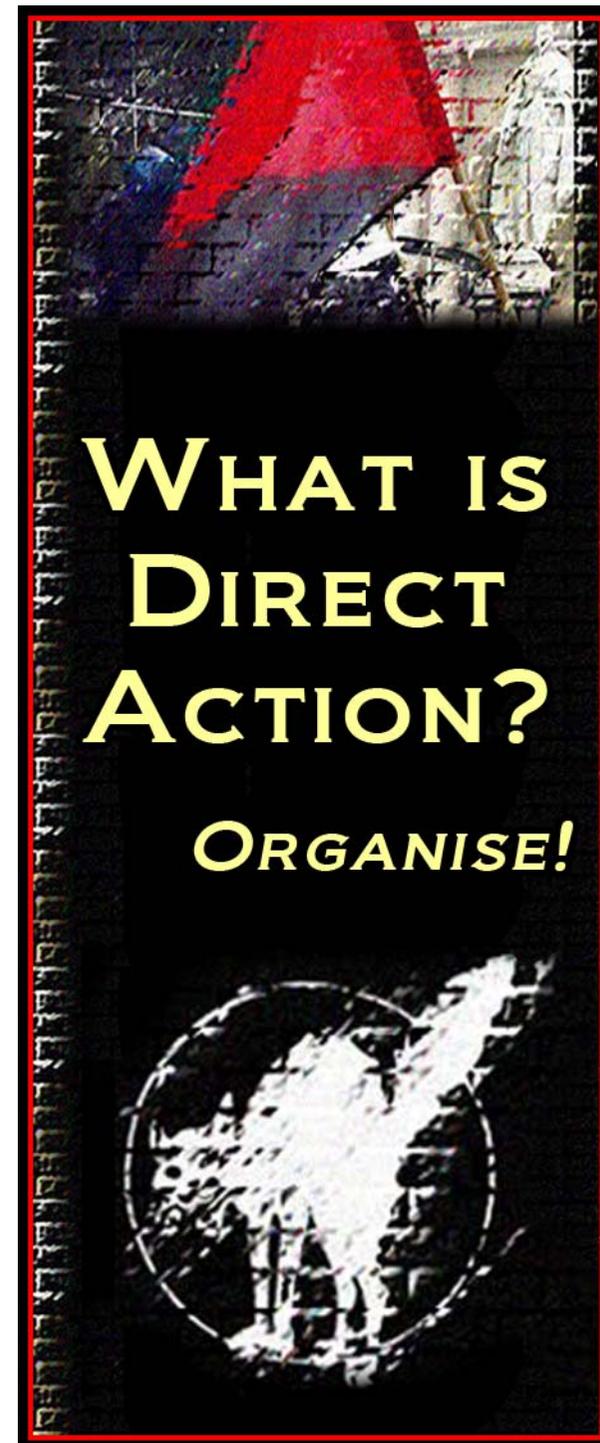
### ORGANISE!

**Organise!** are an anarcho-syndicalist group in Ireland. They publish a quarterly newspaper, *The Leveller*, and regular news bulletins. Links to issues of the Leveller, from issue 6 onwards, can be found on their site below.

**ORGANISE-IRELAND.BLOGSPOT.COM**

### Local Contact:

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From the black bloc 'having a go' to going on marches, from smashing up a McDonalds' to attending a picket, from throwing bricks to going to fundraising concerts for single issue campaigns – all of these activities have had the term 'direct action' applied to them.

Direct action has been confused with actions that are probably best termed as 'symbolic' – and which are, on many occasions, ineffective. A lot of the confusion has been due to the media terming anything that they regard as outside the perimeters of 'normal protest' as 'direct action' – however some confusion is down to activists themselves confusing the terms. Many activists, for example, regard protests such as the G8 summit as direct action, but these types of protests, even if they are successful in shutting down the event, remain as symbolic.

Direct action has also become a by-word for violence, to the extent that much of the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements talk specifically about NVDA – Non-Violent Direct Action. That's not to say that people engaged in direct action shouldn't defend themselves or that violence is never acceptable – simply that this view of direct action is partial and misrepresentative.

So, what is direct action? Put simply it:

*"...refers to action undertaken directly between two individuals or groups, without the interference of a third party. Specifically to Anarcho-Syndicalists (and other libertarian communists) this means the rejection of participation in parliamentary or 'statist' politics, and the adoption of tactics and strategies which place responsibility for action firmly in the hands of the workers themselves"*

Clichéd as it may sound; direct action is really about empowering ourselves and breaking the dependency on others (political parties, unions, bosses and official intermediaries) to do it for us!

*"Fundamental to direct action is the [realisation of] the reality that we can depend only on ourselves to achieve our goals"* (Solfed)

Political parties may say they are fighting for your rights and your interests, but when their only central aim is to build for their own interests and election campaigns, how can this be true?

## DIRECT ACTION IN OUR WORKPLACES

Direct action can be applied in as many different areas as there are forms of direct action. Of course for libertarian communists, the main areas of application are in our workplaces and communities. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) say:

*"Direct action is any form of guerrilla warfare that cripples the bosses' ability to make a profit and makes him/her cave to the workers' demands. The best-known form of direct action is the strike, in which workers simply walk off their jobs and refuse to produce profits for the boss until they get what they want"*

Strike action is at times more limited than this implies, particularly given the constraints of the trade union bureaucracies, the impact and fear of anti-union legislation and a prevalent ideology of social partnership with bosses, political parties and big business.

Wildcat or 'unofficial' strikes, where this stranglehold is removed have been increasingly used by workers in recent years and such action certainly returns some of the impact to the strike weapon.

There are some methods of direct action available in the workplace other than the strike. Rudolf Rocker, a German anarcho-syndicalist, wrote in 1938:

*"By direct action the anarcho-syndicalists mean every method of immediate warfare by the workers against their economic and political oppressors. Among these the outstanding are the strike, in all its gradations from the simple wage struggle to the general strike; the boycott; the sabotage in its countless forms; anti-militarist propaganda and I particularly critical cases...armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty [against, for example, fascism]"*

Direct action is about workers acting to defend or improve their conditions using work-to-rule, strikes and occupations rather than relying on the Labour Relations Agency or industrial tribunals to do it for them. A local example of this was the Visteon occupation in west Belfast, where workers occupied the factory in protest to removal of their redundancy packages with the closure of the factory. This was done without the official jurisdiction of the union, despite the factory operating in a 'closed-shop' format. The workers done it themselves then informed the union, stating that they would continue with or without their support. The workers were successful and won back their redundancies.

## DIRECT ACTION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Before the war on Iraq thousands of people marched in opposition on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2003, including some 15,000 in Belfast and 100,000 in Dublin, but were ignored by politicians.

Working-class people united in the We Won't Pay campaign have successfully managed to defer the