

Why Reclaim the Streets?



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.

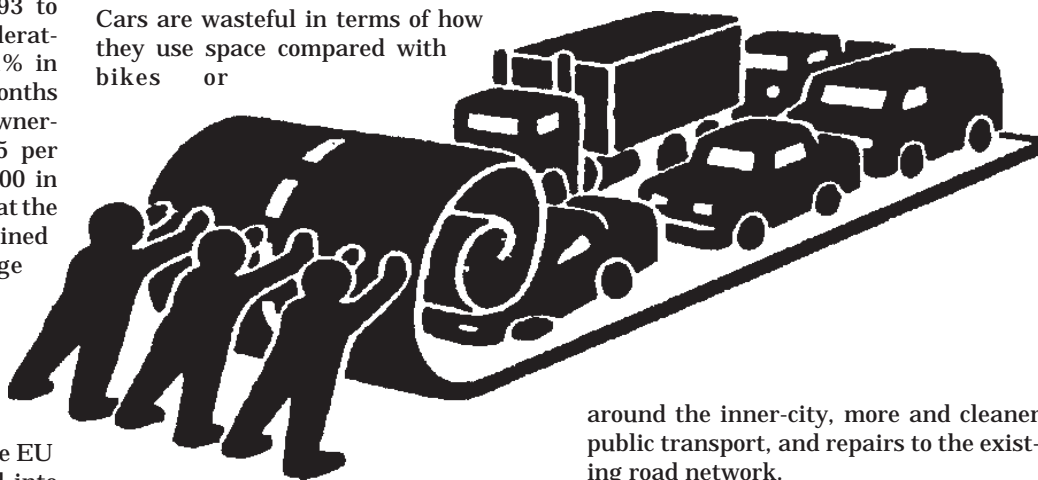
The government's answer to growing traffic has been simple - more roads. Millions of pounds of tax payers money, including money from the EU structural funds, have been poured into Irish roads. This has certainly led to some improvement in the main arterial routes between cities and towns. But within 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 km², 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.

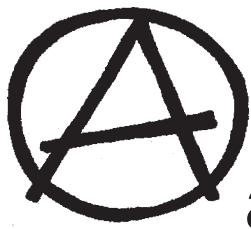
We get to live with the delays and the brunt of pollution, road accidents and traffic jams. So it is in our interests to demand change. We must demand a transport policy that is people and environment friendly. In Dublin, for example, this might include a ban on cars between the canals with a free bus 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



narchist alternative 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, and you can't mine it without damaging the local environment [It has many important industrial uses, but you must use cyanide in the mining and purification process]. 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. 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.



Don't be a scab for a bag of sugar

Six workers at the Aldi supermarket in Parnell Street have been on strike since June 3rd. When the workers joined MANDATE (the union for shop and bar staff) management responded by refusing to talk to the union. They then sacked two union workers for "poor performance" (despite having offered one of them a management job only days previously because his work was so good!) and suspended three others for refusing to carry out heavy duty cleaning, such as toilet cleaning, as well being cashiers.

The workers joined the union because of things like:

*Aldi's claim to pay £7.00 per hour is a lie. To earn £7.00 you would have to meet an unachievable productivity target.

*Workers were not happy with the way their hours were being recorded by management (i.e. they were not being paid for all their time at work). Aldi recognises unions in Germany, Denmark and Britain. If they get away with smashing the union here, other bosses will try to copy them, and Aldi themselves will almost certainly try it on in other countries. Recently Aldi advertised seeking staff on a "self-employed" basis. This means no sick pay and no holiday pay.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

*Don't shop in Aldi until the strike has

been settled.

*Show solidarity, stop at the picket for a minute and let the strikers know that you support them.

*With just six people on strike we can make sure that they suffer no financial loss, that they will not be forced back to work by poverty. Can get your union committee to make a donation to the strike fund? Can you do a collection at work/among friends/at a gig? Any money collected can be given to the strikers on the picket line or sent to Aldi Strike Fund, AIB Capel Street, Dublin 1; sort code 93-11-01, a/c no.01011059

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