Book Review

by Bernadette Moloney

Alternative Ireland Directory
4th edition, completely revised and enlarged

(Quay Co-Op Cork Ltd., 1990)

When I lived in England, an earlier edition of this book encouraged me to come home, suggesting I might find plenty of people like myself here afterall. This revised and enlarged edition should help me to stay around.

The Cork publishers hesitated about using the word "alternative" again in the title, because it is so readily used in a dismissive way now, of naive and futile ventures. But the Directory actually revalues the word. In its 240 pages, you can begin to see the connections between women, environmentalists, travellers and black people, lesbians and gays, trade unionists ...organising from their own point of view, providing support networks, creating changes in Irish society.

And if you are at the stage where you simply want to find out what exists, there can be few better places to start.

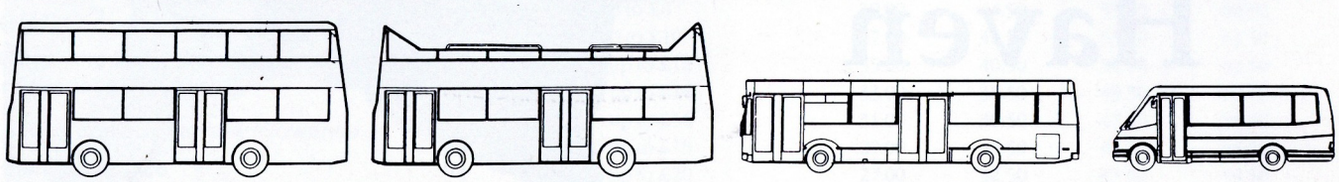
The full list of sections are: Women; Co-Ops; Environment; Lesbian and Gay; Peace; Communities and Spirituality; Animal Rights; Alternative Medicine; Counseling; Travellers; Third World; Gaeilge; Education; Trade Unions and Employment; Social Welfare; Film and Video; Theatre; Wholefood and a Travel Guide.

Each section is introduced by a short essay, most of which provide a brief history of the particular movement and some indication of where they are at now. I found Clare Farrell on Women - stressing the need to recognise the social basis to women's lack of confidence and valuing collective struggle; Kieron Rose's feeling that "the Lesbian and Gay community in the Republic is now in a period of great change and opportunity"; and Niall Crowley's linking anti-racism struggles of Travellers and Black people, particularly interesting.

But you can also learn here about all those non-denominational, or "different" types of schools. The trade union section has very useful explanation of the relationship between unions and the ICTU and of the organisations like the Labour Court, besides a list of the main unions and the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed. Under Wholefood, you can taste all sorts of cheeses, herb teas, sea urchins and Carrigeen moss, as well as the Asia Market in Little Italy!. Under Film and Video there's a comprehensive guide to organisations, festivals and training for the industry here.

One could go on .. Unfortunately, by the time they got to the last chapter on travel, the listing system seems to have gone a bit haywire. But that is my main quibble with the book. Even allowing for personal bias, Alternative Ireland number 4, is a mine of information for all sorts of points of view. Try it!

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