

Red Action

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UNITED WE STAND DIVIDED WE FALL UNITY IS STRENGTH

Two incidents in recent weeks have brought the issue of race right to the fore in the news and media, and have proved once again the extent to which racist attitudes and opinions are part and parcel of life in our society today. The first was the decision by Tower Hamlets Council to refuse to rehouse a number of homeless Asian families on the grounds that they had made themselves "voluntarily homeless" by coming to this country, and the second was the campaign being waged by a number of parents in Yorkshire, to prevent their children attending a school which has a predominance of Asian pupils.

ATTITUDES

Sometimes it can seem that racist attitudes are so ingrained in our society, that it is pointless trying to fight them. And yet fight them we must. Not only because racism is a morally evil philosophy, which has no place in any civilised society, but also because racialism is one of the tools which the upper class uses to maintain its control over the working class, and prevent the emergence of any movement capable of challenging their rule. They know that as long as the white working class are blaming the blacks or Asians for the problems which they face in life, it will stop them directing their anger to where the blame really lays. With the capitalist class and the capitalist system.

As long as the white working class are blaming blacks or Asians for lack of good housing, it stops them asking



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why it is that the government have brought the Council house building programme nearly to a standstill, or why it is that property speculators are allowed to buy up thousands of homes which will be left standing empty and idle for perhaps years to come.

Similarly if black people are being blamed for the unemployment situation, then it stops people realising that the only people who actually ever put anybody out of work are the upper class, who privately own all of the productive resources on which we all depend to create the necessities of life, and who when it suits them, are quite happy to shut down those resources and take them out of production, regardless of whatever economic and social effect this may have on the rest of society.

The idea that the existence of economic problems in our society is somehow linked to race or immigration is just a total fallacy. If it were true then we would expect that the areas where there

are least immigrants, would also have the lowest level of these problems. But of course this is not the case. Some areas with a relatively low level of immigrants, such as West Scotland, or the North East of England, have some of the highest rates of social deprivation in the country. And how, if we try and blame immigration for homelessness and unemployment, can we explain the massive unemployment, homelessness and poverty which existed in this country during the thirties, when there were hardly any immigrants at all here.

PROBLEMS

The social and economic problems faced by working class people are caused by one thing and one thing only. The capitalist economic system, which allows a small minority of people to privately own all of the productive resources of society, and use them for their own personal benefit, instead of them being used for the benefit of society as a whole.

It is this which allows factories to be shut down, and people to be thrown out of work, while others are crying out for the goods which could be produced by those people

and machines. It is this which allows building resources to be ploughed into the building of luxury homes which 99% of people will never be able to live in, while thousands remain homeless or living in sub-standard accommodation.

The only way in which such social evils will ever be eradicated from society, is when the working class come together to sweep away the system which causes them, and replace it with a saner and fairer one.

Obviously this will never happen as long as the working class are at each other's throats, divided by race, or anything else for that matter. This is why the upper class, the only ones who have anything to lose by such a development, do all in their power to promote and encourage racialism.

And that is why we on the left, must resolutely oppose racialism at every turn. Because only by eventually defeating it, will we ever be able to create a movement which will be capable of building a better society, one in which evils such as homelessness, unemployment and racialism will be a thing of the past.

AID FOR THE PRISONERS

Most people reading this paper will be aware that earlier this year, a very bitter dispute erupted between various factions in and around the Irish Republican Socialist Party/Irish National Liberation Army, primarily around an attempt by one grouping to force the organisation to disband itself. This is not the place to try and go into the ins and outs of this dispute, suffice it to say that the I.R.S.P. is still very much in existence, although understandably diminished in size and resources, but determined to rebuild their movement on a sound political footing, aimed at avoiding the repeat of such tragedies in the future, and one which will enable them to recover their former position, as an influential political movement.

As part of this rebuilding programme, they are in the process of picking up the threads of some of the many political tasks which fell by the wayside during the long disputes which built up to the tragic climax. One of these tasks concerns the 45 I.N.L.A. prisoners, currently being held in English and Irish jails.

Because these prisoners are not members of the I.R.A., they do not receive any aid from a prisoners assistance fund run by the Provisional movement, known as the Green Cross. This provides the families of all I.R.A. prisoners, with a weekly sum of £8 each, to help pay for the expenses incurred by having a relation in prison - food parcels, newspapers, travelling expenses for visits etc. When you remember that the majority of these prisoners come from areas with at least 50 percent, and sometimes as much as 80 percent unemployment it is easy to see how important this money must be in many cases, and easy to imagine the extra hardship placed on the I.N.L.A. prisoners and their families.

SPONSORSHIP

In an effort to try and alleviate this situation, the I.R.S.P. are inviting revolutionary movements at home and abroad to sponsor individual prisoners. The idea is to find people or groups of people who will agree to commit themselves to providing the £8 a week, for the length of time that the prisoner remains inside, and also to establish and maintain contact with him or her.

Red Action fully supports this initiative, and is at present in the process of organising its active branches where it has them, to become involved in this scheme. If anybody reading this would like to become involved, then we invite them to get in touch with us, but please remember that this is not something to just take up lightly. It requires a long term commitment. If you would like more information from the I.R.S.P., their address is 392, Falls Road, Belfast.

These prisoners are all revolutionary soldiers, imprisoned because of the commitment to revolutionary struggle. They deserve our support.

ANTI FASCIST ACTION

National March

ASSEMBLE AT

Trafalgar Square

Sunday Nov. 8

AT 1 pm

The problems faced by working class people are the same, irrespective of colour, and only by coming together to confront those problems, will they ever be able to build a movement capable of solving them.

Inside this Issue:

THEY DID NOT PASS THE BATTLE OF LEWISHAM 1977

plus

WHY WE SAY UP THE I.R.A.

You would not have to be particularly familiar with Red Action to realise that support for the armed struggle of the IRA and INLA is something which we push very much to the forefront of our political activities and identity. This does not make us unique - there are other socialist organisations who take a similar position - but it does set us apart from the considerably larger number of organisations on the left, who either refuse to support the armed struggle at all, or who if not actually hostile towards it, still seem very reluctant to openly and loudly proclaim their support for it. It is our opinion that such an attitude is a symptom of a significant political weakness.

Traditionally, the far left in this country have not been slow to show their commitment to the principle that revolutionary socialists should support all other revolutionary struggles anywhere in the world. Whether we take the example of Vietnam in the 50s and 60s, South Africa or Nicaragua today or any of many others past and present we usually find that the response of left wing groups in this country has been the same and loudly proclaimed. "Victory to the freedom fighters."

WORTHY STRUGGLE

The struggle of the Irish people against British oppression, is quite obviously no less worthy a struggle than any of these others, and given that it is occurring so near to home and that our own state machine is the oppressor force, we might expect that the level of support from left groups in this country would be even higher. In fact in many cases the exact opposite is the case. There are significant sections of the left today, who are far more willing to devote their time and energy and space in their publications to publicising the struggles of oppressed peoples in far away countries, than they are the one which is occurring right on their own doorstep. Who have been happy to associate themselves with calls for "Victory to the NLF" (Vietnam) or "Victory to the ANC (S. Africa)" but have never been known to call for "Victory to the IRA" preferring instead to adopt the much less contentious position of calling merely for British withdrawal.

EXPLANATIONS

Various explanations are given for this. We are told for instance that the Republican struggle is not one which should command the full support of revolutionary socialists because it is not a socialist struggle, aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system but a nationalist one, aimed at nothing more than forcing British withdrawal from Ireland, but leaving the capitalist system there intact. Similarly we are told by some that the Irish struggle cannot be considered to be a truly revolutionary one, because it enjoys the support of only one section to the community - the Catholic one - and therefore must be seen as a sectarian struggle. Another argument maintains that it is no use putting Ireland to the forefront of your politics because Ireland is not a "popular" issue. Most people here

WHY WE SAY UP THE I.R.A.



The demand for troops out is obviously a correct one and one which we should support. But those who claim to be revolutionaries should be willing to go much further and call for "victory to the revolutionary freedom fighters"

are either apathetic to what happens there, or hostile to the Republican struggle. Therefore the argument runs, if you are trying to build a revolutionary movement in this country, it is more important to concentrate on those issues which directly affect people here, wages, housing, unemployment etc

These then are the sort of arguments put forward, by left wingers in this country, to try and explain their reluctance to fully embrace the armed struggle in Ireland. The trouble is, any sort of inspection shows that there is no real validity to them.

FALSE ARGUMENT

For a start the argument about playing down Ireland because it is an "unpopular" issue is a most shameful one for anyone describing themselves as a revolutionary to use. What sort of revolutionary is it that bases their commitment towards a political position not on the basis of its correctness or otherwise, but according to how popular it will make them. If a political position is correct, a principled revolutionary socialist will support it, regardless of the response this evokes in others. Of course the Irish struggle is not a popular issue in this country. This is due mainly to the massive level of chauvinism which exists in all classes. The task of a revolutionary is not to pander to this chauvinism by retreating on issues which disturb it, but to bring those issues forward in order to challenge it. How can we ever hope to smash chauvinism unless we begin to challenge it.

The principle of "playing down" unpopular issues, could just as logically be applied to other such unpopular issues such as demands for gay rights, or the scrapping of immigration controls. The fact that those who apply this principle seem to do so only in the case of Ireland, and not to any other issues suggests that they are not so much applying a principle which they believe in, as just looking for an excuse to distance themselves from the Irish struggle.

A similar inconsistency is seen with the argument about

the Irish struggle being a predominantly nationalist one, rather than a socialist one. Of course the Irish struggle contains within it political weaknesses. No revolutionary socialist, including those involved in the Irish struggle would ever try and suggest otherwise. But this has also been the case with many other revolutionary struggles past and present all round the world, which the left here still voiciferously supported. Why is it only in the case of Ireland, that any political weaknesses are seized upon, and used as justification for not giving full support to the struggle.

As for the argument about lack of Protestant involvement, only someone who is either totally ignorant of the situation in Ireland, or is just looking for an excuse to denigrate the Republican movement would ever use this as an excuse to try and deny the revolutionary character of their struggle. However much it may disturb the theories of idealistic intellectuals, given to romantic visions of the working class in all its historically progressive force in society, the fact of the matter is that because of the specific origins and nature of the Northern Irish state, the decades of institutionalised bigotry and supremacy on which the Protestant community have been weaned, the vast majority of them, working class included, remain totally committed to the Loyalist/Orange movement.

REACTIONARY

This is a wholly reactionary some would say fascist movement, with strong links with some of the most right wing elements in this country. As long as the majority of the Protestant working class remain ideologically committed to this movement, they will remain a reactionary force, ready in the final analysis to support the British state against any form of progressive or socialist movement. To expect the Republican movement to be able to win significant sections of this community to a revolutionary position at this time is totally unrealistic - although we should not forget that this has indeed occurred in a small but significant number of cases - but if the Republican movement were to wait for the majority of Protestants to desert Loyalism before commencing the struggle, they would probably wait forever.

And so we can say that the arguments used by those reluctant to embrace the armed struggle to justify their position, are in the first instance ideologically weak, and in the second instance, applied in a highly selective manner. So what is the real reason behind it? To understand this,

we have to look at the nature of British society, and the effect that it has had on the character of the left in this country.

For many years until quite recently, British capitalism was functioning quite successfully, and managing to secure steady, if slight, improvements in the living standards of most classes of people. Consequently most people in this country accept the capitalist system, and for many years now, there has been no experience of what might be described as some sort of general revolutionary upheaval.

ABSTRACT

In a situation such as this, the revolutionary movement really exists in name only. It is not involved in any revolutionary activities because none are occurring. Apart from the small minority who have been in a position to participate in strikes or some form of industrial action, the activities of most of those involved in the revolutionary left in this country, involve nothing more demanding than attending the odd meeting and demonstration, selling literature, and of course pledging their solidarity with other more genuinely revolutionary struggles in far off countries, too far away for them to be able to do anything much practical to prove that solidarity.

This lack of any genuinely revolutionary situation is of course hardly the fault of the left. But it has had its effect upon the character of the movement.

For a start it means that the idea of revolution is something which is viewed very much in the abstract. As something which is read about and theorised about, rather than something which has been experienced and understood. Of course there is absolutely nothing wrong with reading about and discussing the past experiences of the revolutionary movement. In fact such activities are an essential part of the development of a political philosophy. But only a part. Any philosophy based entirely upon abstract theories derived from reading or debating, without being tested in practice, runs a grave risk of ending up as a dogma, with mechanical fixed ideas of how future developments will occur. In its worst form, this can mean a total inability to relate to any developments which don't follow the preconceived pattern.

The politically undemanding nature of life on the British left, also has its effect on the development of the movement in terms of the quality of people attracted to it. Because of the absence of any revolutionary situation to impose revolutionary demands upon the movement, there

is no way of testing whether people really have the level of commitment which will be necessary in a revolutionary situation. Consequently, many are drawn into the movement who do not possess it. Dilletantes, attracted to the cosy debating society atmosphere. Careerists, out for the social and material benefits to be had, by becoming a "leading light" in one of the larger left groups. Closet reformists, who may be able to understand the need for the overthrow of the state, but who will never be able to come to terms with some of the nastier realities of actually achieving this. All of these elements exist in great abundance in the British left unchallenged and undisturbed by the lack of any revolutionary development to expose their lack of commitment. That is of course, only if the revolutionary developments in Ireland are ignored.

NEW DEVELOPMENT

By its geographical nearness alone, the revolutionary struggle in Ireland opens the way for a new development in the revolutionary movement in this country. It means that for once, it has the opportunity to put its oft stated commitment to international revolutionary solidarity into practice, instead of just talking about it in the abstract, and to start working towards building real living links with those actually involved in revolutionary struggle.

The nearness of the struggle also means that some of the realities of revolutionary struggle are brought home with a vividness and clarity which would never be possible when viewing some remote or past struggle in the abstract. The horror of the death and the bloodshed, the tragic consequences of the inevitable mistakes and excesses made by the revolutionary movement as it forges itself in struggle. The dirty deeds it is sometimes forced to carry out, and the tremendous sacrifices which have to be made. The awesome oppression with which the state meets the threat.

All of these are the inevitable consequence of any revolutionary struggle. It is only when the struggle is occurring right on our own doorstep, and is one which if we are to be consistent to our oft stated commitment to the principle of revolutionary solidarity, we should be looking to become in some way involved in, that the reality of them really starts to come home and has to be faced up to. This is something which so many sections of the British left, softened by their years of cosy existence, riddled with elements lacking in revolutionary commitment, or lost in their mechanical idealistic theories of the exact course which their "true" revolution will take, find impossible to do.

BACK OFF

The closet reformists instinctively recoil from the horrific aspects of the struggle. The careerists and dilletantes balk at the prospect of anything disturbing the calm ordered pattern which is life of the British left. They all quail at the realisation that in this particular case, commitment to revolutionary solidarity implies for once actually doing something about it, and that to do so, even by forging only the most tentative of links, could start to expose them to just a little of the sort of state oppression familiar to most genuine revolutionary movements, but so far avoided by the one here.

And so they back off. In reality because of their own political and moral weakness. But this is of course is something which they would never admit, not even to themselves, and so we see them grabbing at any argument

which gives some sort of political justification to their position. Which reassures them that their's is in fact the correct position for a revolutionary socialist to adopt, and that it is they who are in fact the true revolutionaries, and not the Irish freedom fighters. Small wonder that such arguments turn out to be laden with weaknesses and inconsistencies.

Here then is one very good reason for pushing Ireland right to the forefront of your political identity. At the moment, it represents one of the best ways available of testing how genuine someone's commitment is to revolutionary politics. It is our contention that the politically least experienced Red Action member, born and brought up in the chauvinistic atmosphere of this country, who now supports the Irish struggle in the small ways in which Red Action does, and is now willing to openly support the Irish struggle in the face of all the hostility which that engenders, has in fact proved their commitment to the ideal of revolutionary solidarity, a hundred times more than the most articulate intellectual who could tell you everything about the theories behind that ideal, but has never actually done anything about it.

Support for the Irish struggle is not the only way in which people show political commitment, there are others - for example militant trade unionists who carry on in the face of victimisation, harassment from the police etc - neither does it automatically make some one a good revolutionary socialist. There are many, particularly among whose commitment to the struggle is based on their own Irish background, who's views on some other issues are questionable to say the least. But if we accept that support for the Irish struggle, by virtue of the hostility shown towards it in this country, represents one of the most demanding positions that someone here can be asked to adopt, then it is not unreasonable to expect that those who do so, will also be capable of understanding and adopting the other positions which go to make up a revolutionary socialist outlook.

SOLIDARITY

The struggle in Ireland represents the only serious revolutionary activity, whose geographical location makes it possible for the revolutionary movement in this country to aspire to some sort of involvement in. Therefore, if we are serious about being revolutionaries, whose eventual aim is nothing less than the overthrow of the entire capitalist system, we must begin by gravitating towards that struggle. Let us be quite clear what we mean by this. It does not mean that we are advocating that revolutionaries in this country, should tomorrow drop everything and rush off to try and join the IRA or INLA, or that they should immediately start searching for ways and means of sending guns and explosives over to Ireland. Such activity coming out of the blue would hardly be welcomed by the Republican movement, and would almost certainly result in little more than the arrest of all involved. But it does mean that we must be looking to begin the process of establishing living links with that revolutionary movement, in order that we can firstly learn from them about the true art of revolution, and secondly find ways in which we can eventually offer them some practical assistance in their struggle, and in doing so, begin to fulfil our obligations as internationalists and revolutionaries. Only when we have started to do this, will we really be worthy of the title.

On the left Nicaraguan Sandinistas. On the right IRA volunteers. Both revolutionary freedom fighters. We are used to liberal types giving their support to movements such as the Sandinistas, while condemning the IRA, what is even more sickening is when those who claim to be revolutionaries, start to do it as well

THEY DID NOT PASS

Just over ten years ago in the early hours one morning, a large number on police in a full scale planned operation, descended upon a number of homes and arrested eighteen black youths. They were all charged under the notorious conspiracy laws, conspiring to commit crimes unknown with persons unknown. The code name for the police operation was P.N.H.20, which was reputed to stand for Police Nigger Hunt 20. Friends and associates of the accused immediately launched a defence campaign to assist the accused and publicise the case. Amongst other activities, they started holding public meetings in Lewisham High Street. Very soon, these meetings were being subjected to organised attacks by members and supporters of the National Front. These attacks and the response to them, were to set off a chain of events which were to culminate in one of the most significant political events in this country for many years.

ELECTORAL FORCE

At this time, the National Front was a much different organisation occupying a vastly different position in the political life of the country than it does today. It had been formed some ten years earlier by the coming together of a number of small groups of assorted nazis, fascists, and reactionaries of various description. The aim was the creation of a far right force capable of becoming an electoral force in the country. To this end the Front leadership, who were nearly all nazis, were playing down their past political traditions, in order to try and present a respectable image with which to woo the soft right patriotic elements in British society.

In the increasingly racist climate of this time, fuelled and inflamed by the expression of ever more overtly racist sentiments by supposedly "respectable" sections of the establishment - Enoch Powell's rivers of blood speech, hysterical front page headlines in the press about immigrant families supposedly being given privileged treatment - the Front were operating on very fertile soil. Their success could be gauged by their growing membership, reputedly up to something like 20,000 by the mid seventies, and their increasing success at the ballot box. In one bye election, Front leader John Tyndall polled over 2,000 votes. Amongst the more optimistic sections of the Front membership, there was heady talk of pushing the Liberals into fourth place in the political order in the foreseeable future, and achieving the sort of breakthrough soon to be achieved by the Front Nacional in France.

OPPOSITION

The only force which had attempted to stand up and opposed this worrying rising tide of "popular" racism, were sections of the revolutionary left. Most prominent amongst these were two groups in particular. The International Marxist Group and the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP in particular were now beginning to emerge as the leading force in the anti racist/anti fascist movement, due in no small part to the fact that their success in recruiting a far higher proportion of working class members to their organisation than usual in revolutionary groups meant that they had amongst their membership, a significant number who were well suited to some of the particular demands of anti-fascist activity. It was this section which was now to lead the response to the attacks on the Lewisham Defence Campaign.

RAIDS

Campaign meetings and demonstrations. Eventually, in an effort to counter this challenge to their ability to control the streets, the Front announced their intention of holding a National march and demonstration in Lewisham High Street.

A number of organised retaliatory raids were carried out upon the Front members involved, and large scale stewarding operations were organised to protect Defence

The SWP immediately called a counter demonstration, calling upon their members to occupy the Front's proposed assembly point a couple of hours before they were due to assemble there in order to prevent them assembling and marching. On the day some five or six thousand anti-fascists turned out, making it the largest anti-fascist demonstration seen in this country since the war. A series of pitched battles followed as the police tried to force a path through the anti fascists to enable the Front to march. Eventually, after managing to march just a couple of hundred yards, the Front were forced to abandon their plans. The counter demonstration had been a complete success.

TRIUMPH

The real triumph of Lewisham however, was not to be seen until afterwards. Although the events there may seem a lot tamer today, in the light of subsequent events at Brixton, Toxteth, Broadwater Farm etc, at the time they were seen as sensational and were treated to days of high profile media coverage. Suddenly the whole country was aware of the existence of a committed militant anti-racist movement, and the issue of racism was being discussed in workplaces, pubs and clubs the length of the country. In many areas of society, racist myths and stereotypes which had existed unopposed for years, were now being challenged for the very first time.

Lewisham was a symbol of the turn of the tide. From being in a position where it had been a lone isolated voice, surrounded by an ever rising sea of racist sentiment, the anti racist/anti fascist movement was now on the offensive, growing in boldness strength and influence. The culmination came some months later, with the formation of the Anti Nazi League. The ANL was to grow into the largest and most successful popular mass movement seen in this country since before the war, uniting tens of thousands in massive displays of anti racist awareness. More importantly, the ANL succeeded in it's principal aim of exposing the hidden fascist traditions of the National Front leadership, totally destroying the respectable image upon which it had been building it's base of support. The 1979 election, on which the Front had been placing great hopes of further progress, saw them totally flop. The pressures which this caused within the Front, were soon to see it split up into squabbling factions. The electoral dream of the fascist right was, for the moment at least, smashed.

Such then was the course of events in which the Lewisham demonstration played such a significant role. What lessons can we learn from them today?

The first great lesson which we can draw, is that the only really effective action against fascism on the rise, is militant confrontational action, outside of the law if necessary. The entire supposedly "left wing" and liberal sections of the establishment, were seen to be totally incapable of in any way challenging the rise of the Front,



Police trying to clear a path through the anti-fascist demonstrators on the streets of Lewisham, August 1977.

Their commitment to working within the system and it's laws, left them helpless to come up with any effective answers. It was only the physical victory over the fascists achieved by the revolutionary movement at Lewisham, which brought the issue to the fore, and paved the way for the later ideological victory. Indeed it was only as a result of the events at Lewisham, that the state decided to start banning certain fascist marches.

The second great lesson is in seeing just how much can be achieved, even by the relatively tiny revolutionary movement in Britain, when it pursues the correct policies in a consistent and principled fashion. By standing out as they did against the tide of growing racism, the SWP, IMG and other smaller groups were able to eventually turn that tide and achieve one of the most notable victories in recent British political history.

TRAGEDY

The great tragedy was that within just four years of it's formation, the Anti Nazi League was allowed to drift into oblivion. The SWP by then in virtual total control of it, believing that the demise of the Front at the ballot box signalled an end to the fascist threat, totally changed their policy of confronting fascism and racism,

and retreated from that arena of political activity, allowing the ANL to fold, and disillusioning and losing many of their best anti-fascist activists in the process. They claim that should the fascist right start to rebuild and become a significant threat again, then they will again take up the challenge and smash them again. If by this they mean that they expect to be able to relaunch the ANL mark 2 just like that, then they are sadly mistaken. Mass movements cannot be turned on and off like water out of a tap. They have to be built by slow patient and consistent work. The ANL did not just appear out of nowhere. It was the result of years of consistent and principled work in anti-racist/anti-fascist politics, carried out by members of the SWP, IMG and other left groups, the sort of work which is today being carried out by members of Anti Fascist Action, of which Red Action is a part of.

As long as fascism exists, in whatever strength or form it has to be vigorously opposed. If we forget that simple rule, we may find that when we do eventually try to oppose it, we have lost the strength to do so. As at Cable Street in 1936, and Lewisham in 1977, the cry now, and always, must be "THEY SHALL NOT PASS".

THROUGH THE POST

To Red Action

Once again it gives me great pleasure to thank the Red Action group for their participation in the International day of solidarity in Glasgow on the 22nd of August. It has been noted by our organisation that Red Action are appearing at all parades and demonstrations up and down the country, even in the occupied six counties in Ireland, also Sheffield, Glasgow and Manchester to name but a few. You are a credit to the Republican struggle. Hope to see you in the future.

Joseph O'Kane
P.R.O. Republican Bands Alliance
Scotland

And just to show that we don't only print the good ones

"I recently received my first copy of your newspaper "Red Action" My first impression was that the paper was well devised and grammatically sound, but on further viewing found it was misleading and misadvised, and in many cases just rambles on with columns of drivel with fairy tale fantasies of how the country would crumble in it's current state of affairs with it's Tory government. Could Labour's altruistic views and an auriferous government save the country by caring only for ethnic minorities, sexual outcasts or the unemployed. Or your socialist state, which believes quote "In a truly socialist society, crime would eventually die away, and with it the need for any sort of legal system" (April 77) Utopia is not that close to the horizon surely. In this country of so many mixed views and feelings, I am afraid extremism could never find a useful or practical place in society

G.W.
Middlesex



The pages of Red Action are open to anybody to write about anything they wish. Please keep letters as short as possible, and write to P.O. Box 158 Hatfield Herts

Ten Men Dead

A Red Action Book review

"A book which tells the truth is a useful book and one which deserves an audience. A book which tells the truth about the situation in Ireland is such a rarity that I am still shaking my head in disbelief that the author found a publisher" said Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness recently, talking about David Beresford's book Ten Men Dead.

Most books about Ireland are either complete rubbish or just plain propaganda. Beresford's carefully researched work about the 1981 hunger strike, demolishes the myth of the "IRA Godfathers" on the outside orchestrating for their own purposes the situation in the prisons by intimidating the prisoners and their families.

It is an excellent book, factual, honest and intriguing. Based on the "comms" letters written by the prisoners on toilet and cigarette papers and smuggled out of the prison, it provides a remarkable and unique insight into the type of characters both men and women who join the IRA, and into the sense of determination, ingenuity, shared suffering, comradeship, humour and political insight which exists among them. It is above all, a testimony to the calibre of the volunteers recruited by the IRA, as a few extracts from some of the "comms" shows.

Bobby Sands 28/1/81

"Now we sat up all night naked until a few minutes ago before the bastards found it within themselves to give us blankets and mattresses.

Now we didn't sleep we were frozen etc. Big Gerry McInally took sick. They wouldn't give him a blanket. The whole 47 of us stuck our name down for governor today. First 6 men went to the doctor and said we had no water, clothing or beds, and that we had been fired into dirty cells - excrement and puddles on the floor - which we did not mess, and asked what he was going to do about it. He said he would see but it was not a medical matter. We got hold of the P.O. at 10am this morning, and he issued us with half a fucking blanket each."

Bik McFarlane 27/5/81

"A lad named Bosco Doherty informs me that he is going on hunger strike and is just waiting my clearance, which if he doesn't get does not really matter as he "bends the rules to suit" sez he" Now comrade I did a quick I.O. (intelligence officer) job on young Bosco, and I feel that he needs gentle but firm sensible treatment as he is somewhat erratic (mildly put) To give you a clear picture of him might help.... He eats razor blades"

(continued on back page)

TEN DEAD HUNGER-STRIKERS



The ten IRA volunteers who died in the hunger strike of 1981

SUPPORT RED ACTION



Red Action is an organisation founded by working class people to work for the furthering of the cause of Socialism. Membership is open to all who accept our political principles and pay a weekly subscription. Every member has an equal vote on all Red Action policy and decisions.

If you support our aims but do not wish to become a member, you can become a supporting member. This does not entitle you to vote, but you will receive:

1. A free subscription to the newspaper.
2. A regular internal newsletter that will keep you informed of what is going on in the organisation.
3. Notification of any Red Action activities in your area.

The cost for this is £10 for one year.

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THE VOICE OF REASON

In a report in the Johannesburg City News, James Vandamme of the local transport commission explaining the new bus services in the city said "This is the first step in the phasing out of racial discrimination. Buses used by whites will be blue. Buses used by blacks will be yellow. Blue buses will halt at white painted bus stops. Yellow buses will halt at black painted bus stops. Fares will remain unchanged." Asked to explain the difference between the system before and after the change, Mr. Vandamme replied "If you cannot tell the difference between blue and yellow, then it is difficult for me to help you."

"The Sandinistas are just as intolerant, anti-semitic, anti-democratic and racist as the Nazis were. I am pleased to say that whole portions of the Conservative party identify strongly with the Contras." The democratic view of Marc Gordon of the Federation of Conservative Students, who amongst other things, call for Nelson Mandela to be hanged.

"The original idea was never that they should roam the streets together in a van looking for trouble" claimed Brian Hilliard, editor of the Police Review commenting upon the five police officers jailed for assault upon four youths in Holloway North London. Chief Constable Peter Imbert later assured Londoners that of the 27,000 Metropolitan Police, "99.9 percent of the men and women in this force are of the very highest integrity indeed."

That leaves 0.01 percent, which works out at just 27, whom he reckons are a bit dodgy. If you take the five that have just been put away, add the head of the Serious Crimes Squad currently under suspension, plus the detective who topped himself after interrogation by internal enquiry, and include the P.C. now under suspension after claiming to have been shot by a crossbow in South London last month, you will calculate that corruption in the Met. has been reduced by over 25 percent since Imbert took over the job. Impressive by any standards.

Nationally however, the picture is more patchy with P.C.s Jackie Harris and Stephen Riddick being cleared of the manslaughter of a 29 year old labourer, who died in a cell five hours after being arrested by the two. The main witness to the assault was, according to the Judge in the case, drunk at the time of the alleged incident.

In the same week, P.C.s Hamish Montgomery and Patrick Shelvin were charged at Lancaster Magistrates Court with the murder of a 27 year old unemployed labourer, who was arrested after an incident at a pub and found to be dead on arrival at hospital. In both of these cases, through the efforts of the P.C.s, the crime figures on the one hand went up, and on the other hand the unemployment figures went down. As I said nationally the picture is a little patchy.

"I've now got some idea of what it's like to be unemployed" Jeffrey Archer, who's personal fortune is estimated to be over £10 million, and who once stated that unemployed youngsters were "workshy" What a twit.

In his recent book "The Politics of Food" Mr. Geoffrey Cannon found that roughly half of the 246 advisers chosen to sit on the governments expert panels have links with companies who's products may come before them for approval. Three members of the advisory committee which assesses the safety of food and food additives are paid employees of Unilever, Colmans and Heinz, a fourth has just retired from Cadbury Schweppes, and a fifth works for J. Walter Thompson, an advertising agency which handles food and drink accounts. Food for thought perhaps?

"There is no difference in principle between making a false claim for benefit and a false claim for personal tax allowances or for exaggerated business expenses."

A quote from Sir Norman Price, former Chairman of the Inland Revenue, who further revealed that there are 30 to 40 times more prosecutions for social security offences, than there are for defrauding the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise. Social security fraud runs at a couple of million pounds annually, while tax fraud is estimated in billions.

Judge Margaret Burnham, a former Massachusetts criminal judge who attended the trial of the three men convicted of the murder of P.C. Blakelock at the Old Bailey earlier this year, has released an 18 page report in which she describes the police investigation as "haphazard and frenzied" and condemns the government and courts for their failure "to met out fair and equal justice" in what she describes as "a highly polarized and political climate."

In the case of Winston Sillcot, sentenced to life imprisonment, the only evidence presented was an unsigned statement that was not in any way incriminating. There was no forensic evidence, no murder weapon, no identification, no sign of Sillcot in any one of more than a thousand photographs taken by police during the incident, and finally there was certainly no justice.

If the Home Secretary is really intent on reducing the numbers of people in prison as he claims, and if he really has any sense of true justice, he could begin by quashing the convictions against Sillcot and his co-defendants, as well as those against the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and those convicted of the murder of Carl Bridgewater for a start.

"I am a British through and through, and when I hear Paddy jokes I laugh at them. I am not a Paddy, I am a Billy." Arch Loyalist the Reverend William McCrea. Unfortunately for him the bigots and racists in this country generally don't have any time for such subtle distinctions.

A group of "Liberal" South African businessmen shrewd enough to recognise the implications of the "Winds of change" currently sweeping through the country, have concocted a document called "The Business Charter" which suggests how the system should operate after Apartheid has been abolished. In an obvious attempt to woo the country's 20 million blacks, a spokesman for the Charter suggested that there were fundamental similarities between it and the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress, the left wing black liberation

movement. When pressed however, he was gracious enough to admit that there were perhaps "a number of small differences" One of these "small differences" is the proposal by the A.N.C. to nationalise all the banks, gold mines and factories. As public ownership of the means of production is one of the basic distinctions between a capitalist society and a socialist one, it would be interesting to find out what some of the other "small differences" are.

Following a recent court ruling against the United Klans of America for the murder of a young black man, his mother Mrs Beulah Mae McDonald, has been awarded ownership of it's Alabama Headquarters in damages. She has decided to sell it immediately.

"So often people are knicked, and as you know they say nothing. They say nothing at all Some people do say things, but not anyone who knows, and when people say absolutely nothing the whole conversation has to be invented, the whole of it."

Former Flying Squad officer Laurie Cork. A proposal by the Home Secretary to be included in the Criminal Justice Bill to end a suspects right to silence, will bring no small relief to some officers who felt that a suspects exercising of that right rather over-taxed their imaginations, in trying to find some new variation of the classic British one liner - "when we arrested the accused m'lud, he replied all-right guv, it's a fair cop" in order to try and secure a conviction.

The summing up of Judge Caufield in the Jeffrey Archer trial included twelve admitted "inaccuracies and mistakes" including the remark "poor Jeffrey" all of which were presumably directed at helping Archer to realise a very handsome profit on his original £2,000 investment, and drew this columns attention to other strange remarks made by some of the Judge's colleagues recently.

For instance Judge Argyle claimed during a speech that there were 5 million illegal immigrants in the country. Asked for some proof he replied "I don't have the figures, but just go to Bradford."

Judge Christopher Hilton, directing a jury to return a not guilty verdict in the case of a headmaster charged with hitting a pupil on the buttocks because of low marks explained "that if one has the misfortune to be caned, one expects to be hit hard, that is the point of it. It would be a slightly odd caning if considerable force were not used."

He sounds to me very much like one who might subscribe to the Harvey Procter school of thought on corporal punishment.

"If your turn has come to defend the motherland it's interests and it's security, you should know and abide by the only true motto of out socialist humanism. If an enemy does not surrender, it must be liquidated."

A quote from a Russian newspaper called Krasnaya Zvela, displaying all the subtlety and "humanism" of a Sun editorial.

"If I report the colour of the coffee in the canteen of MI5 I could get three months for it" claims Peter Wright author of "Spycatcher", on the catch-all section two of the Official Secrets Act.

You hear a lot about this Glastnost in the Eastern Bloc countries these days, and personally I'm all for it, though I don't suppose it's very likely that it will be introduced over here.

TEN MEN DEAD

Continued from page three

Bik McFarlane 10/4/81 (After hunger striker Bobby Sands' victory in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone bye election.

"I'm sitting here picturing a heap of you swilling down loads of black brew and making right idiots of yourselves and boy am I jealous. I'm away here to relax a wee while. The strains of the last week have been too much man. Congrats to one and all you wonderful people, we really showed them. Up the good old Ra (the IRA) and other such outrageous outbursts. Nite nite and God speed. Bik

Bik McFarlane 12/5/81

"I've just told the lads of Frank's (Francis Hughes') death and there is an unnatural silence hanging over the wing - the other wings as well. I just want to scream or kill somebody. I'm deadly serious comrade. If there's anything on earth that can harden a man's heart to such a degree, it is this devil's tomb. I'll sign off here mate. take good care and God Bless Bik

Bik McFarlane undated some time towards the end of the hunger strike.

"Anyway the way I see it is that we are at war and by choice we have placed ourselves in the front line. I still feel we should maintain this position and fight on in current fashion. It is we who are on top of the situation, and we who are the stronger. Therefore we maintain. In the immediate sense this means that Doc and Kevin (Kevin Lynch and Kieron Doherty, the seventh and

eighth hunger strikers to die) will forfeit thier lives, and as you say the others on hunger strike could well follow. I feel that we must continue until we achieve a settlement or until circumstances force us into a position where no choice would be left but to capitulate. I don't believe the latter would arise.

There is one poignant and sobering fact, and that is if the government had recognised their right to be treated as political prisoners and settled the strike, not only would these courageous and unselfish men still be alive, but nine of them would actually have finished sentences. Only Francis Hughes would still be in prison. This remarkable book is currently in it's fourth reprint. Read it.



The funeral of Bobby Sands drew over 100,000 mourners, and confirmed the level of popular support which existed for the hunger strikers.

WE ARE RED ACTION

RED ACTION IS AN ORGANISATION FOUNDED TO WORK TOWARDS THE ENDING OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOCIALIST ONE

CAPITALISM The need of capital and labour cannot ever be reconciled. In other words the quest by the employing classes for greater profit, is in eternal conflict with the demands of the working class for higher wages, shorter hours etc. It is in the obvious interest of the employer to keep wages down as low as possible while it is equally obvious that this does not serve the interests of the majority. The two systems capitalism and socialism cannot co-exist, as they are in constant struggle pulling in opposite directions, each in pursuit of its own goals. A victory for one is necessarily a defeat for the other. This is the major source of conflict in the world today. Capitalism is a system which is based on the private ownership of the means of production. This means that the factories, workplaces, natural resources etc, on which we all depend to produce the necessities of life are the private property of a few individuals, who use them to produce not what is most socially necessary, but whatever will make them the most profit. When it suits them, they are able to close down those productive resources, even though there may be great social need for what could be produced on them. Regardless of how rich a country may be in natural resources, capitalism can never provide equality of wealth due to its own inherent limitations. It is obviously impossible for everybody to become a capitalist (employer) and so to function, the system demands the creation and maintenance of an employing class and a working class, or if you like an upper class and lower class. Propping up this system, are the forces of social control—army, police force, civil service etc—all controlled by totally unelected and un-accountable representatives of the capitalist class.

SOCIALISM It is impossible for us today to say exactly what a socialist system will be like, as when it happens there will be millions of others involved in shaping it. However there are some features that would have to be present in any society, before we would be willing to consider it as socialist.

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP Only when all of the major productive resources and industry are taken into public ownership, will it be possible for the democratic will of the majority to ensure that they are at all times employed in the most socially useful manner. This will result in a massive increase in production and wealth.

CONTROL OF SOCIETY All those who occupy positions of power and authority will be elected by those they represent and subject to recall.

FREEDOM AND EQUALITY All will be expected to contribute to production and all will receive equal reward and have equal rights, irrespective of sex, race or creed. The state will provide adequate facilities to cater for the needs of the elderly, sick, handicapped, nursing mothers etc, who will all receive a full wage. All questions or personal morality will be free from state interference. Abortion and contraception will be legal and provided by the state. There will be freedom of worship for all religion, but no church will be allowed to interfere in state matters.

INTERNATIONALISM The capitalist economic system is linked up internationally, therefore the struggle to overthrow it is a worldwide one. All workers everywhere have the same interests. It is impossible for socialism to exist in isolation in one country, as the power of international capitalism would crush it.

NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD TO SOCIALISM Socialism cannot be achieved through the parliamentary system, because the real power in society lays not with elected MPs but with rich industrialists and the leaders of the armed forces, police judiciary etc. The present structures cannot be reformed they must be overthrown. The Labour Party does not try to end capitalism, but merely give the workers a better deal within it.

UNION STRENGTH. WE SUPPORT ANY PICKET LINE IN DEFENCE OF WORKERS LIVING STANDARDS. We support a strong organised rank and file movement within the unions. Union officials should be supported as long as they represent their members correctly. But rank and file unionists must reserve the right to take action independent of the officials when necessary.

TOTAL OPPOSITION TO RACISM AND FASCISM We opposed any movement or ideology which attempts to divide the working class on grounds of race, sex, or creed. We recognise the need to oppose fascist organisations, both ideologically and physically on the streets.

THE IRISH NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE AGAINST OUR OWN RULING CLASS We support the right of oppressed people the world over to fight back. We unconditionally support the right of the revolutionary armies The Irish Republican Army, and the Irish National Liberation Army, to engage in armed struggle to free their country from British rule. We draw great inspiration from the principled and courageous manner in which they conduct their struggle, and from the way in which they have integrated cultural and class expression into their political movement.

THE "COMMUNIST" STATES The regimes in countries such as Russia, China Cuba etc, are used as examples to try and prove socialism undesirable. In our view, although these countries have planned economies, they cannot be described as socialist. We contend that socialism cannot be implemented from above by an unaccountable ruling elite. Public ownership, freedom and democracy are all essential features of socialism and in their absence it cannot exist. We support the right of the people in these states to overthrow the leadership and implement socialist policies. At the same time however, we recognise the difficulties that states such as Nicaragua—and others past and present—face, from capitalist backed mercenary armies, military intervention, and economic sabotage, which make immediate transition to a socialist system impossible. While these states remain progressive, we will continue to support them.

THE ORGANISATION Traditionally, the structure of revolutionary socialist groups in this country, has been one where the leadership is made up of a small group of self selected academics and intellectual, who wield absolute authority over the membership. Such a structure fails, firstly because there can be no true democracy in such a set up, and corruption soon sets in, and secondly because those leading the organisation are so far removed from the realities of working class life, it cannot relate properly to that class. A revolutionary socialist organisation must be composed of and led by working class people. It must recognise that no leadership is immune from corruption and be truly democratic in its internal structures. It must be ready to work in a non sectarian manner with other socialist and progressive groups. It must present socialist politics in a manner in which working class people can identify with in their life and their work and their leisure. It must be consistent, principled and above all honest in its politics. Only then will it begin to be able to relate to the working class, most of whom today are cynical if not hostile towards the revolutionary left. We recognise that a revolutionary working class party is necessary if capitalism is to be overthrown. We are not that party, neither are those groups which claim to be it. We will work to keep alive a tradition of working class militancy, until such time as enough militants can be brought together to form that party.