

RED ACTION

Issue No.72 Autumn/Winter 1995 — 50p

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SAOIRSE

FREE IRISH
POLITICAL
PRISONERS!



Over a year-on from the Irish Republican Army's historic ceasefire declaration, we are faced with the harsh reality that conditions for Irish political prisoners in Britain have actually deteriorated, with POWs being forced to embark on a blanket protest to draw attention to their plight. Coupled to the British governments release of Clegg and their derisory offer of 50% remission, this calculated 'two-fingers' to the Nationalist community has elevated the importance of the role played by the Saoirse campaign.

Since our last report in these pages on the Saoirse (Freedom) Campaign we have seen its rapid development in London.

As activists within the London branch we believed it was necessary for the campaign to set itself certain tasks for the summer months.

Primarily these tasks were to;

- establish the name of Saoirse and its credentials as an authentic campaign.
- to draw attention to the continued imprisonment of Irish POWs, particularly those held in England who have been subject to increasingly deterio-

rating conditions.

c) to draw in the activists necessary to carry out the work by involving the Irish community as a matter of priority.

Armed with a strategy that would see us focusing our work around a rolling program of events designed to capture both the public's and the media's imagination, the activists have set about building a vibrant and dynamic campaign.

Saoirse's strength has also been its ability to unite a broad spectrum of individual activists and members of organisations that range from Irish Republican, to Irish cultural, through to Left and other progressive groups; all under the single demand to free Irish political prisoners.

Another important aspect has been the involvement and input from relatives of Irish POWs, living in England, who for so long have been isolated, and also

the high proportion of women activists (often more than half) who make up the core of the campaign.

Although the campaign had made an initially slow start it kicked into gear with a week of action in early June.

The following are the highlights from a London Saoirse activist's diary...

Extremely Embarrassing!

June 3 kicked off our first 'Week of Action'. We were determined to do it in style and deliver our message to the heart of Westminster. First, a 45 foot long banner calling for the British government to "Free All Irish Political Prisoners Now!" was hung from Westminster Bridge facing the nearby House of Commons. It was in place for a full 30 minutes before being finally removed by the police, who whined to Saoirse campaigners whom they suspected of being involved in the stunt that the incident had been "extremely embarrassing" for them!

Meanwhile the statue of former Para commander Field Marshall Montgomery and other military figures who line Whitehall and stand directly outside the MoD HQ and directly opposite Downing Street sported placards also calling for the release of the POWs. Not to be outdone, the same

day campaigners in North London unfurled another large banner bearing the same message from Archway bridge, which straddles the busy A1 road. During that week other events included a forty strong picket of Downing Street highlighting the case of Irish POW Sean McNulty and a demonstration outside the Home Office on the day that Clegg's case went before the review board. There was leafletting in Kilburn and at the London Fleadh; and Saoirse posters and graffiti covered areas of Camden, Tottenham, Hackney, Finsbury Park and Kilburn! Though pleased to have completed our first comprehensive series of events, we had still to make a breakthrough into the mainstream media. This was all to change with the release of one Private Clegg.

Clegg Out, All Out!

July 3rd: Although we could not quite match the vigour of the protests in Ireland, where half of Belfast appeared to be ablaze, we had planned a noisy picket outside the Home Office, and seizing the opportunity presented by the Tories' leadership election, the picket moved to Westminster Green to gate-crash the live interviews of Tory MPs.

Transport Minister Brian Mawhinney

came face to face with Saoirse demonstrators who offered him a leaflet. Mawhinney appeared too shocked to say anything coherent and just muttered 'Go away, go away'!

The next day, the day the election result was announced, Saoirse again went to Westminster Green, and again achieved live international TV coverage at the expense of the Tory MPs who struggled to maintain their composure. Shouts of "Clegg Out! All Out!" and Saoirse banners and placards were clearly seen and heard on live TV with presenters complaining that their interviews could not be heard because of the disruption.

Three days later, London Saoirse was back on the streets - and on TV - again. Our demonstration outside the Court of Appeal in support of Paul Norney received broad TV coverage.

We had achieved international TV coverage 3 days out of five that week, taking the Saoirse message into millions of homes throughout Britain. We were further buoyed-up by the news that both people in Ireland and a large number of POWs themselves, had phoned to say that it had given them a terrific boost.

While we systematically worked the Irish festivals; it was the blanket/dirty

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Shouts of "Clegg Out! All Out!" and Saoirse banners and placards were seen on live TV internationally.

protests in Whitmoor jail that demanded that we 'up' our activity again.

July 22: Members of London Saoirse staged a mock blanket protest in London's Kilburn Square to highlight the cases of Irish POWs in Whitmoor Prison who were staging a 'dirty/blanket' protest against the conditions under which they were being held. Over a thousand leaflets were distributed to local people.

July 26: Travelling further afield, members of London Saoirse joined the fans headed for the St. Pauli v Celtic game in Hamburg, Germany. Campaigners enjoyed an excellent response from both sets of fans, and completely ran out of Saoirse t-shirts and ribbons. Hundreds of pounds were raised for the campaign.

July 28: London Saoirse staged a protest calling for "Clegg out, all out!", outside the Royal Tournament in London's Earl's Court. This peaceful demonstration was immediately met by 80 of London's riot squad, the TSG, wearing body armour. Campaigners held a disciplined protest which disappointed the large number of police and military present who clearly anticipated something more ambitious.

August 6: a cavalcade of twenty vehicles, with Irish tricolours and green ribbons flying, converged on Whitmoor prison, Cambridgeshire in support of the blanket protest. Following a two-hour picket by over 80 Saoirse supporters the cavalcade then wound its way nicely to the Conservative and Unionist Club in the nearby town of March. To the utter bewilderment of the local Tories, tricolour waving demonstrators occupied the club's bar, shouting "Clegg Out, All Out!"

August 31 was an important anniversary for London Saoirse, as it signified exactly a year since the IRA's ceasefire announcement as well as the completion of the first six months of our work. Saoirse supporters joined the rally at Trafalgar Square which was addressed by Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness. Amongst those speaking on behalf of Saoirse that evening was Ronnie McCartney, a former POW who had spent over 20 years in English jails, and Patricia

Campbell, who's partner Peter Sherry was involved in the Whitmoor escape attempt. Patricia announced the release of 600 Saoirse balloons, representing all Irish political prisoners across Ireland, Britain and the USA. Each one was labelled with the name of a political prisoner in England, the address of the jail, and a message to the funder to write to the inmate.

Meanwhile a number of Saoirse members dressed as screws and chained themselves to a 'blanketman' in a wheelchair, symbolising the fate of Irish POW and cancer patient Pat Kelly. The Saoirse activities ensured that the rally was a colourful affair, notable for the high percentage of Irish people present.

September 1: The 'Grand Benefit' evening at the Harrington Irish Centre where Glasgow's Blarney Pilgrims had been booked to play. However, as a packed hall buzzed with anticipation, the news came through that the band was stranded on a train outside London. Despite initial disappointment, people made the best of the evening with an impromptu Republican karaoke!

September 2: London Saoirse Conference. The basis for the conference was the recognition that although much progress had been made over the preceding six months, the strategy had only been intended for that limited period and now needed expanding. We were also conscious of the fact that while Saoirse's activities had at times mobilised relatively large numbers of people, not all of the sponsoring organisations were pulling their weight. It was still a small core of activists taking responsibility for the organising of events.

Despite this being the third major event in three days, and perhaps in that context being over-ambitious, all who took part agreed that it was extremely useful. The workshops that took in Future Activities, Lobbying and The Irish Community proved fruitful in providing a large number of ideas and perspectives to take the campaign forward in the coming months, as well as gaining a number of willing new recruits.

The Saoirse Campaign, although very much in its infancy and only just beginning to realise its true potential has been remarkably successful and has provided us with a glimpse of what might yet be achievable on the 'Irish Question' in Britain.

The events over the 'Ceasefire' weekend saw a large number of London's Irish come out in open support for the Liberation movement, in what must be seen (while firmly

keeping both feet on the ground) as a significant breakthrough.

Obviously the IRA ceasefire which allowed them the moral high ground and effectively drew the teeth of the PTA, along with the respectability given by the 'broad Nationalist consensus' have had a large effect psychologically on the Irish community. And, as the so-called 'community leaders' and the conservative consensus that they represent is challenged, then so this confidence will grow.

However, the Saoirse campaign must also take credit for the way it has injected a dynamic into campaigning around Ireland with an energy and imagination not seen in this country for too long to remember.

These new opportunities though do not last forever and must be grasped while they exist, we all have a responsibility to ensure that they are not squandered. Old habits and working practices, tried, tested and failed must be ditched; old squabbles and sectarian battles cast aside.

The Saoirse campaign, of which we are all justifiably proud, has been built from nothing. We all have a duty to the POWs, to their families, and the wider struggle to ensure that it continues to consolidate and expand; as a failure to do so might prove how easily it could return to nothing.

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■ A number of new Saoirse branches were recently set up in the North West of England. Not all have followed London's pluralistic lead.

In Bolton, the public launch meeting was organised by the Phoenix Support Group (Bolton) whose previous antics have alienated virtually every other organisation involved in Irish work in the area. This group itself is notoriously intolerant of other organisations, and they typically chose to organise the meeting in a manner which effectively discouraged the involvement of others!

If that wasn't bad enough, they were apparently warned in advance that a number of fascists and loyalists intending on turning up at the meeting, but chose not to arrange any security or inform organisations like Red Action or AFA who could have prevented any attempted disruption.

In the event, the fascists and loyalists didn't actually cause any physical disruption - they didn't need to. Their mere presence allowed them to set the agenda, and instead of discussion aimed at securing the transfer and release of Republican prisoners, the meeting centred on the issues of Loyalist prisoners, Lee Clegg, etc.

Afterwards, the fascists threatened individuals and told them that they knew their addresses. Bolton Saoirse have not organised any public events since. Anyone listening carefully might have heard the sounds of chickens coming home to roost.

Victory to the Blanketmen!

Almost 19 years after Kieran Nugent began the blanket protest in the H-Blocks in 1976 for political status for Irish POWs, Feilim OhAdhmaill, Michael O'Brien and Patrick Kelly began a blanket protest in Whitmoor prison on July 12 to demand their rights as PoW.

On their arrival at Whitmoor from Full Sutton prison, the three men were ordered to wear a prison uniform and told that if they did not undertake prison work they would not be transferred to a jail in Ireland (the transfer had been agreed three weeks previous).

For refusing to conform Feilim, Michael and Patrick were sent to the punishment block. They were joined on the blanket protest by PoW Liam Heffernan and Martin McMonagle. The PoW were denied access to writing paper and stamps, telephone cards and daily newspapers. They were restricted to 'closed' visits only - visits held with a thick perspex screen between the prisoner and the visitor and a prison officer listening to and noting conversations. The prisoners refused to accept visits

under these conditions as they are extremely stressful for their families. These conditions meant that the PoW were held in isolation, denied any contact whatsoever with their families and friends.

During this protest, Patrick Kelly was suffering from a recurrence of skin cancer. Despite the seriousness of his condition he was refused adequate medical treatment. A prison doctor estimated that he had between three and eighteen months to live if he did not receive immediate treatment.

It was only after the public intervention of Dublin foreign minister Dick Spring that the demand for Patrick Kelly to be moved to hospital was acceded to by the Home Office.

Patrick was moved to Peterborough Hospital on 9 August. While there, he was chained to his bed and to prison officers. At all times he was in the presence of four prison officers and four police officers, some armed. Following the completion of his treatment, Patrick was moved back to Whitmoor jail.

Feilim OhAdhmaill, Liam Heffernan and Martin McMonagle were trans-

ferred to Maghaberry prison in Ireland within a few weeks of starting their protest. However, Patrick Kelly and Michael O'Brien remain as hostages of the British government's policy on Ireland.



Saoirse members as screws chained to a 'blanketman' in a wheelchair, symbolising the fate of Pat Kelly

Edinburgh: The Usual Suspects

Anti-Fascist Action members from Scotland and the north-east of England were out in force in Edinburgh on Saturday, 3rd June 1995, to oppose the planned loyalist/fascist counter demonstration to the James Connolly Commemoration. AFA squads patrolled the area around the marches rallying point where opponents of the march had gathered last year.

Acting on information received, AFA members arrived early, aiming to take over a proposed fascist meeting point in the Grassmarket. It seemed clear from the number of police vans and patrolling officers that the 'forces of law and order' were also aware of the meeting point. It was decided that we should split into squads and search for the fascists new meeting point.

After splitting up, the first encounter with the opposition was almost immediate. Six loyalists from the West coast, obviously confused about the police presence at the meeting point, wandered into an AFA squad and were immediately challenged to a robust

plain clothed police there to facilitate the fascist counter demonstration and did these facilities extend to actually physically intervening against the anti-fascists in Edinburgh that day? It would seem so.

Another disturbing aspect of the police operation was the surveillance of those members of the Hibs casuals who have traditionally mobilised on the day against the fascists. Some Hibs boys were surrounded as they left a flat early that morning with the intention of teaming up with AFA. Others were hounded throughout the day and their activities were effectively neutralised as a result. The fascists and loyalists on the other hand were able to mount an attack upon the Bridgeton Republican Flute Band at the back of the march despite the fact that there was a wall of uniformed police around the 500 who marched. As far as we know, no loyalists or fascists were charged after this incident, but one marcher who tried to defend the flute band was. It is obvious which side the forces of law and order are on. Indeed, on past evidence of the JCS march and



Loyalist/Fascist Protesters, Edinburgh, 1994

debate which resulted in a couple of them being splattered and the rest taking flight. That was at 9am and the rest of the day looked promising. Some AFA members decided to hole up in a pub and let the fascists wander into our roving groups.

Scouts were sent out to track the opposition but for the next couple of hours there was no sign of them. At around 11.30am, we decided that all the AFA squads would hit the streets and head towards the points on the march route where we felt sure that the fascists and loyalists would attempt to disrupt it. One of these groups encountered another half-dozen fascists on their way towards the Greyfriars Bobby Monument - where they 'siege-heiled' last October's march.

Another AFA contingent heading towards the same area but from another direction were attacked by at least a dozen casually dressed young men - some of them sporting skinheads - as they made their way to the march. By the casual nature of their dress and their aggressive attitude it was assumed that they must be fascists. The anti-fascists, therefore, defended themselves against the attack. It was only when the tables were turned on the attackers that they apparently decided to 'break cover' and identify themselves as police officers. According to the press reports, four police officers were hospitalised as a result of this incident.

In the ensuing confusion, ten anti-fascists were arrested and detained for the rest of the weekend at St Leonard's police station. The ten have been charged under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and the charges include 'Breaching the Peace', 'Resisting Arrest', 'Police Assault', and 'Assault with a bottle'. Three defendants have five charges (two police assaults), three are charged only with 'Breach of the Peace', whilst the rest are charged with the combination of 'Breach', 'Police Assault', and 'Resisting Arrest'. One of the defendants has been advised by his solicitor that, if found guilty, he could face a prison sentence of up to three years.

Shortly after these arrests, an AFA scout watched helplessly as a large group of fascists and loyalists beat the shit out of two young lads who were wearing Celtic tops. No police in sight for that one - surprise, surprise! Later, however, the leaders of this group walked into another AFA unit and received a severe beating.

The police operation which led to the arrest of the AFA members is seriously suspect. Just what were the officers in the area between the 'Doctors' pub and Greyfriars monument up to? Were the

events, the police have never been neutral. Instead they have taken a pro-active role, harassing individual organisers and those publicans who are still prepared to provide them with venues for meetings.

Despite this, the JCS have, for the last two years, relied upon the police to effectively steward their opponents, issuing leaflets to the marchers advising them not to be provoked by any counter demonstration. This year they even went as far as issuing an appeal to the loyalists to embrace the peace process by calling a 'truce' over the JCS march in Edinburgh. The events previously described in this article are testament to the value of such appeals and, despite the Connolly march's tenuous legal status, the police and fascists have been lobbying hard for an end to 'all sectarian marches' in Edinburgh. The 'sectarian marches' that they have in mind are obviously the Connolly Commemoration and the Independent Orange Order March which itself has been under pressure from anti-fascist opponents in recent years. By appealing to the loyalists for a 'ceasefire' the JCS have inadvertently provided the police and local council with ammunition to be used against them when they next apply for a march because such an appeal for a truce with fascists like the UVF has meant that the JCS has been prepared to equate Republicanism with the far-right politics of such scum. It is likely that, in the near future, the march will once again be criminalised and the JCS will be forced once more towards a more militant approach. The real test for the JCS will be whether they are ever again able to mobilise the militants who put their march back on the road two years ago and who have been sidelined since.

Similarly, the attempts to criminalise AFA are nothing new. AFA members have served lengthy prison sentences for their activities. In London, a leading AFA militant was put on trial on trumped up charges of 'conspiracy'. In the Midlands, AFA members have been on the receiving end of police baton charges, and in Manchester, AFA activists have had their homes raided. It appears that the police in Scotland are now catching up with their English counterparts and turned their attention to stitching up anti-fascists.

Defence campaign

Donations to:
Edinburgh AFA, PO Box 421,
Edinburgh, EH11 1OD

True Lies

Dear Red Action,
True Lies, RA issue 71 certainly confirmed some doubts I share with you concerning Searchlight's true role. In the August 1993 edition I was gratuitously attacked by Ray Hill in his column. I don't know Ray Hill, never met him, and as far as I know he has never met me. He clearly knows very little about me in that he called me 'Pat' rather than my correct name Pete. He alleged that I was "now serving a very long sentence" when in fact I had been released from prison for two months, and I remain released on parole. I have been a socialist, anti-fascist and anti-racist for the whole of my life - I am now 69 years of age - and have bought and read Searchlight since it first appeared. I have always considered it to be in the vanguard of anti-fascism. Unlike Ray Hill, I have never been attracted to any form of fascism and cannot understand him lecturing me and calling me "sinister". If Mr Hill wants to call me a terrorist because of the role I played in the anti-imperialist and national freedom struggle relating to Ireland, with particular reference to the SAS officer who was organising the 'shoot-to-kill' policy there - that is his affair. I stand on my whole life's record. I wrote to Searchlight in September 1993 demanding an apology and never received a reply, not even an acknowledgement. I now reckon that the article may well have been inspired by MI5 and that Ray Hill/Gerry Gable are willing stooges for MI5.

All the best
PJ, Bristol.



Ugly Mugs!

Dear Red Action,
This year's visit to Belfast was going so smoothly until the Scottish Red Action contingent found themselves among the Troops Out Movement (TOM) delegation from England. We had arranged with the POW Department that we would have a meeting with one of their organisers to discuss the prisoners' plight and that this meeting would be geared particularly towards those of our members who were in Belfast for the first time. Unfortunately, our speaker warned us that he may not make it to the meeting or that he might be a bit late and that there would be some alternative arrangements for us. The alternative was to go to Conway Mill at 10am the following morning where we would be allowed to participate in TOM's prisoners/Saorse workshop. So, dutifully, a dozen RA members from Scotland turned up on time next morning.

The first that we knew there was something wrong was when we were asked at the tea counter whether we were part of the "official" delegation and if not we would have to pay for tea and coffee! Something that we had always intended - a huge 10p a cup! Then a couple of our lads were approached by two TOM members and asked who they were, what they were doing there and why. When they replied that they had been invited by one of the speakers, they were informed that it was a private meeting for members of TOM delegation only and that they should leave. Naturally, they ignored this demand and joined the rest of us at the meeting.

As the meeting started, these two creatures then came into the meeting room, sat across from the RA organiser and began miming. "Will you please leave - NOW!" To which he replied - in mime of course - "What? Sorry, I don't know what you are saying!"

After a couple of minutes of this pantomime, we decided that we'd had enough and left before the two women who were intent upon causing trouble started any further 'performances'. As we left, a friend of ours from Scotland who was on the TOM delegation, complained about us being asked to leave and informed them that we were mainly unemployed guys who had made their own way over, want to do a bit of work and have £500 for the prisoners with them.

This made little impression on the prima donnas who had thrown the tantrum but our Sinn Fein hosts seemed pretty embarrassed and left the meeting to come outside to talk to us, apologising for the attitudes of those inside the meeting. Their blushes were spared when in walked our original speaker who duly convened our meeting elsewhere in the building. He spent a couple of hours talking with us in what was a very constructive and informative meeting. We even got a complimentary tray of tea as well. All's well that ends well, I suppose, but no thanks to TOM. In fact, the lowlifes that started the incident couldn't even acknowledge the fact that they had made a blunder and I'm pretty sure that they felt that they had achieved some sort of sectarian victory, judging by the smug looks on their ugly mugs. S O'N, Glasgow.

off the streets (in 1993 a 3000 strong anti-Le Pen demo was attacked by 50 armed FN supporters. There were a number of serious injuries. One demonstrator was shot and the anti Le Pen campaign was ignominiously abandoned) they have theorised the fascists out of existence.

The French rationale comes down to this. Until one calls for the crushing of all vestiges of democracy and the extermination of the Jews, a fascist it is agreed is only a fascist if - he says he's one.

Or as the Italian author Umberto Eco puts it: "...fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes. It would be so much easy for us if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying: 'I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Blackshirts to parade again in Italian squares.'" In the absence of such a declaration the existing agreement serves as a stand in to avoid confusion the possibility of libel etc.

On the other hand it doesn't necessarily mean you'd want your sister to marry one either. The following guidelines on things to watch out for, in no particular order are: subscriber to Holocaust Hoax; Skrewdriver tattoos; C18 membership card; autographed photos of Leon Degrelle; Spearhead binder; former member of right wing death squad; (but - not if he says he's a socialist).

In May of this year Militant Labour held a meeting in the

north of Ireland entitled: Is There a Future for Socialism. The principle speaker was Billy Hutchinson. Mr Hutchinson is a member of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). PUP is the political wing of the UVF. According to some critics: 'The UVF has an horrific history of sectarian gangsterism. This stretches from the Malvern Street murders through to the Shankill Butchers to last September's attempt at mass murder in Dublin's Connolly St station. Not only are the UVF sectarian killers, even within the ranks of Loyalists they have been the most fanatically right wing. They have the most extensive contact with British and European fascism'.

Until one calls for the immediate crushing of all vestiges of democracy and the extermination of the Jews, a socialist, it is agreed, is a socialist as long as he says he is one

In addition there is a belief among both loyalists and Republicans that UVF/PUP is more or less entirely a state asset. Billy of course would not agree. Billy insists he is a socialist and Militant employing the French rationale believe him. "Militant Labour has no problem whatsoever in asking people, and indeed parties, from very different backgrounds, who claim the mantle of socialism onto our platforms."

Ends and Means

Dear RA,
Red Action is still about the only Left paper worth buying, let alone reading. However, here's some comments on your 'We Are Red Action' section on the back page. According to RA: "Anarchism, which claims to be a libertarian alternative to Leninism, could never work".

But according to Marx: "What all socialists understand by anarchism is this: as soon as the goal of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, shall have been reached, the power of the state...will disappear and government functions will be transferred into simple administrative functions".

The original split between Marxists and Anarchists wasn't over the goal to fight for - a classless stateless society ('anarchy') - but the means, ie how socialists (Marxist or Anarchist) should organise, and the strategy and tactics to use in the here and now.

According to RA: "Anarchism means the principled opposition to the exercise of any authority. Accordingly, even the most perfect democracy would be regarded by anarchism as authoritarian as it means the imposition of a social decision by a majority on a minority".

However: "Anarcho-syndicalism and organised anarchism operates on majority decisions".

"We reject individual authoritarianism, but accept and respect collective and majority mandates. Without this acceptance there is no organisation". From the Statutes of the CNT

Anarchists are against minority rule and for direct democracy. While the majority is not always right - and minorities shouldn't be simply steamrollered - total consensus over everything is impossible. Anarchists have long recognised this and have incorporated voting (along with recallable delegates and federal organisation) into Anarchism since day one.

The only way to get round this fact is to claim that the Anarchist movement has never 'really' been anarchist in practice - or that Anarchists never vote to go on strike...

P, Liverpool.

REPLY

You introduce two arguments both based on misconceptions. When we speak of the 'rejection by anarchism of even the most perfect democracy' it is in reference to how anarchists would see society operating after a revolution not the organisational methods adopted by them prior to it. The other more

fundamental issue raised is the split in the International. You maintain that "the split wasn't over the goal to fight for but the means." This is not true.

The fight was over ends and means. The quote you refer to from Marx was written not by way of approval but in an effort to keep the door of the International open to anarchism as a creed. Marx did not therefore add his disagreements with the doctrines of anarchism; nor did he counterpose his own view to the anarchist view of the abolition of the state.

This approach - keeping the International open to ideological anarchists was in contrast to the bitter opposition to Bakunin's tactics within it. In a pamphlet entitled *The Alliance of Social Democracy and the International Workingmen's Association* produced by the International in 1872 which set out to expose the rule and ruin nature of the Bakunist faction the introduction read: "Here we have a society [Bakunin's Alliance] which under the mask of the most extreme anarchism, directs its blows not against the existing governments but against the revolutionaries who refuse to accept its dogma and leadership...It brazenly substitutes its sectarian program and narrow ideas for the broad program and great aspirations of our Association..."

the passage went on with specific reference to the Bakunist form of sectism: "...it organises within the public sections of the International its own little secret sections which obey the same instructions and in a good many instances succeed in gaining control of the public section by prearranged action...it resorts to any means, any disloyalty to achieve its ends: lies, slander, intimidation, the stab in the back - it finds them all suitable."

It was the organisation smashing principles of Bakunin not its anti-state (anarchist) views, which made this movement incompatible with the effective existence of the International. 'Bakunin's system was to reserve his demands for the imposition of anarchic disorganising principles strictly to his opponents, while at the same time seeking to build his own secret faction under his own hierarchical and authoritarian controls. The principles of Freedom and anarchy in organisation were designed to disorganise the opposition not his own merry band of agents. It was only in the last stage of the fight that Bakunin's faction came out openly with the demand for the abolition of the General Council, whose very existence was the authority in which it inveighed.

In addition to the means there was a fundamental difference as to the ends. In 1872 Engels wrote to a

colleague: "Bakunin has a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and communism...while the great mass of the [socialist] workers hold our view that state power is nothing more than the organisation which the ruling classes - have provided for themselves in order to protect social privileges, Bakunin maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital only by the grace of the state...the difference is an essential one." Bakunin's theory of the state was a very simple one: the state, politics in general, was the devil that engendered all social ills. For Marx however the abolition of the state was an outcome of the development of socialist society, some sufficient time after a social revolution, but - "The Anarchists reverse the matter. They say that the Proletarian revolution has to begin by abolishing the political organisation of the state."

Where this approach was attempted in practice such as in the revolutionary turmoil in Spain in 1873 as Engels recounts there was disaster. The Bakunists had come to power here and there in peasant districts. But since the Bakunist prescription "decentralisation" proscribed any centralised leadership of the revolutionary forces of the various towns, each town in the insurrection was defeated one by one by the counter revolution...picked off separately. Engels records: "As soon as they were faced with a serious revolutionary situation, the Bakunists had to throw the whole of the old program overboard. First they sacrificed their doctrine of absolute abstention from political and especially electoral politics...till they were sitting in the municipal juntas almost everywhere as an impotent minority out-voted and politically exploited by the bourgeois." (This was a fore runner to the events in Spain in 1936)

Engels listed one after another the other abandoned tenets of anarchism until: "nothing remains of the so called principles of anarchy, free federation of independent groups etc but the boundless and senseless fragmentation of the revolutionary resources, which enabled the government to conquer one city after another with a handful of soldiers practically unresisted" His final comment was all inclusive: "In short, the Bakunists in Spain have given us an unparalleled example of how a revolution should not be made." Regardless of whether principles are adhered to or not, disaster follows. Whether they are implemented or discarded the final landing point is diametrically opposite from the starting point. That is anarchism's historical record. It is not Red Action but history that demonstrates that anarchism doesn't work.

Billy's Boys

Regular readers of Red Action will no doubt be familiar with the term 'no platform for fascists'. Adhering to the principle requires that you do not provide fascists with a political platform. It also means that others are not allowed to do so either. Though not a libertarian concept, few on the Left argue with the principle. It seems straight forward enough. Where the problems begin is in defining precisely who is fascist. Particularly as those so labelled are apt to deny it. For perfectly sound reasons the BNP for instance prefer the term 'nationalist'.

In France the far-right have been a major presence since the mid '80's. The combined vote for the 'fascists' in May was about 20%. Undaunted, the French Left still cherish the principle of 'no platform'. They just don't bother to implement it. The reason forwarded is that the FN etc are not 'real' fascists. And as they are not 'fash' it would be positively unethical to attempt to deny (even if this were now possible) freedom of speech. Surrounded by an unpalatable reality the French Left have sought sanctuary in fantasy. Rather than risk the indignity of being beaten

unwillingness to admit and learn from failure. And marked by an unflinching resistance to come to terms with the reality that they as socialists are the living representatives of just another discredited 'ism' discredited by the 20th century. Discredited not by the indelible stain left by Stalin or the Holocaust, but by a century of fudge, duplicity, cowardice opportunism and betrayal. Is this the 'mantle' Militant want to wrap themselves and PUP in? If so they are welcome to it, and to each other. The rest of us will have to start afresh. Militant ask 'Is there a future for socialism?' Not if the 'socialists' don't know what it means - not if the 'socialists' have anything to do with it.

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Billy Hutchinson - PUP/UVF, Socialist and Militant ally.

Beyond the Pale

Red Action · PO Box 3355, Dublin 7



Winning the Peace

Throughout the past 12 months of the Peace Process the British government has been exposed as having no policy to achieve peace and justice in Ireland. The aim of the British Administration is to create the illusion that they have the upper hand over the IRA, Sinn Féin and Irish nationalist opinion in general. The intransigence of the British government has been the one enduring and constant impediment to any advancement of the peace process. The inflexible role of John Major - seen as one of the weakest Prime ministers this century - is explained in the media as being dictated by internal divisions in the Tory party and the importance of maintaining the support of Unionist MPs to ensure the survival of a government with a 9 vote majority in the Commons. However this is only one aspect of the agenda of the Tories. The political motivation behind the prevarication of Major and Mayhew on the issue of all party talks, as in their previous (failed) demands for a 'permanent' IRA ceasefire, is an attempt to put as much time and rhetoric as possible between the IRA's cessation and the public realisation that it was the armed action of the IRA which first forced the British into the secret talks with Sinn Féin in 1993.

By adopting a hard line stance on the less contentious issues, the British are hoping to create an illusion of strength that belies the reality of the political position they have been forced into. An example of this was their refusal to move on the issue of Republican prisoners. When Republicans in Whitehorn began the dirty protest Major attempted to echo the stance of Thatcher during the hunger strikes when she claimed that 'Britain has no Political prisoners'. The petty refusal to allow open diplomatic visits between the POWs and Irish politicians was an attempt to reinforce the 'no political prisoners' line. This statement merely presented the British stance as unreasonable and triumphalist, which is exactly the impression Major wished to convey. By blindly repeating a formula which he believed had been successful previously Major managed not to upset back bench Tories and Unionists but within days he had returned three Republican POWs to the Six Counties. However it is important that Republicans do not become complacent on the prisoners issue, despite the early releases of Republicans in the 26 counties. While repatriation is an important issue for families of prisoners and for the movement as a whole it must be only a step on the road to full release of POWs as soon as possible. The debate about the restoration of remission, from 33% up to 50%, is a diversion from the clear demand of immediate release. As former POW Ray Mc Cartney pointed out at the last Saoirse Conference in Dublin "50% of 20 years is still too long to serve for POWs."

After the Ormeau Road RUC riot, when plastic bullets and violent assaults were used against nationalists engaging in peaceful protest against a sectarian march, the RUC claimed that an investigation would be carried out into the incident. The provocative behaviour of loyalists and the savage police attack on nationalists, as well as the decision to allow the Apprentice Boys to march on the walls of Derry led to a heightening of the tension by loyalists during the 'marching season'. This new crisis in the peace process, directly provoked by the Loyalists and the RUC, served the interests of the British by allowing them to attack Adams when he made the self evident comment that 'the IRA had not gone away'. The media orchestrated furore about Adam's comment overshadowed the later announcement by the Royal Black Institution, an orange faction, that it had decided against holding two more marches on the Ormeau Road. A relevant question would be not who is controlling the nationalist protests but rather who is pulling the strings of the loyalist marchers? The fact that the RUC will protect loyalists and attack nationalists being obvious, it would appear that the decision of the Black Institution may be directed by Britain to quell the rising anger in nationalist areas.

The British demand for IRA decommissioning, never mentioned as a precondition for talks in the run up to the ceasefire, emerged throughout the summer as their excuse for not entering negotiations. This fact was pointed out by Gene Kerrigan in the right wing 'Sunday Independent'.

"The position of the British government is that any dialogue could only follow a halt to violent activity. It is understood that in the first instance this would have to be unannounced. If violence had genuinely been brought to an end, whether or not that fact had been announced, then progressive dialogue could take place"

This British document, from March 1993, clearly uses the phrase 'end to violent activity' as the precondition for the entry into negotiations, not the surrender of IRA arms.

By now adopting a stance demanding decommissioning Britain is hoping to win the peace by splitting the nationalist consensus. Britain hopes, through continually demanding an IRA surrender - which is what 'decommissioning' actually means - that some elements of nationalism, possibly the SDLP, Dublin or even a section of Sinn Féin, will also urge the IRA to give up their arms in return for all party talks. Such a development would allow Britain to claim victory over the 'terrorists' and sit down for inconclusive talks with a toothless Republican movement. However all the Irish parties, with differing motivations, realise the impossibility of forcing the IRA to hand over weapons. Adams has made it clear that he does not

have the power to deliver up IRA arms and the British are aware that this is the case. Thus it can be seen that the British precondition is based on an impossible scenario and is merely a further method of protracting the period of time

UDP Executive member David Adams said that:

"It is unrealistic to say the least, given the nature, history and reasons for our conflict to demand decommissioning to be undertaken by any side in isolation, as a precondition for entry



"And all the time I'm thinking of my little Armalite?"
Raymond McCartney, former O/C Long Kesh, contemplating the finer points of the unarmed strategy.

between the cessation and negotiations. This has nothing to do with what was previously presented as a period of 'decontamination' for Sinn Féin, the revelation that British representatives had been in secret discussions with Republicans for two years, while the war was going on, put paid to the notion of a 'quarantine' period.

Major's attempt at talking tough before coming to compromise agreement is a classic negotiating ploy. However the reality is that it is Britain which is making all the 'concessions', but they are only concessions to the extent that the obstacle has been created by the British in the first place. If Major had genuinely wished to resolve the crisis brought about by the release of the Para murderer Lee Clegg he could have announced repatriation, increased remission, or at a minimum improved prison conditions after his victory in the Tory election. The failure of the Tories to take any of these easy steps to resolve the deadlock exposes their strategy as one of trying to force Sinn Féin into a position where it will lose international support, while Britain simultaneously attempts to hold the support of unionists and ignores the opinions of the Irish government. Major is walking a very precarious tightrope. An indication of this was Major's adviser Andrew Hunter claiming that no Unionist party would agree to all party talks until decommissioning of republican weapons was under way. However the position of the UDP and the PUP at this time was the exact opposite, the PUP was stressing the release of loyalist prisoners while the

anything to avoid more bombs in London, and at the behest of leading financial figures he has decided that surrender is the only policy'.

The reactionary and stagnant ideology of loyalism has been eclipsed by the initiative of Republicans, particularly by the pace of events in the initial weeks after the IRA cessation. The splits and alliances within the fragmenting edifice of Loyalism point to a realisation, by some elements at least, that the traditional twin poles of loyalism, intransigent political Unionism and 'unofficial' sectarian murder are now completely outmoded as any form of strategy for the maintenance of loyalist supremacy. While Trimble and Paisley bleat loudly that they will not enter All Party talks while the IRA still retains its arms the reality is that the Unionists will be forced to jump on board for fear of even further 'betrayal' by a British government that they do not trust.

The emergence of the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party, representing the sectarian murderers of the UDA and the UVF, was an indication of the inevitable splintering of what was previously seen as the monolith of loyalism. Hailed as proto-socialists by some elements of the media and the soft left there is little evidence that this is actually the case. Considering their past involvement in murdering people solely because they were Catholics, and their current support for triumphalist orange marches through nationalist areas, these parties could hardly be classified as socialist. The UDP political outlook as described by McMichael is that of the conventional centre right. The formation of a new party advocating Ulster Independence is an indication that some elements of unionism now recognise that the Union is dead. Several speakers at the initial meeting openly attacked Mc Michael and Ervine of the UDP, describing them as 'proven fools'.

On the military side of loyalism internal disagreements within the grandiosely titled Combined Loyalist Military Command, principally about the distribution of the proceeds of drugs deals and gangsterism, have led to a split. A further development has been the formation of a new group calling itself the Protestant Defence Force. This group has been linked to the arrest of PUP representative Lindsay Robb and others in Liverpool and Scotland while they were attempting to procure arms with drug money. This group has the support of Billy Wright, the loyalist killer known as 'King Rat'.

In the early stages of the Peace Process, in the weeks immediately after the IRA cessation, the British Government was revealed as being seriously out of touch with what was happening. Weeks were spent in fruitless semantic argument about the meaning of 'permanent', 'complete', 'cessation', etc. Sinn Féin, in contrast, immediately embarked on a well organised public relations exercise which ended with Michael Mates and

Ken Maginnis scurrying to America in a desperate attempt to win back some of the ground from Sinn Féin. The alliance between Sinn Féin and the Irish government survived the possible disruption of a change of government in the 26 counties.

Sinn Féin now has its much desired 'Nationalist Alliance' between themselves, the Irish Government, the SDLP and sections of wealthy Irish America. The success of this strategy can be seen by John Hume, the elder statesman of Northern politics, and Reynolds, the former Taoiseach, being wheeled out to back up Sinn Féin whenever the British start stalling. We have also heard John Bruton, leader of the Free State government and the anti-Republican Fine Gael party, calling for the release of Republican prisoners. The flip side of this situation is that Sinn Féin have no alternative strategy should this 'Nationalist Alliance' fall apart. Instead of a dual approach involving this alliance and also mobilising people on the streets, Sinn Féin seem to be of the opinion that peoples' anger can be turned on and off like a tap whenever it is politically expedient. The Nationalist community's lack of response in Derry to the Apprentice Boys march in August should have made Sinn Féin think again. Even the necessity of having to orchestrate the rioting after the Clegg verdict should have been an indication that people aren't willing to be used merely as political footsoldiers.

The situation is even worse in the 26 counties. More time is spent on the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which is now recognised as a futile talking shop, than on trying to mobilise people around the prisoners issue. The issue of political prisoners has always been a contentious one in Ireland and with the deterioration of conditions for political prisoners in British jails the potential exists for a successful campaign, even on the emotive aspect alone. The fact that there are Republican prisoners on dirty protest for the first time since the '70s and Sinn Féin has adopted a low key approach, would indicate that they place more reliance on working through government channels than on 'people power'. This strategy has led to disquiet within the Republican community and among some Republican activists. After all the aim of the Republican movement is British withdrawal, a demand that has been conspicuously absent from recent pronouncements of the leadership.

From the perspective of the British establishment it is essential for the future, both politically and economically, of the 'United Kingdom', that the public does not become aware that the British army failed to defeat a tiny number of IRA volunteers. Having failed abysmally over 25 years in their attempts to win the war, Britain is now attempting to 'win the peace'.

Taking Up Battlefield Positions

My enemy's friend is also my enemy

"The Labour Party is now the party of law and order in Britain...The Labour Party is now the party of modern business and industry in Britain...For the first time...the Labour Party has set down its commitment to a market economy, to living within the rigours of competition, and to nurture enterprise...now with our clear statement of aims, no-one can ever again question our commitment to a healthy and successful private sector, or to competition and enterprise."

Gordon Brown, Shadow Chancellor, Evening Standard, 28 April 1995.

Across Europe, the member states of the European Union have been hit by recession. In Germany, real unemployment stands at 6 million - higher than at any time since the 1940's. In France, unemployment has hit 12% and kept on rising. Italy has unemployment at 11%. Britain's unemployment rate has hovered around 3.5 million since 1979, despite consistent doctoring of unemployment figures.

The Thatcherite strategies adopted by the ruling class across Europe since the late '70's (and administered by both 'socialist' and conservative governments) were designed to cut labour costs by smashing workplace organisations and using unemployment as a drag anchor on wages. Lower labour costs haven't been enough to bail out European capital. The existence, in the majority of European countries, of a system of state welfare is a massive drain on the finances of EU states.

In Germany, the dole has been cut from 58% to 55% of gross pay, and will stop completely after 4 years. Social spending will be cut by DM45 billion by 1996.

The post-1945 principle of universal welfare was established as a means of establishing social order in the guise of social consensus. Capitalism in boom could afford unemployment benefits and health care as a means to a healthy, well-educated workforce. Now, with social spending in Germany at DM1001 billion (£397 billion) in 1992, and £50 billion in the UK, it is a luxury that the ruling class can no longer afford. Further, it is a world-wide problem. America's new right-wing figurehead, Newt Gingrich, writing in the Sunday Times on 16 July said, "We must rethink all the things that inhibit our ability to compete: regulation, litigation, taxation, education, welfare, the structure of government bureaucracies. Given the quality of our competition, this is going to mean real work, real change. We must replace the welfare state with an opportunity society".

If the ruling class agenda of the last decade was to bring down wages through unemployment, the agenda for the 90's is to dismantle the welfare state. The only issue in each country will be which party will be best placed to carry the task out.

In the USA the Republicans have begun to set the pace because the fragility of the economy cannot afford Clinton's softly-softly approach. Gingrich's "Contract with America" proposes a mandatory balanced budget by the year 2002, by slicing \$240 billion off \$1.3 trillion budget. To kick off, they're starting with \$40 billion cuts in food, housing and income programmes that serve children, disabled persons and the elderly.

Also on the agenda are plans to make it impossible for young "out of wedlock" mothers to receive any social assistance. In California the state legislature passed Proposition 187, to deny all education, housing and food aid to "illegal" immigrants.

In the UK, business has recognised that John Major's terminal unpopularity makes a Tory government the worst option for an assault on the welfare state. Far more palatable if the Labour Party, which heralded the creation of the welfare state in 1945, were to over-see the attacks. Blair and Brown are up for playing the role; hence the amount of time given over to addressing conferences of the likes of the Spectator and Murdoch's Sunday Times. On 23 April Blair declared, "I believe Mrs Thatcher's emphasis on enterprise was right. Where she went badly wrong was in being indifferent to the consequences of social breakdown...She was a better destroyer than creator".

With a wink, Blair is spelling out that his agenda is the same as Thatcher's, but Labour's historical relationship with the working class puts him in a pole position to carry that out. The Guardian reading intelligentsia which congeals in Labour Party think-tanks like DEMOS has begun to quote favourably the writer Amitai Etzioni, whose notion of "communitarianism" is a veiled attack on welfareism and the "moral decay" of Thatcher's "dependency culture". Labour's widely praised Commission on Social Justice has called for a more "competitive economy", built on the principle that "average money earnings should rise in line with productivity across the whole economy".

In the US anarchist paper, BLAST, a writer offers this picture of the inner-city: "We live in a society rampant with social inequality. Instead of abolishing this inequality the ruling class attempts to manage it. Certain areas of the city are therefore occupied by the police...Publicly subsidized housing projects are fenced in and monitored by off-duty police...the Cabrini Greens housing project in Chicago is equipped with an on-site detention centre, and housing police randomly strip search youth..."

In the UK the Criminal Justice Act has given the police renewed powers to stop and search. "New" Labour failed to oppose the Criminal Justice Act because they know that they will need the powers contained within it. Blair's New Labour intends to attack working class communities as brutally as Thatcher's 1979 government began to attack the trades unions.

We must begin now to organise practical political and physical opposition to the Labour Party's electoral agenda.

With this in mind it's worth noting that, outside the mainstream media, the main proponents of a Labour victory are the orthodox Left. Labour Briefing want us to believe that "the Labour Party remains an essential battleground for socialists...We cannot walk away from the fact that a general election face-off between Labour and the Tories is still, at root, a class confrontation, however much Blair and Major contrive to disguise it". (Labour Briefing, June 1995).

"As long as Labour remains the main party of the working class we have to operate the tactic of 'critical support'...To blow away those illusions we have to put Labour in office and force them to fight" (Workers Power May 1995).

Regardless of how Blair blatantly spells out his plans, the Left just as blatantly refuse to believe him.

Labour Briefing got hot under the collar about "an unprecedented influx of new party members". The Labour Party's only serious recruiting drive has been through the pages of the Guardian and the Independent. It has courted the disenchanted middle class. In their 'International Review', Militant admit as much: "Labour enjoys a 50% to 30% lead over the Tories amongst the so-called A-B groups. This general support is paralleled by a layer of petit-bourgeois joining the party. A high proportion of careerists will have been drawn in, attracted by the lure of office which

would follow on the heels of a Labour victory".

What particularly irks the Left though is that these "careerists" are their natural constituency as well. The Labour Left spent the 80s staffing and supporting 'left' councils like Islington, Lambeth and Liverpool as denied shields against Tory attacks, while colluding with the attacks in practice. Even in 1979, the first thing that Ted Knight's incoming "anti-cuts" Labour group did in Lambeth was agree to a 4.5% across the board spending cut. A decade later, Joan Twelve's administration, backed by Socialist Outlook and Labour Briefing moved from collecting the poll tax "only as a last resort" to voting for the use of bailiffs. Lambeth's "hard left" flew the tricolour from the town hall and shouted "Victory to Iraq!" in the council chamber, while ignoring £50 million of fraud at the expense of Lambeth tenants.

"The Socialist Republic of Islington", meanwhile, has recently been revealed as unable to prevent child abuse by known paedophiles in its homes for fear of breaching its Equal Opportunities policies!

In 1984, the Militant controlled council declared a rate rise of 17% "an overwhelming victory over the Tory government".

The history of left Labour Councils is of middle class activists with no knowledge of or interest in working class needs, indulging in pet projects while riding a gravy train. The Labour left has seen the train on the horizon again.

The Labour left today still recycles old tactics as a solution to new problems. In their *Workers Liberty* journal (June 1995), Socialist Organiser comment favourably on the "Socialist Policies for a Labour Government" campaign, which intends to set "the agenda for the next Labour government by focusing on...the minimum wage, on the right to take solidarity action and on the rebuilding of the welfare state and public services". This is all pretty familiar. Every general election, the Labour left calls a "Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory", rallying a few hundred Trots and 3 or 4 left MPs, to stir up some enthusiasm for a right wing Labour electoral campaign as an "anti-Tory crusade". Workers Power speak frequently of the "real fight - to put Labour into office and force them to meet our immediate needs" (Workers Power, April 1995).

The purpose of all this, we are told, is to expose Labour in office and so break working class illusions of the Labour Party. The Left seems to have a shorter memory than most when it comes to illusions in Labour.

The first majority Labour government was elected in a landslide victory in 1945, with 393 seats (48% of the vote). It was the only Labour government that came into office on the backs of working class illusions. By 1947 the government had introduced an austerity programme, extended rationing to petrol and meat, and extended the miners' working week by two and a half hours. In 1949 they made £250 million spending cuts. In 1951 the Labour budget proposed financing defence expenditure by a £23 million cut in the newly constructed NHS. Meanwhile, the Left's hero Aneurin Bevan had, as Minister of Labour, jailed ten striking gas workers in 1950, and charged 7 dockers with organising an illegal strike in 1951. By October 1951, Labour was out of office.

The Wilson and Callaghan governments distinguished themselves with the introduction of wage freezes and anti-union legislation, as the precursor to Thatcherism. The experience of the Labour-run local authorities - schools without books, rising rents, disrepair

and evictions - has given most people a fair clue as to what they can expect from an incoming Labour government. Ken Coates accurately described realised, Blair and Brown are "bastards and shits who are going to walk past the unemployed".

The Left's shadowing of Labour would be dismal enough if taken at face value, a misguided tactic to try to win a working class audience. The reality is that the Left don't even believe their own propaganda. Socialist Organiser admit that the "Blairite project of modernising British capitalism can only be achieved by destroying what remains of the welfare state and continuing the Tory hammering of the working class and its organisations". In other words, the campaigns for "socialist policies" are meaningless because Blair's agenda is not a reformist one. The days of reformism are over - Labour's agenda is the same as Thatcher's was and Newt Gingrich's is.

The Labour Left, though, because it is not of the working class, can see no solution to the political schizophrenia at the heart of its own ideology. This is because it does not see the working class as a political force in its own right, only as a spectator to the proceedings. Workers Power would, we are told, "if it had the resources and enough backing from the working class - stand against Labour. We would do so to expose the rotten sham of capitalist democracy and mobilise workers for action outside the council chamber". But only... "if it had enough backing from the working class".

What the Labour-supporting radicals want us to believe is that they want to get on with the business, but it is the backwards 'workers' who are holding them back. In reality, the Left peddles a Labourite politic which atomises the working class while castrating it as a political force for itself - one individual, one ballot box, one vote. The working class only ever exists as a political force for itself en masse, on the streets.

In many ways, Militant appear to be the most radical of all the Trot/Labour left. They have stood candidates against the Labour Party and, in effect, now exist outside the Labour party as a separate organisation. Their latest *International Review*, though, betrays all the old crap about Labourism. They tell us that "The British Labour Party from its inception was, to all intents and purposes, a 'trade union party'"

However, with the abandonment of Clause Four, "the Labour leadership is pushing in the direction of creating an openly 'liberal' bourgeois party". Since 1945, Labour in office has consistently attacked working class living standards. At no stage, because of its lip service and nationalisation, did it do so as a bourgeois party!

Militant concede that "most politically advanced workers entertain few illusions as to what a Labour government will mean". Consequently, it proposes as a strategy the building of Militant Labour as a "mass socialist force" reliant upon the following scenario: "...On the basis of big events [unspecified], a radical, socialist mass wave will develop in the unions...if the trade unions conclude that it is necessary to pull out of the Labour Party at a future date in an attempt to transform it, Militant Labour would give it the maximum possible support". Wow! Militant Labour have turned their face organisationally against Labour in the short term so as to reclaim it in the long term.

So, in essence, what does the opposition to Blair's agenda amount to? Just this - "Many workers and young people who are disgusted and outraged by Tory Britain and have no confidence in Tony Blair's New Labour can be won to the socialist alternative..." by the launch of - a new

monthly magazine with the snappy title, 'Socialism Today'. Similarly Labour Briefing see the solution to the political crisis of the L.L.F. as the establishment of - "a magazine of the Labour Left".

The point is that the orthodox Left can only countenance an intellectual opposition to Labour, not a physical, organisational, political opposition.

The Labour-supporting left has one clear agenda, and one set purpose - to confine opposition to Labour to opposition within the Labour Party. In consequence, rather than dispel illusion, they create it. What influence they have is entirely negative. Its just a little easier to force the working class to swallow if the Left can provide cover for the attack.

The Labour left is the constituency of white-collar dissent, the minions of the Labour bureaucracy, the radical force of reformism at a time when capital has abandoned reform, and as such entirely useless except as a means of propagating the notion, as Socialist Organiser have it, that it is possible to campaign for socialist principles for a Labour government, even as it prepares to cut your throat.

Writing in the Independent recently, Andrew Marr warned "Labour cannot, should not, must not break with the millions of lower-paid and unemployed people who have partly looked to the trade union movement for their salvation...if Labour in power fails to offer it leadership and hope then...lower Britain would eventually turn elsewhere, perhaps to a period of militant syndicalism, perhaps to political dissent of a different kind".

The Left then can either be advocates of "political dissent of a different kind" or stand with Blair against the working class. There is no middle ground. Trotskyism has already made its choice. Many are fond of quoting Trotsky's saying, "My enemy's enemy is my friend". We, in turn, must never forget: my enemy's friend is also my enemy.



In 1951 the Labour budget proposed financing defence expenditure by a £23 million cut in the newly constructed NHS.



The Wilson and Callaghan governments distinguished themselves with the introduction of wage freezes and anti-union legislation, as the precursor to Thatcherism.



Unlike Atlee and Wilson, Blair's agenda is not a reformist one - the days of reformism are over

Earlier this year the Labour Party formally renounced its commitment to the working class. Unashamedly, New Labour proclaims itself to be a party of and for the middle classes.

The entire working class is now without even the veneer of political representation. As a consequence, the political vacuum already in existence will be magnified.

Inevitably, the vacuum will be filled. Somebody will address the concerns and aspirations of working people. That someone will either come from the Right or from the Left.

We believe that it is the duty of those who maintain a loyalty to the working class to take the necessary steps now, to ensure that a successful challenge to Labour comes - only from the Left.

It follows that in order to deny the Right a free run it will be necessary to set up a new independent working class organisation.

A number of meetings were convened, in London and around the country, to discuss the possibility of setting up an independent working class association. Representatives of the following organisations attended: Analysis; Anarchist Communist Federation; Anti-Fascist Action; Class War; Communist Action Group; CPGB (Provisional Committee); Open Polemic; Red Action; Revolutionary Communist Group; Revolutionary Democratic Group.

Printed below are edited versions of two of the documents around which discussions revolved. Discussions are continuing...

"The class war is dead... We live in the age of the almost universal middle class - what they want from a political party is prudent compassion. The near unanimous support for cautious altruism is an electoral blessing". "The Labour Party remains Britain's best hope of building a more equal society. Perhaps only slightly more equal..."

Roy Hattersley (27/4/95)

In June 1994, the Guardian reported that, "Labour had recruited only about 6,000 trade unionists from the 4,000,000 political levy payers offered a vote in the leadership poll ... 6,000 will be a disappointment to those who had predicted that the opportunity existed to add as many as 80,000 to the party's 260,000 members," the article concluded.

Since then Labour has reached the 80,000 target - but if they are not trade unionists who are they?

Even within the SWP some already know the answer: "All the indications are that the ... new electoral support, and possible membership, emerges from the thoroughly rattled middle classes, particularly in the South, and not from the working class at all," according to a document in the SWP pre-conference bulletin 1994.

Labour - a middle class party for a middle class people. It is hard to disagree...

Irrespective of the media controversy surrounding the Clause Four debate, the issue itself is still a defining moment for the British left. Will it continue to bemoan the fact that 'socialism has been abandoned' or take advantage of the fact. It's make your mind up time.

The reality of course is it is not socialism that has been abandoned: "Labour cannot desert a position which it never occupied", according to former deputy leader Roy Hattersley. What Labour has ditched is the working class. So for those who believe that the working class is the constituency of the left this surely is an undreamt of opportunity.

But to make the dream come true it is no longer sufficient to break with Labour 'politically' (as many such as the SWP have done) the real job is to break with it organisationally. Nor in doing so is it enough to impact on Labour and the trotskyite left; instead the objective must be to impact directly on the general public. The priority must be to bridge the gap between organised working class militants and the working class as a whole. The question is how to go about it?

It is quite evident that the existing political vacuum, already gargantuan, is expanding. Society is changing dramatically. In many ways conditions for the working class politically are similar, now that the industrial wave is going out, as it was 150 years ago when the industrial wave was coming in. Industrialisation herded people from rural to urban areas where they began to organise themselves around the point of production in trade unions.

Conversely, deindustrialisation is driving working people from the large manufacturing centres back in to their communities. Now, as then, the working class are bereft of a political voice, bereft of political power, bereft of political organisation.

The massive decline in union organisation in the last decade has not been because of derecognition or because workers have rejected trade unionism, but because of a decline in traditional industries and the growth of smaller scale units, unskilled part-time jobs, where industrial relations are not required and where membership in any case would be an irrelevance. That is the future. It follows, therefore, that trade unionism as a political strategy for the working class is as dead as a dodo.

Similarly, the term 'labour movement', sometimes with a capital 'L', fails to distinguish between the Labour Party, the unions, the local councils, the left and, of course, the working class. For the Labour Party entryist or the left wing activist who has weaseled himself a trade union post by doing favours and donkey work, it has the convenience of concealing his divided loyalty to Labour (the party), Labour

(the union) and Labour (the working class). To all it is a reassuring term which sustains the myth of a wider structure in society, a labour movement. Of course there is no such thing as a labour movement.

That is why the left is demoralised - it has no real vision of the future. All it can do is wait around until either a Labour government is elected or until the economic crisis hopefully forces the working class to do something. That is not a strategy for leadership but an opportunistic running after events in which 'politics' means little more than attaching a meaningless radical slogan to whatever turns up.

If the working class is to exert an influence over sections of the middle-class rather than be dragged along by their radicalism, which is always the first to appear in a political crisis, then it must find a form of organisation which allows it to exert leadership.

Like the working class, the political left has itself split into pro and anti-Labour camps. And again, like the working class, only the former are organised. So, the first step towards reaching the unorganised working class must be to organise the unorganised left.

The working class is increasingly alienated from Labour. The strategy of the far-right is entirely reliant on this alienation: 'they really hate Labour.' It isn't the job of working class militants to mend this relationship as Trotskyism believes, on the contrary the task is to accelerate its decline. Make it permanent. Labour arrogance, on the other hand, is based on the belief that there is no possibility of an alternative to it and so the working class, who it believes went out of fashion with flat caps and whippets anyway, will continue to vote for it as 'the lesser evil'. Hattersley again: "the least advantaged - and in many ways the least attractive - members of society...will undoubtedly vote Labour whatever the party does."

One consequence of this analysis is that their left flank is glaringly vulnerable. Organisations like the SWP (who claim 10,000 members) justify their historic failure to attack this flank and their continued support of Labour on the grounds that: a) 'they are too small to stand against them', b) 'it is in any case a movement to the left' and c) they [SWP] are already 'the alternative'. The formation of any organisation to their left - standing against Labour - would instantly expose the inadequacies of both fig leaves. The impact of such a development, not just on the SWP but for trotskyism as a whole, would be both immediate and satisfyingly traumatic.

The point is that while organisations like this cannot attract mass working class audiences, their continued adherence to a defunct organisational and political culture remains a definite obstacle to the working class achieving its political independence.

And clearly what is needed now is working class independence and a new organisation - an independent working class organisation. The setting up of such an organisation is the only practical response to the situation we are faced with ie. the total abandonment, even as a concept, of the working class by Labour.

The setting up of an independent working class organisation is a broad but decisive stroke that would allow militants the advantage for the first time in half a century of attacking directly all their political opponents, Tory/Labour, the conservative left and the far-right from the same platform. Anything less than such a move, given the absence of realistic alternatives, would be pure cowardice. And it is not only possible but neces-

sary, a case of love and need. For without organisation the working class has no voice. Without a voice there can be no resistance. Without resistance the English working class fulfils the role pre-ordained for it by the establishment and becomes, like its American counterparts, politically extinct.

Popular organisations built by the working class can take many forms. It must be clear to all but the most obstinate sectarian that given the size of the vacuum on the left, and the distance between the left and the working class, that the chasm cannot be bridged by any one organisation. Moreover, to set doctrinal purity as the basis for unity is to embrace obscurity and pretend impotence is a virtue. To deliberately shoot yourself in the foot in order to avoid active service in the class war means thereafter being branded either a fool or a malingering. As James Connolly once remarked:

"It is a mistake when trying to convert people, to look for something to differ upon in order to show how smart you are. You should always seek for some point upon which you can agree!"

However, any attempt to create a new mass organisation, built by an alliance of existing left wing groups, and orientating to the left rather than the working class will be bogus. "Our view which we have confirmed by long practice, is that the correct tactics in propaganda are not to entice away a few individuals and local groups here and there from one's opponent, but to work on the great mass, which is not yet taking part in the movement," is Marx's advice.

And not only those 'not yet' involved but more precisely those previously involved but now inactive. It is the tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of class conscious militants who over the last 15 years have been ground down by Labour's phoney war with the Tories and Trotskyism's collaboration with Labour that must form the core constituency.

It is precisely because they have been involved before that makes this strata so potentially invaluable. Not only do they have general political skills and education but they also know what won't work and what they don't want.

They may not know exactly what they

What is needed now is an independent working class organisation. This is the only practical response to the situation we are faced with ie. the total abandonment, even as a concept, of the working class by Labour.

are for, but experience has taught them what to be against. What they might be against at a guess is: 'front organisations'; organisations directed from the top down; hidden agendas; and fantasy programmes for world revolution.

So what is being proposed is not an organisation designed for electoral success but an organisation that is instead structured to dig in - in anticipation of failure. Not designed to work within electoral politics; but would instead be geared to withstand and take advantage of the meaningful collapse of electoral politics.

Already local government revenue is in the main (at the moment 80%) doled out by central Government. Correspondingly, much of its work is carried out by state appointed quangos. This is a trend not likely to be reversed, particularly as local services are themselves being emasculated. If there is no local services ergo no local government.

In fundamental ways the working class



association being proposed would be distinct from anything that exists in Britain now or in the recent past. A working class organisation not only independent of, but hostile to, Labour. That is, in fact, its reason for being. It would seek to absorb and unite groups (without demanding that they abandon their distinct positions or organisations) and individuals on the basis of that platform. So from the outset it follows that it has rejected not only Labour but entryism and the prospect of reform; be that reform of either Labour itself or the economic system.

And it must be a clean break with the past and be seen to be so. It will not orientate towards the trade unions or seek solace from the 'labour movement'. It must be community orientated and, if successful, in time community based. Initially, as the best way of making a public statement and establishing a local mandate it might contest local elections standing candidates or co-opting where appropriate independent working class candidates. Objective circumstances will throw up the campaign issues.

It will be led by the working class but not limited to the working class. Essentially, however, it must be a 'can do' organisation; one that can make things happen or prevent them happening. It's short term plan of campaign would be geared towards achievable goals. Pragmatism rather than idealism would need to be the watchword.

Though its stance would need to be defiant, it would still be a defensive formation. It must start from where the working class is, and where it is in order to change it. It must first and foremost be a real class organisation no matter how backward working class thinking might be from the standpoint of the more 'sophisticated'. Membership must be openly available. Its activists must aim to become the best militants for the limited aims of the movement as is. Opening up a dialogue with local working class communities will in many cases determine the immediate priorities.

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We Have to Start Somewhere

Two separate documents were produced in response to 'document One' (reproduced above). The submission from Communist Action Group entitled 'One Stop Forward', argued that: "Red Action base their vision of the future on the presumption...that the point of production no longer can play the role as terrain for working class organisation as it once did. Though we do not deny the trend we feel the trend is overstated." The point RA is making is that given the changing nature of production, any illusion in trade unionism as the basis for a political strategy for total social change is kaput.

Even were that scenario not the immediate future the case for attempting to organise the working classes on the estates where they live, as well as where they work would remain a powerful one. Particularly, as this is precisely area of work, and indeed one section of the population traditionally shunned by both the parliamentary parties and the Left. A void the far-right is more than happy to occupy. Even without the unemployed millions, who cannot be reached anyplace else, the argument for attempting to remedy this imbalance by organising elementary political resistance within working class communities, now in anticipation of further onslaughts from the right is undeniable. If it was the case that the Left's theoretical preoccupation with the point of production (in practice the orientation was to universities) resulted in an undue influence within industrial unions it could be regarded as some consolation. But we are all aware that for at least a quarter of a century when the Left referred to 'the workplace' it invariably meant a menial civil service occupation (for which the activist was invariably over qualified) rather than ship yard, site, or pit. The consequence is that any organic link the Left might have previously taken for granted has atrophied. There is nothing left to salvage; the relationship will have to be rebuilt brick, by brick. Despite their stated reservations CAG readily acknowledge this reality: "We have to start somewhere."

The principal criticism from the group Analysis, "Hang on a minute, Comrades. Haven't we heard all this before?", is their claim that the entire strategy "is focused on the Labour Party and the world of Labour." They cite as evidence the fact that document 1 refers to the Labour party "31 times" concluding that the preoccupations of RA "are those of Labour internal politics with which it wants to woo Labour's radical elements."

In the class war all politics is about taking up battle field positions. The Left both inside and outside the Labour Party have for a quarter of a century, when given the choice unhesitatingly lined up behind the class enemy in defence of the status quo. So in what sense can they be described as radical? By any definition they are conservative. But it is only by taking on Labour in a battle for working class hearts and minds that this will become fully apparent. So if the proposed strategy when implemented causes confusion or even dissent within 'renegade' ranks then that is to be welcomed - as a by product. The conservative Left are collaborators and should be treated as such. But as we all know name calling means nothing until there is active resistance. And traditionally the 'resistance' does not court collaborators, it tars and feathers them. Labour is still the political incumbent in working class areas. Before making a move a burglar cases a house. In the same way a mugger first assesses the vulnerability of a prospective victim. RA's preoccupation should be judged entirely in that context. The working class is the only class that has ever had any interest for us.

Moving On

No doubt everyone was fully aware even prior to the July 1 meeting that the obstacles that needed to be hurdled to see the initiative come to fruition would be formidable. A glance at the anti-Labour line up would seem to justify such scepticism. Taken as a whole the assembled groups have nothing in common. Neither principles, histories, profiles nor priorities. Nothing in common except a hostility to Labour. Little enough to go on. So

no possible hope of a merger. Ironically, this will almost certainly prove a strength rather than a weakness. What has forced such disparate elements; ranging from avowed stalinists to anarcho communists together is to attempt a practical response to objective conditions ie the abandonment even as a concept of the working class by Labour. But what precisely is to be done about it? As James Connolly remarked: "It is a mistake when trying to convert people to look for something to differ upon in order to show how smart you are. You should always seek for some point upon which you can agree! Then when that point is established and agreed upon by both, the path to agreement on vital points will be smooth and easy."

Well, following that advice lets look at what we already broadly appear to agree on.

1. The need for a resistance movement.
2. The need for it to be community orientated (rather than toward Left etc)
3. The recognition that it must be able to accommodate working class people.
4. An acceptance that it be wholly democratic built from the bottom up.
5. An acceptance that affiliated groups retain their own distinct identity and organisations.
6. A recognition of the importance of the 'cause' rather than the 'organisation being seen to come first.
7. Understanding the need for working class political hegemony.
8. The necessity of a practical dimension to make things happen.
9. An appreciation of the danger of the prospect of change being offered only from the right.

The points listed above are not being offered as a set of principles. They are in a fact opinions, largely untested, expressed at the July 1 meeting and placed here in no order of importance. Maybe not exactly earth shattering, but not entirely incoherent strategically either. Possibly even a cause for cautious optimism, while accepting at the same time that neither tacit agreement nor hatred of 'the system' are in themselves sufficient reason to force agreement. Quite effortlessly, any number of us can call up a variety of reasons to avoid being part of such an alliance -and- (in our own eyes anyway) retain revolutionary integrity. And, doubtless, all concerned would in line with their own beliefs insist on the value of their respective contribution to the class struggle thus far. But accepting that it is no longer good enough simply to be against evil, can any of us hand on hearts confidently declare, given the balance of forces, that we have, and expect to continue to make a genuine - difference?

As always the task is not just to understand the world but to change it. But the gulf between understanding and changing is at least as formidable as between wanting and being able to. Nevertheless it is that desire that invariably distinguishes revolutionaries from the rest. In 1877, in a letter to Engels, Marx wrote: "Had we from 1864-73 insisted on working together only with those who openly adopted our platform - where would we be today. I think all our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our distinct position and even organisation." The question that needs to be asked of the Left today is: if each of us decides only to work with those who openly adopt our platform, where will any of us be in 2004?

It has to be recognised that from the outset the organisation under discussion cannot be content to restrict itself to a sum of the parts currently involved in discussions. Instead it must aspire to be a pole of attraction to tens of thousands, who long despaired of the Left ever attempting anything worthwhile. This orientation does not mean discounting other working class elements possibly still active, in trade unions etc who remain less than convinced by New Labour but equally, are repulsed by the cloistered approach of those who may politically oppose Clause 4 etc but prefer to face the world in a doctrinaire fashion declaring: "Here is the truth, kneel here!"

Brass Tacks

At the meeting on July 1 the opening remarks from Analysis was that there was 'no basis for unity'. The assumption being that no matter how well meaning, matters of principle would inevitably intrude and the subsequent difficulties would prove insurmountable.

Undoubtedly, if for this initiative to come into being the sponsors first had to disband, the argument would be perfectly valid. But of course the organisation under discussion is not being discussed with these groups in mind. The structure may be designed by them but ultimately it is not for them. Its function is to accommodate the working class as is; not just structurally but politically. It is generally

The alternative is to return to talking about what interests us rather than what interests the working class: in other words 'let things be': let the struggle be extinguished; let the class be made extinct, 'but let our eternal principles remain immaculate'.

accepted that we are not dealing with either a revolutionary situation or indeed a revolutionary working class. So, to begin by, as some have clearly anticipated, unfurling a revolutionary proclamation, would drive any self-respecting elements straight back into limbo or the arms of the opposition.

At the heart of the proposal for a politically independent working class lies the concept of working class self determination. So the question of a revolutionary programme does not arise, as this would mean the collective will of the sponsors being imposed in advance. A complete negation. For around the last 50 years the British Left along with their European counterparts have been with varying degrees of enthusiasm attempting to build a party for the working class based on the appeal of its revolutionary programme. When the project ran into difficulty, simple adjustments would be suggested to the programme, resulting in splits and so on. Such were the theoretical concerns, it was rare that anything practical was done. When occasionally someone suggested evidence of an apparent contradiction [ie that the organisations were not being built by the leadership for the working class but by the membership for the leadership] they were denounced by all sides as heretics, and the 'revolutionaries' dutifully went back to tinkering with the programme. The basic contradiction that generations have ignored is that an authentic revolutionary party cannot be built for the working class. It could be built by them or with them. To attempt to build it for them is to attempt it without them. That in a nutshell is what the Left have been doing since 1945. The

utter futility, and indeed damage caused, is there for all who want to see. Throughout Europe only the right and the far-right are accepted as genuinely radical. The Left are regarded as figures of fun, by rich and poor alike. A spent force. In Britain in particular the evidence of the emergence of a new class; 'nouveau lumpen', should help dispel any complacent notion that time and tide is on our side. Already they 'control' many working class areas. Should this development manifest itself politically it will undoubtedly be, as an ally or a tool of reaction.

In the short term there is only one way to halt the slide. Rather than continue the activity of building the party, be it stalinist, marxist or anarchist based on a 'revolutionary programme' but without the involvement of the working class, we propose instead to invert the process, and build an activist organisation based on the working class but without a revolutionary programme.

The immediate benefit is obvious. If there is no merger and no revolutionary programme there are no grounds for haggling over cherished principles. There is the basic strategy and there are the tactics. If successful the organisation will evolve. And, after a considerable period of common activity, a programme will be hammered out in day to day confrontation with the practical needs of the class who will then in practice be involved in the development of that programme. In 1886 Marx commented: "A million or two working men's votes for a bona fide working men's party is worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinally perfect platform." By today's standards, a hundred thousand working class votes for a bona fide working class organisation would be worth infinitely more than a 1000 for a doctrinally perfect platform.

Undoubtedly there are those who will sneer at any suggestion that is not directly revolutionary but they for most part, as Engels observed "limit themselves to making phrases and doing nothing." In the real world the priority is not how we journey from reform to revolution but how we get from A to B. One hundred years ago Engels endorsed the following guide-lines to govern the conduct of revolutionaries in relation to the class as a whole. As a rule of thumb they are just as valid today.

"Ever since 1848 the tactic that have brought the Socialists the greatest successes were those set forth in the Communist Manifesto: In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they [the communists] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole. The communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims; for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of the movement. They therefore take an active part in every phase of the struggle between the two classes without ever losing sight of the fact that these phases are just so many stages leading to the first great goal: the conquest of political power by the proletariat as a means of reorganising society. Their place is in the ranks of those fighting to achieve immediate results in the interests of the working class." The alternative to that approach is dismiss the advice and pour scorn on the proposals. That way, we can all return to talking about what interests us rather than what interests the working class: in other words 'let things be': let the struggle be extinguished; let the class be made extinct, 'but let our eternal principles remain immaculate'.

Instant Responses

Communist Action Group

To stand aside from the creation of such a new working class organisation... would be nothing short of cowardice and sectarianism.

The central thrust of Red Action's proposals is that the new turn by Labour, which is explicitly turning its back on the working class, demands a radical response from those organisations which claim to stand for the working class: the creation of a new organisation through which the working class can find a voice and a vehicle for its aspirations. Such an organisation must represent a clean break from the past, according to the comrades, and must be led by the working class. No single existing organisation could fill the vacuum on the left of Labour, they argue. To stand aside from the creation of such a new working class organisation, one which is based on the ability to make things happen, would be nothing short of cowardice and sectarianism.

The gulf separating the left from the working class to which Red Action refer is undeniable. Clearly something does need to be done, and fast. Labour must be challenged from the left, and challenged properly. Given the parlous state of the left, its divisions, its weakness, Red Action are correct to state that the first steps must come from some form of coalition of pro-working class and anti-labour groups. On this level, given the seriousness with which Red Action have stressed the tasks at hand in the fields of anti-fascism and now Irish solidarity, the proposals should be welcomed, and worked on so they bear fruit.

Our reservations concern the other groups who might be attracted to the project.

The Communist Action Group shares Red Action's estimation of the type of groups which make up the British Left. Quite apart from the ideological factor of support for Labour, the Left in Britain is geared largely to propaganda - it wants to denounce the world, not to change it. The slogans are very radical, the political practice almost wholly conservative. When faced with a campaign which genuinely sets out to make a difference - like Anti-Fascist Action - the Left has characteristically adopted two poses: either it comes up with excuses for not participating, which it then dresses up in theoretical garb, or it joins in the campaign but tries to turn it into a talking shop. The first is the least damaging approach, of course; if the talkers on the Left do us the favour of lecturing the proposed new organisation from outside, then we will be ok. But if they adopt the second approach, we will have to find ways of dealing with them.

If the new organisation is to meet with any success, it must be able to attract those groups and individuals who are serious about the work that needs to be done, and repel those who are just after recruits. Experience with AFA shows that this is not always as easy as it seems, especially if approached in too formal a manner. The Red Action document insists that membership must be open. They mean open to working class people: they do not mean open to the sectarians. How, though, are we intending to

keep them away?

We are worried neither about being attacked as censors nor for being "undemocratic"; we are only concerned that we recognise the likely antics of the Left in advance, and preempt it. Because if any ordinary working class, people walk in and see the Left performing in the new organisation in the way that they do elsewhere, we won't get off the ground.

The Red Action document states that existing groups will not have to dissolve their individual identities into the larger grouping that is the new organisation. This is necessary at this stage, since the ideological and practical basis for a more thorough unity does not exist. But such a coalition of different forces is likely to be very unstable. This is not to write it off from the outset. Far from it. But we know from past experience that there will be those who will use this to their own narrow ends. At the very least, the danger exists that the individual identities will soon present themselves as competing identities. This is a contradiction for the new grouping, and one which it will have to overcome very swiftly if it is to survive. AFA to some extent has done so through publishing a magazine which does not reflect the line of any single organisation within AFA, though this may not work for the new group. To work, the new grouping will need a sober, mature approach from the organisations and individuals who make it up, something which most of the Left lacks completely.

This is all the more important since, although the document states that the new group will be led by the working class, at the outset at least, it will not and cannot. It will be led by those groups that set it up. It will only be led by the working class in the end if, from the very outset, it acts like a working class organisation and not like a bunch of lefties.

The important thing at this stage isn't to achieve agreement on everything. What we need at this stage is not ideological purity but some practical, concrete action which begins to make a difference. We have to start somewhere. Red Action are proposing that we start with work aimed at working class communities rather than at the workplace or the official union movement. Since we agree that such work needs to be done, we also agree that such an organisation needs to be formed. Count us in."

Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party

They are inching towards the Party, but in an intuitive and unconscious way

"Comrades from the CPGB brought greetings from the Revolutionary Democratic Group and reported on our work for revolutionary rapprochement. We put forward our minimum platform of working class defence as a basis for revolutionary work in the field of bourgeois elections. This sparked debate with some, who predictably raised objec-

tions to electoral work in principle and counter posed 'direct action'.

Others - paradoxically - spoke of revolution in Britain as a more or less imminent prospect, while in the same breath they suggested that elections required "too many resources" and warned against "falling flat on our faces". No other practical suggestions for united work were raised.

We believe that comrades in RA and AFA have recognised that their current political form has reached a dead end. They are inching towards the solution of the Party, but in an intuitive and unconscious way. Thus, they are quite wrong to assert that all organisations "have failed".

A working class party - a Communist Party - with room for organised factions and free discussion, but with unity in revolutionary action is the solution - not simply for the comrades of RA, but for all working class partisans and revolutionaries."

ANALYSIS Discussion Group

We console ourselves that these people are not really going anywhere, that they will all have to come back, that only we know the true way, even if today we are left stranded.

"The trouble with renovatory attempts on the Left is that they get nowhere because they are haunted by the ghosts of the past, like Miss Haversham in *Great Expectations*. The Left never looks at its mistakes, it just moves on to somewhere else, leaving behind the litter of broken dreams and demoralised people. But in the end the ghosts catch up. The past bears down upon us and prevents us from looking at future prospects afresh. There are too many past failures to conceal, too many past grudges to remember, too many past fears to forget. And so we hobble along defending a defunct political identity no one really cares about and insisting upon the validity of a political tradition long past its relevance. It's like the old folks who talk about their war experience and we are irritated because younger people don't pay attention. The more the world develops, the more out of place we feel, and the more we cling to the old religion. Like a man who can't board a train because he drags with him an oversized trunk full of old clothes and memorabilia, we cannot move into the 21st century because we are similarly lumbered. And so in the end we sit on our baggage on a platform watching the world go by on the way to exciting destinations and new frontiers. We console ourselves that these people are not really going anywhere, that they will all have to come back, that only we know the true way, even if today we are left stranded.

Why don't we just dump all this rubbish? To disband and to admit one has to start to anew, completely anew, will liberate us from all this. Red Action,

like most of the other participants at this conference, represents nothing and is nothing. It is nothing more than a sentimental husk. Why not start by being honest rather than being like a jumped up petit-bourgeois who puts on airs and pretends to be of noble birth? To admit one's failure in public, openly, clearly and without hesitation, to declare that one has nothing, that one is just an amateur, that one has been fairly and squarely beaten by events, will draw derision from the Left. No matter. The laughter of fools is of no concern. More importantly, it will impress honest revolutionaries and one day, when the class is able to understand its own history better, it will recognise and admire the courage it takes.

Disbanding will allow Red Action to talk to others on a straight one-to-one basis without the hindrance of fictitious identities and ready-made poses. This, peculiarly enough, is a better way of putting other people on the spot. Having to earn one's political bread every day also sharpens the mind and sorts the professionals from the passengers. There will be time enough in the future to form a revolutionary party.

Most importantly, disbanding will allow Red Action members to undertake the most important task confronting us at the moment, and for some time; to explain why and how revolution is possible in the 21st century. This needs an uncluttered mind. In this we are willing to join Red Action members, or anyone who honestly and in a serious, consistent manner wants to sort out where we are going. We do not need 'unity', organisational agreements or even 'doctrinal purity'. A quiet room and some pencil and paper will do. Just as the insurgent bourgeois had once locked themselves in the Tulliers Palace and refused to allow anyone to leave until they had given France a constitution, we, the Jacobins of our time, also need to be locked away until we can give our class the battle plan it needs.

Red Action needs to give up any swaggering notion of 'leadership' and big words about 'active service'. Neither Red Action or any other Left organisation has anything to offer the working class but the familiar free ticket to fast-lane defeat. Before one can go out to 'lead' the working class one must know where one is going. Comrades, there is no organisation, no party. The project is dead. It is significant that Red Action's document makes no mention whatsoever of its work over the last 10 years or the lessons learned. This conference initiative is little more than an attempt by the fringe to rid itself of the past without admitting it."

Solidarity Federation North Somerset Local

We note that you do not condemn that obnoxious form of political activity, Trotskyism, per se, ... implying that you remain unbilically attached to LenTrot vanguardism.

"Thank you for the invitation to participate in the formation of 'New' SWP. Your belated recognition of 'New' Labour's middle class orientation (in fact the same old garbage dressed up in the emperor's clothes) and the need to be hostile towards it does not bode well for future development of your proposed organisation. Nor does the "anticipation of failure", which you appear to regard as a virtue.

If your aim is to make a "clean break with the past" and reformism then why the intention to participate in local reformist elections? Such ineptitude serves simply to legitimise the parliamentary system at the lowest level, no matter how often you might claim, during the electoral process, to be opponents of said system. Just like the SWP has done in the past with consequent results. What might a co-opted "appropriate working class candidate" resemble? A dissident member of 'New' Labour perhaps? Which variety of "socialism" will you be advocating in your propaganda? How can you hope to paper over the theoretical divisions of this 'popular front' of divergent principles when the inevitable crisis develops?

We note that you do not condemn that obnoxious form of political activity, Trotskyism, per se, but merely its "collaboration with Labour", implying that you remain unbilically attached to LenTrot vanguardism.

It is not being sectarian to point out the simple fact that an independent working class organisation, virulently hostile to Labour and capitalism, the enemy of all forms of authoritarianism, with a practical programme of short and medium term aims already exists and has done for some time, ie the Solidarity Federation. The realistic alternative."

London Anti-Fascist Action.

If AFA's efforts are to culminate in victory we must seek to replace them, but to replace them we must not only out-violence them, we must also out radicalise them.

"Fascism is the vanguard of reaction. It is at once the manifestation, the contributory cause and principle beneficiary of society's decomposition. Unlike the rest of the anti-racist Left, AFA's emphasis has always been on the political danger represented by fascism, while others such as Searchlight and the ANL have laid the emphasis on their violent and criminal tendencies. In addition they refuse or are unwilling to recognise that anti-fascism is by definition a rear-guard action and that fascism is the consequence, rather than the cause, of the Left's failure. Inevitably the strategies adopted to combat fascism carry with them the germs of the strategies that caused fascism, invariably leading to compound failure. So while it cannot be denied that the ANL's media campaign

focused public attention on the problem, it also proved to be a distraction in regard to the solution.

One of AFA's strengths in its formative years was its limited platform; the 'single issue'. This concentration weeded out or repelled the sectarians, the 'tough talkers' and the dilettantes. However, during the Isle of Dogs campaign, the 'single issue' exposed AFA's limitations. AFA had to nothing to say on the principle business.

The working class is increasingly alienated from Labour, the BNP's strategy is entirely reliant upon this alienation: they really hate Labour etc. The total ineptitude and the tangible contempt that exists in some areas between Labour and its former constituency has locally and nationally begat the BNP. And fascism begat anti-fascism. In straight-forward language, it is the politics of the Labour Party that has created the BNP. So by acting as campaign managers for Labour, the ANLYRE are prostituting anti-fascism, and instead of being identified with a radical, pro-working class position, anti fascism is seen to be defending the status quo, thereby practically forcing people who want change to vote BNP, out of sheer desperation. They are literally driving people into the arms of the fascists. Up to now it is entirely due to the cutting edge of AFA that the passive support has remained just that. But it is unrealistic to expect that vacuum to be maintained indefinitely.

Nor as working class militant anti-fascists can we stand on the sidelines, wringing our hands hopelessly. We have to take a stand. And we have to take that stand against Labour. Not simply in a theoretical sense, but in an organisational sense. It is vital that the working class on the estates, seriously alienated from Labour, are provided with an alternative to the BNP. The election of a Labour government will be a massive shot in the arm for the far-right. It is also very possible that in the subsequent local elections the Isle of Dogs scenario could be repeated on a national scale, and all our good work in the last decade would be undone at a stroke.

In any case it must be obvious that to stand aloof would be an unmitigated disaster. That would allow the middle classes once again to set the agenda. AFA has been dealing with the consequences of their agenda for over a decade. It would be criminally negligent to allow our adversaries to fill the space we have created and maintained in that time. This is an opportunity to add a string to AFA's bow. It will be a complement to, rather than a deviation from, vigorous anti-fascist activity.

Ultimately the challenge for AFA is not only to destroy the BNP in working class areas but to replace them there. So the political message, to have resonance, will have to be deeper and more comprehensive. A straight forward anti-fascist parable, a simple refutation of the 'radical' in nationalism will, on its own, prove unsatisfactory.

If AFA's efforts are to culminate in victory we must seek to replace them, but to replace them we must not only out-violence them, we must also out radicalise them."



...nothing but the Truce

Though the Cold War is long over the intelligence services retain a significant influence over the British media. Given that their trade is lies falsification and propaganda it would be *remiss* of them not to do so. Irish Republicans have long suspected that in fact large sections of the free press are directly controlled by MI5/MI6. Now it appears that a large number of Irish and Irish based journalists agree with them. In an article in the Guardian (7/7/95) they finger not just a particular journalist but a whole paper as being part of a conspiracy to derail the peace process. Of course speculation as to the extent of MI5 infiltration within the media is not new. Jon Snow anchorman for Channel Four News confirms that he was approached in the 70's with an offer to double his salary. He turned it down. But how many would have done so? According to Peter Wright, MI5 had always about twenty senior journalists working for it in the national press. "They were not employed directly by us" he explained "but we regarded them as agents because they were happy to be associated with us."

There has been disquieting evidence of MI5 intrigue before. Much surfaced during the Scargill/Windsor/Gadaffi affair. When The Cook Report who along with the Mirror made the sensational allegations of Moscow gold etc in 1990 had hardly come off the air, when the rest of the media and whole sections of the establishment joined the fray clearly working off the same menu. Tory and Labour MP's, Scargill's opponents inside the NUM, the Fraud squad, the courts, the government appointed Certification officer and Commissioner for trade Union Rights, the UDM and the maverick rightwing electricians union, Cabinet ministers, the TUC the Inland Revenue etc In his book *Enemy Within* Seamus Milne comments: "With the special exception of Britain's corrosive 'security' role in the north of Ireland, there have been no clearer cases of covert action, of such comprehensive mobilization of the normally submerged power centres of the Whitehall empire, than in the history of the secret war against the miners."

Thatcher herself had made the same connection in a slightly different context six years earlier, an analysis that set the tone for the subsequent events. "At one end of the spectrum are the terrorist gangs within our borders and the terrorist states which finance and arm them. At the other are the hard left operating inside our system, conspiring to use union power...to break, defy and subvert the law." This was a call for 'a common front' against Scargill and the NUM. As the evidence shows the call was heeded. The apparent uniqueness of the campaign allowed those startled by it to find grounds for dismissing it from their minds, not by exploring the vast conspiracy against the NUM, but instead by focusing on former NUM officer Roger Windsor's role within it. Like the lone gunman theory liberals sought and found comfort in the idea of the 'bad apple' rather than the rotten orchard

One example of the 'bad apple

syndrome' that occurred during the ongoing Colin Wallace saga is indicative of the rot. Wallace who had been employed as a spook in the Six Counties in the early seventies subsequently made a number of allegations regarding MI5 attempts to destabilise the Labour Government of Harold Wilson. Serious attempts were made to discredit him until eventually he was convicted of the murder of a friend and jailed for ten years. On his release the opportunity presented itself and he began to try and clear his name with some success. Immediately the counter allegations resurfaced. The most prominent being that he was a 'Walter Mitty' type fantasist. David McKittrick the Irish correspondent for The Independent wrote a scathing article along those lines. He quoted as evidence the fact that Wallace photographed in the early seventies wearing a para Red Beret had claimed that he was in fact an ex para. As proof he offered a cutting from a local paper in 1974 which carried a quote from Wallace claiming as much. The crusading journalist Paul Foot who had taken an interest in the affair asked McKittrick on television how it was he a journalist based in the north of Ireland had come to unearth such damning evidence - in Wales? "Dammning evidence" that lay buried in an obscure local paper for 16 years? McKittrick offered no reply. **Of course the other question that lay unanswered was who planted it?**

Irish Republicans still talk to McKittrick so presumably he can't be all bad. One journalist they will not touch is Liam Clarke. Recently he has been the subject of a withering attack not by republicans, but by other Irish and British based journalists. He is accused of "bias and falsification of planting patently false stories". **This is extraordinary enough but what is exceptional is that the same charge of "bias and falsification" is laid at the door of a whole paper, the Sunday Times.** Since the IRA ceasefire on August 31 last year, the ST has carried a series of stories questioning its sticking power. On October 16 the papers NI correspondent, Liam Clarke, wrote about Sinn Fein's difficulty in holding the IRA in check. Christmas, he claimed, was the moment when the IRA "would review its ceasefire...and could abandon it". He added: "However, intelligence sources believe the ceasefire will be extended until Easter, when a final decision will be taken." A month later Clarke alleged that "the IRA is on the brink of an internal war". A week after that, he wrote: "The danger period for the ceasefire will be the three months between Christmas and Easter."

A front page news story-headlined "Rebel IRA units threaten new war" - suggested the danger was already present. It claimed that a hardline faction of more than 50 terrorists are preparing to split the IRA to begin a bombing campaign. The breakaway group has given the IRA's army council an impossible deadline of next March to achieve the total surrender of the British Government in NI" All of this was attributed to "senior security officials and later to senior RUC detectives". Most of these stories were published in the Irish edition but some appeared in a shorter version in Britain. It is evidence like this that convinces some journalistic critics "that the ST is hell bent on derailing the peace process". (This

ignores the fact that other British papers have carried similar stories. Clarke is simply the most blatant). According to Roy Green, former Daily Mirror editor writing in the Guardian: "one phrase betrayed the writers [Clarke] agenda: 'The [breakaway] groups emergence confirms growing fears that the peace process is in serious jeopardy.' Green asks "Whose fears? The papers? The people's? The army's? Sinn Fein's?" As most of these stories were published in the Irish edition only, it is safe to assume that it was intended for consumption in Ireland. **And who in Ireland is likely to be most paranoid about the intentions of the IRA? Who in Ireland is likely to be most impressed by senior security officials and the RUC? It is not republicans as Green tentatively suggests. - it is loyalists.** Indeed MP Ken Maginness is one Unionist leader, incidentally also thought to be close to MI5, who has repeated word for word the ST propaganda. In June he predicted that the IRA had planned "a rolling resumption of violence."

If for instance MI5 wanted to derail the peace process it would be necessary to prepare the ground in this fashion by constantly feeding the inherent suspicions in the loyalist and republican communities; the fear of capitulation to the IRA matched by a fear of capitulation by the IRA respectively. It would be necessary to keep the pot simmering, so that at an opportune moment the pot could be quickly brought to the boil. In the last couple of months prominent figures in both the INLA and the UVF; organisations shown to have been vulnerable to MI5 manipulation in the past, have been arrested either moving or

Ultimately what's worse? Accepting the possibility that the Left's policy on Ireland may be influenced by MI5, or recognising that it probably doesn't have to be?

attempting to procure weapons. In July there was also the emergence of a previously unknown loyalist grouping threatening to renew hostilities with nationalists. Similar claims had been made by a 'pro-republican group the INRA' a few months earlier. In such a situation all that would be required is for "masked men" believed to be republican/loyalist to initiate some violent action against their political opponents.

The intention would be to provoke a response, real or imagined. tat...tat...tat - it. Once that had occurred the situation would quickly escalate. As an anarchist called Malatesta once observed: "Organ and function are inseparable terms. Take away from an organ its function and either the organ dies or the function is re-established. Put an army in a country in which there are neither reasons for, nor fear of war...and it will provoke war...a police force where there are no crimes to solve or criminals to apprehend will event both or cease to exist." **It is important to note here that such a strategy though devised by MI5, and in line with their thinking, may actually be counterposed to the governments own agenda such as it is.** The essential requirement is that a political vacuum exists to allow for that kind of manipulation. So while it is clear that at least a section of the establishment genuinely want to disengage; they must rely on MI5 etc for advice on what is likely to prove the most advantageous and least damaging circumstance. If they are advised that a surrender of some republican armoury is guaranteed - if they take the hard line on decommissioning 'if they make Adams sweat' they might stall etc

Republicans of course have their own different and distinct paranoias. They are not concerned with the breakdown of the ceasefire but with the decom-

missioning of weapons, surrender, and betrayal. It is logical that these are catered for as well. A former editor of the Times, Simon Jenkins, maintains that there is no peace process, just peace - nothing but the truce.

Now consider these statements: "Sinn Fein is now compelled to put disarmament on the agenda: Adams will have to negotiate with the IRA on demilitarisation: In return for demilitarisation, Sinn Fein will push for an amnesty for Republican Prisoners: Sinn Fein will have to participate in any "power sharing" assembly: [the leadership] are prepared to hand over arms accumulated by the IRA provided that there is demilitarisation on the British side: To enter talks the IRA will be made to surrender much of its weaponry: Sinn Fein will argue that demilitarisation by the IRA is the price that must be paid for the release of prisoners, the reform of the RUC and the dismantling of Army observation posts: The barriers within the Republican movement against Adams implementing his side of the bargain are at the moment very weak. They consist of the republican hardliners - the one third or so of the IRA army council that opposed the ceasefire and marginal elements like Republican Sinn Fein and Bernadette McAlisley."

Liam Clarke again? Nope. Wishful thinking by British analysts or the nightmare scenario outlined by hard line republicans? Neither actually. These statements were taken from Class Struggle no 24, the journal of the Irish Workers Group..

Oh, you may think the very hard left who are bitter about the betrayal of republican aspirations and the abandonment of the armed struggle? Yes and No. Yes, they are against the ceasefire. No, they do not, nor have they ever during a quarter century of resistance supported the armed struggle. So, during the war they condemned the armed struggle, and since, then have condemned as petit bourgeois renegades those who suspended it? Yes. Bonkers? In a nutshell (forgive the pun) yes.

There is however another explanation.. For many republican POW's, the unsolicited gifts of Brit left propaganda is treated like refuse and despatched to the nearest bin - unread. As one explained: "It is designed to demoralise us." 'Designed is the key word here. There is a suspicion among republicans that like the British media much of the British Left is under the influence to one degree or another of the British state. Though the example provided would be of little significance in its own, the theme of republican capitulation and defeat is a

thread common to almost the whole Anarchist and Trotskyist Left.

But why would they bother? The Brit Left has no influence. Exactly. And whose fault is that? The American Left is hardly less feeble but that didn't stop the FBI placing agents in the Socialist Workers Party over there. These revolutionaries eventually settled for \$7,000,000 in compensation - on condition - that they in turn would not seek to have the provocateurs identified! According to former South African BOSS agent Gordon Winter MI5 like to boast that "If there is a left wing movement in Britain bigger than a football team our man is a captain or vice captain or else he is the ref and can send any man off the field and call our man on any time he likes."

So even to say that the 'Left' has no influence is hardly correct. By maintaining a constant barrage of anti republican propaganda over a quarter of a century they have denied to the republican movement not only their own organisations and platforms but an invaluable political periphery and immediate access to tens of thousands of potential allies both here and in Ireland. An entirely negative influence from a republican point of view but an impressive record in maiming minds nonetheless. During the war, the Brit Left poured scorn on nationalist aspirations and unhesitatingly condemned the armed struggle. **After August 31, alarmed by the possibility of finding themselves by default on the same side as republicans for the first time in 25 years, they immediately condemned the ceasefire and poured scorn on working class nationalist hopes in it.** In preference to working with republicans in a united front against the 'common enemy' their own ruling class, they castigated the IRA for 'making deals with imperialism'. **With weasel words they resumed their position as the radical wing of the 'common front' sponsored by the ruling class against the IRA.** An MI5 success story then? Even in this 'badly lit hall of distorting mirrors' there cannot be a shadow of doubt. From an MI5 perspective it is hard to see how matters could be improved. Of course whether they are directly responsible or it happened in spite of them, who can tell. But it would be *remiss* of them not to have tried. Ultimately what's worse? Accepting the possibility that the Left's policy on Ireland may be influenced by MI5, or recognising that it probably doesn't have to be?

Campaign Against Water Privatisation Theft, but no sale...

The campaign against water privatisation in Scotland, initiated by the Gardyloo group and now being pushed by the West of Scotland Campaign against Water Privatisation, is on the ramp up towards serious struggle.

Since the Tories proposed to privatise water here, we have had two half victories. The first was when evident and vocal opposition to privatisation forced them to back off and settle on a more modest reactionary initiative. Instead of outright theft of locally owned water resources, followed by privatisation, they retreated to the idea of grabbing the water and putting it in the hands of Tory quangos. Theft, but no sale of stolen goods.

The second victory was that the referendum that Gardyloo had demanded on water privatisation went ahead last year in Strathclyde with an astonishing 97% of the vote against the government proposals. This result was a significant moral victory, since it now establishes that those opposing water privatisation are implementing the popular will. In defying the popular will so blatantly, the government loses legitimacy, and confers it on its opponents. Civil disobedience, the non-payment of water bills, etc, now have clear democratic legitimacy. The disadvantage has been that many

people in Strathclyde think that as a result of the referendum the Tory plans were called off. Were that true. Instead they have pressed ahead, and last month the first meetings of the new water quangos were held.

The West of Scotland campaign found out where the quango was to meet and got ready. Activists turned up in good time and demanded entry as members of the public. Other members of the public going past asked what was happening. On hearing that those in the building were meeting to privatise our water, dozens of passers-by joined in, moved into the hall where the quango was meeting and made their opinions known in no uncertain fashion. The quango chairman made the mistake of telling the public, "You people have no right to be heard". This did not go down well, and the quango was forced to abandon the meeting hall.

Suitable warnings given to papers and broadcasting organisations ensured widespread coverage of the action in the media.

This is just a start. The campaign has a long way to go before we have mass non-payment of the water bills, but given the overwhelming public opposition to the scheme, that is on the cards.

New Searchlight!

Virtually Fact Free!

Systematically with-holding information from anti-fascists serves whose interests? Airbrushing the militants out of the picture boosts whose morale? Promoting the concept of C18 invincibility whilst concealing specific intelligence to avoid "serious violence" out of 'concern' for whose reputation? Just who is calling the shots at Searchlight these days?

In what can safely be described as a major gaffe, the June issue of Searchlight confirmed what in normal circumstances they might have been expected to deny: ie that the operational effectiveness of the broad anti-fascist movement is entirely subordinate to the Searchlight agenda.

On April 29 the Loyalist Apprentice Boys marched through central London. Varying estimates of between fifty and one hundred 'mainland' fascists operated as the outriders for the procession. Many were in their late teens or early twenties. More familiar faces ran the operation. Having found out about the march a few days in advance Searchlight decided that it was in the best interests of the anti-fascist movement that the parade should not be opposed. Searchlight were 'concerned' that the police were poorly represented, "only six motorcycles and one van load of ordinary officers" who, had trouble flared, would have been unable to deal with it. "Because of the danger of serious violence Searchlight did not inform anti-fascist groups of the march. The anti-fascist movement at present has difficulty mobilising such numbers in advance of such public C18 activities." Implicit in that statement is the idea that it is the anti-fascists who would need protecting. This conclusion simply does not tally with the facts.

For some time now Searchlight has been systematically deleting AFA box numbers from the list of addresses in the 'Anti-Fascist Fightback' column on the back of their magazine. No explanation has ever been offered. London AFA, Manchester, Glasgow, Southampton etc have been 'disappeared'. The substitutes have been less than inspiring. We have the United Campaign Against Racism ("who believe in the unity of the victims of racism?"), Camden Unity (c/o Searchlight), Campus Watch etc. There are a number of variations on this theme. One wheeze is to print the name of an AFA branch, say Edinburgh, but alongside it is the address of an entirely different organisation - one for which Searchlight has more sympathy - CARF. Apart from deleting affiliated branches - apparently at random - they have also begun promoting as AFA groups that are not recognised as branches. The latest addition to the list, Blackpool AFA, is not recognised by the organisation, nor is it ever likely to be. Fraternising with Special Branch and wilfully with-holding intelligence were just a few of the problems. That the new Searchlight operative for the North West is also a member of the group should suffice as an explanation. "Blackpool AFA are listed c/o the box number used by Lancaster AFA. Lancaster AFA, however, do not appear on the Searchlight list!"

Disinformation also takes other forms. On April 28 the BNP organised a mass leafletting session on the Coxmore Estate in Kirkby, Ashfield. The Midlands region of AFA mobilised around 80 people on the day with the intention of stopping the event. On the day, what were thought to be BNP scouts but turned out to be police provocateurs led AFA to the main body of BNP leafletters - and a sizeable body of police equipped with dogs and horses. The police demanded that AFA disperse. When stewards refused, the AFA contingent was baton charged. There were a number of injuries, the most serious being one person's leg broken in five places and serious dog bites. When AFA re-grouped they were again baton-charged which resulted in further injuries. Eventually AFA were corralled in the middle of the road for an hour, blocking all access to local residents. The BNP meanwhile

with a police guard were allowed to leaflet the High Street, but possibly unnerved by the violence, seemed eager to get away, and there were no reported sightings for the rest of the day. AFA claimed victory. Searchlight reported the same event thus: "In Kirkby East ward in Ashfield Nottinghamshire [the BNP] flopped disastrously after campaigning hard since the start of the year. The local housing estates...became a much safer place after a National Mobilisation called by the BNP's headquarters in London only produced around 24 nazis. Three times that number of local Anti-Fascist Alliance supporters turned out and after a short time the police cleared the nazis from the local streets." (The 'Alliance' has previously been praised in a previous Searchlight as a 'model' for other anti-racist groups). The Searchlight modus operandi dictates that if you are not on their list, you don't exist. So possibly as a consequence of working from their own depressing data they may have concluded that the anti-fascist movement is in serious difficulty, if not on the point of collapse. Their readership could certainly be forgiven for reaching such a conclusion. Searchlight only carries seven of the thirty six branch addresses that appear in the AFA magazine, Fighting Talk. For those whose arithmetic is a little shaky, this represents a shortfall of twenty-nine. Attempting to airbrush the militants out of existence is in line with whose agenda? Boosts whose morale?

But of course, despite everything, there remains that beacon of hope: "[C18] is extremely sensitive over security. While Searchlight broke through this ring of security, this came too late to organise anything more than to photograph and video the event." Yep, just another couple of days and they could have organised - what, exactly? Searchlight is a magazine. Apart from the odd, invariably poorly attended meeting, Searchlight have never organised anything of note. This is an important point. Because they have no organisation to act on the information that they receive from groups and individuals up and down the country, they have an obligation to make that information available to those who can. Whether they like them or not. That is what non-sectarianism, which they are always banging on about, means. The information they receive, as against other material collated strictly by their own efforts is *not* theirs. No more than any information is deemed the personal property of whoever answers the phone. 90% of the time it is provided free, in the expectation that it will be of use to the anti-fascist movement as a whole. That is the general understanding.

Searchlight in the past have made strenuous efforts to convey just this impression. To then systematically misappropriate that intelligence and attempt to exploit it for exclusive political or financial gain is not just straightforward theft, it is an act of political betrayal.

London AFA has never had a problem finding 'sufficient numbers' to confront the far-right. Numbers are not always the criteria. Ten wankers multiplied by ten wankers is a hundred wankers; no qualitative difference. Often it is not the size of the dog in the fight that matters, but the size of the fight in the dog. The last time that C18 attempted to organise publicly in London, the Feb 94 Blood and Honour gig, AFA humiliated them. Confronted by a 150 strong AFA stewards group at the Little Driver pub in Bow which was the C18 'nerve centre' for the day, they were taken completely

by surprise, panicked and ran. They never recovered their composure. The gig was cancelled. A complete rout was averted only by the appearance of a large number of police. Afterwards, fascist fanzines were full of fear and recrimination: "The owners of the back-up hall got scared at the reports of a riot and refused us access, meanwhile two Red gangs were allowed to roam London attacking our people. At Bow Road, the main re-direction point, 200 Reds clashed with C18 and 100 British skins...a similar thing happened a few hours later at Waterloo, British Oil winged, "A gang of tooled-up thugs were ambushing unsuspecting little mobs of skins in full view of our lawmen. Also the rent a mob rabble of the IRA, Red Action, were milling about with balalafras on with such items as hammers, etc"

Of course, that was over eighteen months ago, and it is true that neither AFA nor anybody else in London has confronted C18 or Blood and Honour in that time. That is not because of 'insufficient numbers' but because of the absence of opportunity. The fact is that C18 have not raised their heads publicly in London since. Despite Searchlight's



Since Searchlight started exposing C18, its influence has gone from strength to strength.

"For the first time since the end of the Second World War, an openly National Socialist organisation is now the most powerful far-right group in Britain. The National Socialist Alliance (NSA) has taken over from the BNP as the most active nazi organisation in the country".

(Searchlight editorial, 1995)

continuing black propaganda of C18 'omnipotence' "and the failure of the anti-fascist movement to curb it" (Searchlight April 1993) the reason for both C18 and the BNP adopting low-profiles is patently obvious - the clear and present danger "of serious violence". Over the past couple of years Searchlight have invested serious time and effort into promoting via the media the concept of C18 invincibility, and the need for something to be done about it (see RA 71). They have now publicly admitted to concealing intelligence from militant anti-fascists. This was done out of 'concern' for the sanctity of whose reputation - precisely?

If C18 have had other 'public' activities either in London or the rest of the country, then they and Searchlight are keeping it to themselves. If AFA had to rely on Searchlight we would in any case be the last to know. Hoarding intelli-

gence and concealing it from militant anti-fascists is now Searchlight's stock in trade.

For instance, in the same article, they casually disclose that "the far-right of London's loyalists may have found a new watering hole." Interesting enough, if true. Apparently Searchlight stumbled upon it when interviewing former barman Des Clarke, and former Skrewdriver member - a full two and a half years ago. Clarke apparently provided much of the info for the first three exposes in April 93 on C18. Clarke also told Searchlight that he was a former fascist - *but he lied*. "he claimed that he had left far-right politics behind him, but we learned shortly afterwards that he was still an active player".

So, if he was in fact still active, what was his motivation? That isn't a question that Searchlight felt any need to answer. That they may have been duped doesn't appear to concern them. The same process has been repeated many times since, though the alleged informants 'dishing the dirt' are nearly always anonymous. One former activist that went public was Neil Parrish, who exposed 'the dangerous and violent men' behind C18 on three successive Sundays, in a Searchlight/News of the World promotion. Unlike Clarke, Parrish was no longer active (he had been caught with his fingers in the Blood and Honour till) so his volunteering information may have been money motivated. But that is just speculation. The Parrish disclosures did nothing to damage C18. Consequently, the 'dangerous men behind C18' have done nothing to damage Parrish. Instead, the spin-off in publicity from this and other Searchlight inspired public indictments have made C18 a household name - world infamous, in fact. They must be gutted.

Indeed, since Searchlight started exposing C18 in 1993, its influence in far-right circles has gone from strength to strength. According to Searchlight's own testimony, "For the first time since the end of the Second World War, an openly National Socialist organisation is now the most powerful far-right group in Britain. The National Socialist Alliance (NSA) [with C18 as the major force] has taken over from the BNP as the most active nazi organisation in the country".

Of course C18 are not the only ones to profit from skillful media manipulation. Take this extract from the June editorial: "After the tragic Oklahoma City bombing Searchlight was inundated with calls and letters from our regular readers congratulating us on our perception and analysis. The Sunday Telegraph claimed the weekend after the bombing that it had been the first in Britain to publish material on the militias...in fact Searchlight has been monitoring these groups for several years...Searchlight's ability to be first in the field was demonstrated again when we were asked to give evidence to a round table session of MEP's in Brussels...Searchlight's contribution received wide newspaper and radio coverage...Searchlight was also the only one to uncover the plans of the nazi terrorists of C18 to march with Ulster Loyalists through London last month...and ensured that MPs were told of the scandal...there can be no doubt that when it comes to knowing what the enemies of democracy are up to, we can reliably declare that you read it here first. The increase in sales of Searchlight and media requests for information reflects this." Do they indeed. Its most gratifying, as any genuine militant anti-fascist will tell you, to be able to

read about what the enemies of democracy have been up to. It's heartening to discover afterwards that Searchlight alone had the information all the time. The ingenuity and bravery of the photographers, "operating without any police protection, and with only their superior running speed enabling them to shake off a dozen large nazis" can be admired - from afar. Because if Searchlight has anything to do with it, that is probably where you will be. As they see it, for the brave few, no risk is too extravagant. Duty is its own reward. Naturally, such derring do, "operating without police protection" etc isn't for everybody. The witless, the foolhardy and the fanatic must be protected; if only from themselves.

Searchlight are not slow on self-congratulation. They have every reason to be pleased. They have done very nicely thank you from the C18 media frenzy. As, of course, have C18. During roughly the same period it is noticeably only the fortunes of the anti-fascist movement that appear to have dipped. In January 94, when calling for M15 to be given the task of dealing with C18, a Searchlight editorial commented: "While the anti-fascist movement may be able to hold its own against the nazis on the streets, we cannot deal with bombings and terrorist acts". Eighteen months later, it is no longer bombings and terrorist acts that we cannot deal with, but a "small march of around 150!"

Today Britain remains one of the few countries where the far-right are still being denied a political base. Informing MPs of the scandal was *not* how it was achieved. Britain is also one of the few countries that for the past decade has had a militant working class organisation whose sole role was to seek out and confront the fascists, physically and ideologically. The resulting impasse is not a coincidence. Had we adopted the live and let live attitude adopted by the Left and implemented with such enthusiasm on the continent, the situation could well be remarkably different. Unless you choose to believe that it could never happen here, the evidence is there for all to see. It is in fact all around us. On August 8th, the Daily Express published the results of an ICM poll they had commissioned. "Short fuse behind the British attitude to race is revealed in our test of public support for the type of policies championed by Jean-Marie LePen, leader of France's ultra-right. The creation of a party supporting repatriation and a 'whites-first' policy would be on a course to becoming Britain's top political force ahead of the Liberals. The fact that two-thirds of the individuals that we surveyed were prepared to admit to so-called 'racist' feelings shows that British people have a healthy resistance to the bullying of political correctness."

From 1982-92 the Left regarded anti-fascist activity with disdain. They had better things to do with their time. Here too the evidence is tangible. In a by-election in East London a couple of months ago, Militant Labour, still numerically one of the biggest organisations on the left, garnered 3% of the vote, exactly one fifth of the vote allotted the 'isolated fanatics' of the BNP. During that ten year span, Searchlight was one of the very few publications that you could accurately describe as anti-fascist. Though they were involved in the setting up of AFA in 1985 they were never allies, the eccentricity was evident even then. Fairweather friends might be a more realistic assessment. It was more like a business arrangement than a conventional political arrangement. They provided AFA with publicity and intelligence, we in turn provided them with credibility and occasional security. They had a magazine and media contacts. AFA was an organisation. Whereas AFA might organise an event they would promote it. While we rarely saw eye to eye, tactically or strategically, theirs was a unique contribution. Very occasionally, a vital one.

Regardless of motive, this is no longer the case. The contribution is still unique - bizarrely unique!

This is an anti-fascist magazine that is now openly trying to emasculate the cutting edge of that movement. Looking at developments objectively, it does

If you want your information to reach the militants, send it directly to Anti-Fascist Action. Tel: 0161 232 0813

Review...

Harry Ratner - Reluctant Revolutionary. (Socialist Platform Ltd)

Harry Ratner was one of the founders of British Trotskyism, one who, as the book's introduction describes, for "25 years devoted his entire life - practically the whole of his waking hours - to the Trotskyist movement, and thereby to the cause of working class emancipation and Socialist revolution". What makes his autobiography worth a read is Ratner's genuine commitment to, and participation in, working class struggle, and his conclusion; that "the Trotskyist movement" and "working class emancipation" have very little in common.

Harry Ratner was born in London in 1919, the son of a Russian Jewish small-businessman, and his socialist education began in Poale Zion, the Socialist Zionist Party. Ratner soon abandoned Zionism, coming to see himself as a socialist rather than Jewish nationalist, and joined the Labour League of Youth, the youth section of the Labour Party, at 16. The Trotskyist Militant Group was active in the LLY, and, after reading some Trotskyist literature, he joined them in 1936.

Ratner describes the Trotskyists after their expulsion from the Communist movement as "small propaganda groups, completely isolated from the working class movement". In Britain, the Trotskyists had split three ways, with CLR James' Marxist Group working within the Independent Labour Party, and the Militant Group and the Communist League joining the Labour Party. 'Entrism' was justified on the basis that "Trotskyists should be with the workers, sharing and participating in their struggles within their

own organisations". This reduction of the class struggle to the struggle within the Labour Party resulted in the farce of "trotskyists speaking to each other as if they did not know each other, and pretending to be ordinary 'left wing' workers!"

Ratner's description of Trotskyist tactics at the time of the Spanish Civil War is particularly telling. He describes how the Trotskyists "vehemently castigated the POUM (a Spanish revolutionary party) for its vacillations and centrism. This, however, did not save its leaders from Stalinist reprisals after the Barcelona May Days". The Trotskyist movement represented little in Britain. In Spain, except within the middle class, literary/intellectual circles, it counted for nothing. The POUM was a left wing, socialist group which was part of an armed mass movement which was engaged in a struggle against fascism and against Stalinist betrayal of working class gains made in the course of the civil war. The Trotskyists in Britain spent most of their time "exposing Russia" at Aid for Spain meetings, or, as Ratner puts it, "being parasitic on the meetings of organisations bigger than ourselves; standing outside someone else's meeting to sell our literature...forever being in the position of being accused of shouting criticisms from the sidelines, while others, the brave lads in the International Brigades, were fighting and dying with rifles in their hands".

None of this is to suggest that the anti-working class crimes of Stalin should have been ignored, but, because of its organisation of the International Brigades, its participation in the street fights against the Blackshirts, and its shopfloor presence, the CP had built up credit as a defender of working class interests. The Trotskyists never attempted to serve any interests wider than their own, so when the CP

Trotskyism: a minority within a minority...

denounced the trots as "fascists" none leapt to their defence because their vocal anti-Stalinism was seen as disruptive to anti-fascist unity. The CP were rooted within the working class; the Trotskyists neither had, nor seemed concerned about, any working class base.

Ratner himself appears as a man of considerable integrity, with a real commitment to his class. In his 1955 diary he is shown to have been, at one and the same time, the president of his branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, chairman of the Platts shop steward committee, secretary of the TMM combined shop stewards committee, editor of the Textile Machinery Worker, and a Labour Party and trades council delegate. In 1939 he was part of an underground Trotskyist group in France. As a soldier he took part in the Anglo-American invasion of Sicily in 1943, and in D-Day in 1944.

Of his activities as a soldier during World War 2, Ratner writes that within troops of "working class origin", there was "absolutely no anti-war feeling. Even the more politically radical saw the defence of democracy against fascism as the over-riding priority".

Entering France after the D-Day landings, he describes the tension between the local resistance groups and De Gaulle's Free French Overseas Government. "In many areas and towns, the local Resistance had risen in advance of the arrival of the Allied armies, defeated the German forces, chased out the Vichy collaborationist officials...local 'Liberation Committees' seized power and were arresting collaborators, disarming the Vichy militia and police, organising food supplies etc. De Gaulle was

alarmed at this development of power from below".

Ratner feared that British and American troops could be used to disarm the Resistance, and began clandestine organisation within his own unit to lead a mutiny against any such action. The French Trotskyist POI, meanwhile, denounced the Resistance as a bourgeois nationalist movement, and its anti-fascist activity during the war consisted of publishing a newspaper, La Verite, which warned of the subordination of the working class to the bourgeoisie, but by refusing to enter the Resistance, certainly guaranteed that this would be the only outcome.

In 1960, Ratner left the Trotskyist movement, after years of hyperactivity, while remaining active as a shopfloor militant. He describes the movement he worked so hard to build as "marginal to events", and writes of the "bitter factional quarrels and dogmatism within the Trotskyist movement...the unhealthy dominance of individuals, the cliqueism, and intolerance of criticism", all symptoms which exist as much within the Trot milieu today. He recognises that "We must look for other, more promising roads. I do not pretend to know what they are. I can only hope that by critically re-examining the past and by asking the right questions, that we get nearer the right answers".

Fair enough, but if we examine the past of the Trotskyist movement, we have to draw conclusions for the future. The Trotskyists made a virtue out of their isolation. Politics was no longer about the battle between classes, but a battle of ideas, of "programmatic manifestos" that "will become the guide of millions". The

Trotskyists believed that "ideological superiority" gave them an automatic right to lead the working class, that Stalinism and reformism would simply be defeated by superior argument. As Ratner recounts, they therefore directed plenty of rhetorical fire at the French and Spanish anti-fascist movements, but no real fire at the agents of fascism itself!

For all its political failings, and its legacy of sell-outs of working class struggles, the CP still had a base within the working class. It was a movement of thousands and therefore could, by its weight of force within the class, be seen to serve working class interests - it could stop evictions, lead strikes, organise International Brigades etc. To ordinary people, it had some use, it was seen to defend their interests. Its position on, say, the Moscow Trials, seemed therefore to be of little relevance.

The Trotskyists, meanwhile, scorned the notion that it was necessary to win the respect of working class activists in struggle in order to gain a hearing for their ideas. They only saw a "crisis of leadership" with themselves as the pre-ordained solution. As far back as 1938, Ratner recognised that "the difference between being a 'drawing-room Bolshevik' sitting in small rooms merely talking about Marxism in closed circles and actually going out into the broad movement and trying to win non-Trotskyist workers and union militants to our ideas was a very serious political difference". But not one reconcilable with Trotskyism - a movement whose Bolshevik-derived vanguardism was the cause for its contempt for any political struggle, or any social movement, that it could not lead as of right!

Ratner concludes that "the influence of Socialist ideas...is weaker today than it has been at any time since the late 19th century". Respect for socialist ideas has declined because the 'revolutionary' left has chosen for itself not the role of servant to the interests of the class, a force to support and sustain working class struggle, but, as Ratner himself has it, "a minority...of a minority...within a minority".

Birmingham:

Celtic Fans Victory!

On the 29th July, Birmingham City were hosts to Celtic in a pre-season friendly. Rumours abounded during the weeks prior to the game that the occasion was going to be a focus for fascists to attack the travelling support, which would also give them an excuse to invade and vandalise the Irish pubs, clubs and shops in the Digbeth area of Birmingham. Police advised publicans of the probability of attack, but did nothing to prevent it. They later complained to the media that the resulting chaos was as a result of "both" sides being organised. Clearly their game plan envisaged that only the fascist aggressors would be organised.

In anticipation of some degree of police complicity, Celtic Anti-Fascists, Celtic casuals and Midlands region Red Action drew up a battle plan to defend the area on the day.

On Saturday 29th, Celtic Anti-Fascists released the following press statement:

On Saturday, 29th July, 1995, thousands of Celtic fans converged on Birmingham to watch the Bhoys take on Birmingham City in a pre-season friendly match that ended in the home side winning 1-0. Off the park, before the match had even begun, there were clashes between the fascist-led Birmingham hooligans and Celtic supporters. Celtic supporters had been drinking in the Dubliner Public House and meeting up in Birmingham's "Irish Quarter", Digbeth, when they came under attack from a several hundred strong group of casuals and fascists. The attacking group appeared to be a united group of hooligans from various sides in Birmingham and the

West Midlands and under the leadership of well-known fascist organisers from the area. Obviously the nazis were intent upon building upon their recent "success" in Dublin where they managed to have the friendly match between Ireland and England abandoned. Celtic Anti-Fascists, casuals and ordinary supporters had other ideas.

After initial surprise, Celtic supporters fought back and ran their attackers out of the area. Clashes continued throughout the day and into the evening with the fascists and hooligans from Birmingham taking a thorough beating. Despite the violence being obviously inspired by the fascists, the

Birmingham police decided to wade into the Celtic fans, whose actions had been of a purely defensive nature.

At least four Celtic fans were treated for serious head injuries as a result of police baton charges. Some fans who were arrested after these charges were later released under caution after threatening to press charges against the police for their violent behaviour. A BBC journalist was later quoted in the local press saying, "The police baton charged the Celtic fans for no reason".

Celtic fans arrested complained of sectarian abuse by the police. One man was spat upon, had his nose bust open and was constantly referred to as a "Fenian bastard" by the police in the van which took him to the station. With England's finest fascists having taken a surprise beating, the police appeared prepared to make amends.

Inside Birmingham City's ground, the home support continued to taunt Celtic supporters with cries of "No Surrender to the IRA" and waved Red Hand flags at them. This so incensed Birmingham's managing director, Karen Brady, that at one point during the match, she left her seat in the director's box and snatched one of the offending flags from a Birmingham fan who had been waving it provocatively and giving Nazi salutes. Ms Brady, who hails from a London/Irish background herself, was later quoted as saying, "It had to be done and as no-one else seemed to be prepared to do it, I did it!" Her statement is also an obvious criticism of the stewarding and policing inside the ground.

The local media have continued to criticise the heavy handed approach of the police to the Celtic fans. A police spokesman even suggested that it was not the Celtic supporters who were the instigators of the violence when he said, "We know of

the reputation of Celtic fans when they travel away - it is a party atmosphere. But we also know of their reputation that if they come under attack they will stand and fight".

Serious questions have to be asked about the policing of the fans inside and outside of the ground and throughout the day. Publicans were able to tell us that Irish bars in Birmingham had been approached at least two weeks previously and warned to expect trouble from fascists and other hooligans who might be preparing attacks upon their bars and the Celtic fans. If the police had serious intelligence reports that there was likely to be fascist inspired violence, why did they fail to keep the fascists out of Digbeth - or do Birmingham police have their own agenda regarding such matters?

In the end it was the magnificent supporters of Celtic who managed to turn the tables on the Nazis. It is clear that the fascist hooligans are using these games as practice for next year's European Championships to be held in England. Celtic Anti-Fascists together with Anti-Fascist Action are determined to reclaim the game from the nazis on the terraces.

Next year's championships will not be a showdown between various international hooligan groups as the Championships have been in the past. Rather, they will be a showdown between the forces of fascism and anti-fascism in Europe. We are in no doubt which side Celtic fans will be on and we are determined that the anti-fascists

Short, Sharp Shock

A vanload of West Midlands BNP members got a shock recently when they got themselves lost in Leeds one Sunday afternoon.

The unfortunate fascists had stopped at the bus station to ask for directions when they were surrounded by a large group of anti-fascists who had apparently appeared from nowhere.

Suddenly the vans windows went in, and the boneheads who only a few moments beforehand had been cockily sticking two fingers up to the assembled anti-fascists were screaming in terror as they were dragged bodily from the relative safety of the van.

The van driver, a particularly fat, loathsome creature, distinguished himself by completely losing all control. In his panic, he couldn't decide whether to drive off, or attempt to hide under his seat. He was eventually hauled out of the van and given the same treatment as his mates, despite his pleading.

The battle was short, sharp and sweet, and in less than five minutes the anti-fascists had vanished again, leaving only a wrecked van and battered boneheads as proof that they been there at all.



IS IT SOMETHING WE SAID?

[Gramplan Red Action] describe the Orange Order as a 'natural constituency for fascism', fail to elaborate on how they arrive at that conclusion, but attempt to justify their statement by describing the actions of Combat 18.

We are also aware that 'Red Action' banners were prominent in a Connolly Association Parade in Edinburgh indicating their support for the terrorist organisation, the Provisional IRA. It would therefore appear that Gramplan Red Action is indeed a 'natural constituency' for terrorists.

Jack Ramsay, Grand Secretary, Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland. Big Issue (Scotland) August 95.

In the days leading up to the march, London BNP sources had warned that a Red Action team was planning an attack on a nationalist pub in Leeds under the cover of the march. Leeds nationalists wanted to make a date of it...after all, four members of Red Action are now doing time for planting IRA bombs. So there was a chance to hit back at these bomb-happy cowards. White Lies pamphlet, Leeds BNP

Larry is - this is a new concept to me - an 'ultra-liberal'. I guess I am one, too, for it seems to mean someone who does not generally approve of blowing people up. But then its probably people like me Red Action have in mind when the unnamed reviewer writes of 'the British left's'...carefully nurtured tradition of harmless eccentricity.'

Larry is far more to their taste. Their review ends, Recommended with reservations. Is being recommended by Red Action good news or bad news? Robin Ramsay, Editor, Lobster No. 29

In their May issue of Red Action, undoubtedly the strongest 'physical force' component within Anti-Fascist Action have laid into Searchlight, and not before time. They quite rightly flay Searchlight for their April announcement that MI5 supposedly set up C18, commenting that given Searchlight have been continually calling for MI5 to take over monitoring fascists, in drawing attention, through case studies, to Searchlight's lucrative relationship with the media at the expense of anti-fascists, Red Action have added significantly to the literature already available exposing Searchlight's true role.

Larry O'Hara, Green Anarchist

The article, all the more authoritative because the organisation it comes from have earned the right to be taken seriously, finishes by calling upon anti-fascists to give 'intelligence' to AFA directly, not Searchlight, and states that for Searchlight 'there can be no way back.' Hopefully this critique of Searchlight will have great consequences for the team though not, I fear, immediately politically fatal ones.

Green Anarchist, no 38.

CAG darkly whispers about the dangerous conspiracies "its cadres" are engaged in and all in all makes as much propaganda noise as it can muster about trailing behind Red Action and AFA. It hopes that some of its terroristic glory will vicariously rub off. Sad to say the comrades' independent communist work is virtually non-existent; they boast about putting up stickers in London! Perhaps we should dub them stickies!

Daily Worker supplement

AFA had mobilised in North London to oppose a heavily publicised BNP activity. The BNP, however, had eluded AFA by a switch of area and the comrades retired to a nearby pub to drown their sorrows.

It just so happened that AFA's turn-out on the day was mostly from RA and DAM. As drinking got underway, both groups began to argue over which faction was responsible for the fiasco-like attempt to oppose the BNP activity. Tempers flared, voices were raised and soon a full-scale punch-up between RA and DAM as the rivals turned on each other. A trashed pub, 37 arrests and 15 AFA comrades requiring hospital treatment was the result of this impressive display of unity by the British left.

Spearhead No. 317

AFA were able to mobilise over 1,000 anti-fascists to Waterloo and AFA security stewards were able to remove at an early stage, fascists drinking in the bars on Waterloo Station. Fascist stewards were noticeable by their absence. Many anarchists turned out as well as members of the Turkish Revolutionary group, Dev Sol, who even brought their children. Their leader was to later remark that he hadn't realised there was a difference between AFA and the ANL and he thought Waterloo would be a re-run of the passive anti-fascist/nazi activities he had attended with the ANL.

'The Anti-Nazi League, a critical analysis'. Colin Roach Centre, summer '95.

The SWP/ANL brought at most, 100 to Waterloo and they stayed out of harms way, preferring to stand close to the police rather than get into the fascists. This however, did not stop them lying about events at Waterloo by listing it as one of their successes in the programme they produced for the massive (200,000) ANL carnival in south London in 1994.

Colin Roach Centre pamphlet, July 1995

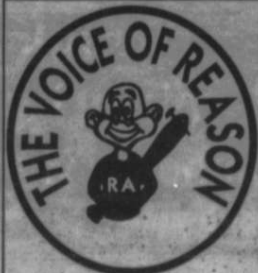
"It appears that the main Red Action mob has not turned up yet. Keep an eye out for the ones without placards and not shouting slogans."

TSG commanding officer in aside to underlying, Saoirse picket, Royal Tournament, Earls Court.

Some had the additional concern of a promised visit from Combat 18...Red Attitude sellers kept their heads well above the parapet on Warwick Road, secure in the knowledge that their handy young men propped up by the railings were not just there to take the morning air.

'As the Reds Go Marching On...'

Richard Kurt on the Man United Chelsea game



Poor Tiddles!

In the late 80's following a clash between Red Action and a number of NF skinheads in Upper St Islington which resulted in an all Metropolitan Police alert, a leading member of RA at the time making his way from the area was arrested by a number of plainclothes and uniformed 'federales'. One of the latter for no apparent reason began beating him in the back of the van with his truncheon with such enthusiasm, that, as two fellow police officers testified in a subsequent court case, the blood 'splashed on the wind screen'. In addition to wounds needing twenty stitches he received a broken hand, broken nose and a visit to the dentist. He looked like he had been hit by a bus.

As a result of the complaints lodged by the coppers, the aggressor was charged. In a hysterical farce of a case he was acquitted. He denied causing the injuries and submitted that he had not even drawn his baton. "The only time I have ever had occasion to draw my baton was to attend to a cat that had been hit by a car - to put it out of its misery." The jury visibly gulped. 'Poor Tiddles.'

I was reminded of the case the other day when reading a review of 'The One that got Away' an account by Chris Ryan (incidentally that is a pseudo nom just in case there are those among our readers who may not quite have entered into, the spirit of the ceasefire) of an SAS patrol in Iraq which went badly wrong. Anyway it transpires that our Mr Ryan had a dog called Turbo. Then one day he decided he would have to put him down. Not as in the case of the valiant constable to put Tiddles out of his misery - but to take Ryan out of his. Turbo it appeared 'grovelled too much'. "I shouted 'Cats!' and he hurtled between my legs. I put one round straight down into the top of his skull but he stayed on his feet his tail wagging against my knees. A split second I gave him another, and then as he was standing I put one between his eyes. Poor Turbo!"

The Security Forces; don't cha just love 'em?

Uncle Bill

London Saoirse and AFA booked stalls for the Hackney Show in July. The AFA stall, quite appropriately, was listed as stall no. C18! London Saoirse's allocation was not half as amusing as their actual address, which reads PO Box 3923 London NW5 IRA!

Trade was quite brisk and three young girls approached the stall and inquired about the ribbons etc. Duly informed, they appeared suitably enthusiastic and agreed to sign the petition calling for the release of the prisoners in exchange for a green ribbon each. Just then, an adult relative, who may have been their father, appeared on the scene and beckoned them over. "What do you think you're doing?" he enquired loudly. They stared at him by way of reply. "Do you know who they are?" he shouted. "They are the people who shot Uncle Bill!"

Suitably chastened, the elder two dutifully followed him from the park, though the youngest one totally ignored the adult representation, insisted on signing the petition, and demanded her green ribbon.

Which suggests that whatever her motivation, Uncle Bill wasn't her favourite uncle.

The entire British intelligence apparatus failed to predict the IRA's complete cessation of violence: security chiefs readily admit they were expecting perhaps a three-month cease-fire. This same intelligence apparatus is assuring government ministers that Mr Adams has room for manoeuvre...David McKittrick, Independent, September 1995

RED ACTION

IRA CALL THE SHOTS!



...When the IRA announced the ceasefire nobody was more gobsmacked than he British government. Days earlier, Michael Ancram, Minister of State, privately dismissed rumours of a ceasefire as an "IRA gimmick"...Major still believed it was only for three months a week after the IRA announced that it was a complete cessation. Issue 69, Sept 1994.

RED ACTION

TALKING TO THE ENEMY IRA CARDS ON TABLE



The Newry robbery used by elements in the media to fan the scenario refused to ignite. Neither did the semtex probably planted by military intelligence in Enniskillen. Coupled with the suspicion that the government is possibly being misinformed by its own intelligence service; such a hawks and doves scenario might well exist, but possibly a little closer to home. Issue 70, Jan 1994.

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WE ARE RED ACTION

The collapse of Soviet communism has signalled the end of an era. Capitalism's golden age, defined by the economic and political certainties of the Cold War, has turned to crisis. As a discipline on the entire working class, mass unemployment is restored as a permanent condition. As capitalism expanded, many reforms such as nationalisation, implemented to serve the needs of capital, also served the needs of society. As capitalism contracts, deindustrialisation and the return to the principal of privatisation in health, public transport, housing and education sustains the profits of the wealthy directly at society's expense.

In the short term, open conflict within and between classes is certain. Ultimately, the choice faced will be government without consent or social revolution.

Leninism, which decrees the interests of the working class are subordinate to the will of one revolutionary party, is the decisive influence on the far left. An apologist for the authoritarian state, it advertises the lie that dictatorship (ie minority rule) can be progressive. This betrayal mocks the theory and practice of Marx and Engels and any notion of independent working class initiative. The surrender of the political high ground to the opponents of total social change has paralysed the working class internationally.

Sectional division on the left continues to be a comfort to a system which socialism promised to replace. Factions, whose immaculate programmes for party dictatorship result in the pursuit of goals exclusive to themselves, contribute nothing to the real movement of the working class, except to help delay its political renaissance. In all essentials reactionary, they are the socialists of the previous generation.

Anarchism, which claims to be a libertarian alternative to Leninism, could never work. Anarchism means the principled opposition to the exercise of any authority. Accordingly, even the most perfect democracy would be regarded by anarchism as authoritarian as it means the imposition of a social decision by a majority on a minority. The answer to bureaucratic authority is democratic authority, not the abolition of authority. We must start afresh.

In every country the working class possesses one striking advantage over the capitalists - numbers. However, numbers without unity and unity without organisation is free of political advantage. The purpose of a revolutionary working class organisation is to raise the working class to the position of the ruling class. To transfer political power from the minority to the majority.

Unconditional democracy is the sole political form through which the aspirations of the majority can then be exercised and made secure. A revolutionary organisation must always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole. It must be working class in instinct, composition and orientation. It must be built in a democratic manner from the bottom up, rather than by decree from the top down. Direct democratic control by working people over their own organisations is the necessary preparation for the future rule of working people over their own countries.

WE ARE THE REDS!

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