

Red Action

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MINER DISTURBANCE



IN MANY WAYS

The double standards of the British establishment and media, have again been perfectly illustrated by their reaction to the IRA bomb in Brighton. Thatcher's speech calling those responsible "evil, cowardly, inhuman, and barbarous" contrasts strongly with her attitude for instance, to the sinking of the General Belgrano, well outside of the war zone, where over 260 men were killed in a manner no less painful or inhuman than those at Brighton. To Thatcher however, this was a heroic act.

In the last few weeks, the operations of various resistance movements during the second world war have been shown on the telly in a programme called S.O.E. We have also seen on the news, film of Afghan rebels "in action" including two men attempting to destroy a helicopter with a missile. In both cases, the men and women involved have been portrayed as courageous and honourable people an example to us all.

Why is the response so different when the IRA, who also have an army of occupation in their country, fight back in the same way.

It is not violence that the government object to but the motivation behind it. When violence can be used to their advantage whether for profit or propaganda, it is glorified and heroes are created. It is only when it is used against their interests that they abhor it.

BACKLASH

One point that is quite significant about this latest IRA operation is the reaction of the British working class to it. Some operations have in the past provoked a certain "backlash" of anti irish and anti republican feeling. This time, instead of comments like "bloody Irish bastards" the reaction seems to have been more a case of "they nearly got her that time". What has caused this change?

First and foremost, it is because this time they have attacked an obvious and clearly political target, without any injury to bystanders (not even a horse was injured). Secondly and most important, it was a government that had

done no favours to the British working class since it had been in office.

Over the past 15 years, the government has tried to convince the public that what is happening in Ireland could not happen here, and that they are protecting the majority of the population from terrorists. Events in the last few years have shattered this illusion.

RIOTS

It was said that CS gas and riot gear would never be used here, but the riots in 81 saw just that in Toxteth and elsewhere. It is known that constabularies up and down the country have been issued with thousands of rounds of plastic bullets. Another parallel with Ireland. Where are these to be used—on miners perhaps?

It is incidents like these that show that what has been happening in Ireland is beginning to appear over here. Perhaps some of the working

A GUNMAN HATED AND FEARED BY ALL?

class are now beginning to realise that the IRA/INLA are not looney crazed terrorists just people who realised that the only way that their voice would be heard was by their taking direct physical action against the state.

It cannot be said that the news of the Brighton bomb brought cheers of "up the provos" but there were plenty of people who thought that it would have been better if it had been more successful.



PEACE LOVING CHAMPIONS OF THE COMMUNITY?

MORE AND MORE WORKERS ARE BEING FORCED TO USE THESE TACTICS.

When you are a member of a tiny left wing group like Red Action, it is not at all uncommon to find yourself in conversation with some-one where they will say to you something to the effect of "I agree with most of your ideas and aims, but they will never come to anything. The vast majority of working class people do not agree with your politics, and you'll never convince enough of them to be able to do anything."

It is a fair point. Certainly if we were relying merely on our own persuasive abilities in order to build a movement large enough to have some effect, we would wait a very long time indeed. Fortunately for us, however, that is not all that we are relying on. There are other factors at work, which are daily bringing more and more working class people face to face with the reality, that radically new ideas are needed in order to offer solutions to the problems that they face today. The miners strike is a very good example of this.

If nine months ago, one of us had spoken to most miners, told them how we thought it not only right but necessary to break the law, how we applauded the riots in '81 etc, they would no doubt have smiled politely at us with the sort of expression that you use, when dealing with the inmates of a lunatic asylum.

BATTLES

Yet just a few months later what do we see. Thousands of these same miners involved in daily running battles with the police. Arson attacks on blackleg firms. Miners hijacking mechanical diggers and building barricades across roads. Police stations in pit villages besieged.

These acts which would have seemed unthinkable before the strike started, are happening because thousands of miners have quickly learnt that the law is not a neutral institution there to defend everybody's interests equally. It is there to defend the interests of those that maintain and control it, the upper classes, and as the miners have found out for themselves, the working class if they are to defend their interests, are forced at some stage to take on and fight the law. In short they have to come to exactly the same conclusions as us "loony lefties".

OLD IDEAS

As the economic system gets into more and more of a mess and there is no sign of it doing anything else but that, the government will try and clamp down and attack the living standards of more and more groups of workers, in the same way that they have with the miners. Sooner or later these workers are going to have to come to exactly the same sort of conclusion as many of the miners have, and realise that their old ideas of what is right and wrong, necessary and unnecessary, are no longer of any use to them. Just as all of us on the revolutionary left did, before we got involved in revolutionary

politics.

The rebellious defiance of the miners, represents a very real rejection of old values, amongst a very significant section of the working class. It is in situations such as this, that the ideas of the revolutionary left if they are presented correctly, can win support from significant numbers of them.

BUILD A MOVEMENT

It represents a chance to begin the process whereby the "fringe left" can begin to come in from the cold, and get in amongst the mass of the working class where they belong. Then we can start to think about building a movement that will not only fight the law, but more importantly defeat it.



AGAINST THESE TACTICS

INSIDE

THE POLICE: FEATURED!

HOW FAR ARE WE FROM A POLICE STATE?



A group of Red Action members in Hatfield Hertfordshire, recently had the opportunity to witness at first hand, both the growing authoritarianism of the police, but also the way in which popular resistance to it can be organised. We asked one of them for his views.

It all started when the police were called out to a lads stag night at a local pub, because people were drunk and getting a bit rowdy. If they had just asked people to leave them nothing might have happened, but they came in heavy knocking people about, and because people were a bit geed up, they fought back and chased them out of the pub.

There was a bit of a fight nothing really serious, and no-one was hurt, except for one lad who got a truncheon over his head, but they were really raging because a police car got turned over, and a lad they had had in handcuffs got away.

RAIDS

The raids started that weekend. Supposedly they were looking for the lad that had got away, but I think that really they were just mad that they had been stood up to, and were venting their anger.

They raided the house of the bride and groom the morning of the wedding, they raided the house of the one who got away four times that weekend. In one raid, about 15 of them started kicking at the front and back door of a house and scattered rubbish all over the garden, in the early hours of the morning. When they got in, they started knocking the man that lived there around, handcuffed him up, and dragged him off in his underpants. While this was going on, his three young children aged between 3 and 10 were all in the house. At the same time, various people, many who were nowhere near the original incident, were being picked up for no reason and held for a while, and then released.

Early in the next week, we managed to get about twenty people together and we formed the South Hatfield defence campaign. By the weekend it had become the Hatfield defence campaign.

INTIMIDATION,

What happened that weekend, was that transit loads of police were touring all over town, generally harassing, intimidating, and in several cases, assaulting people. They would do things like ordering hot dog stands where people had been queuing to close

promising to turn into the "final conflict" (their words). In the event they kept a really low profile. Most of us were convinced that this was directly due to the campaign and the publicity that it was receiving.

LOBBY.

On the day of the lobby, we had about seventy or eighty people there all-together. That doesn't sound like many, but in a small town like Hatfield with no political tradition, we were really pleased with it. What was especially pleasing was how it was supported by all different sections of the community, young and old.

The next week the local press again gave us great coverage. By now people like local councillors were being forced to show some interest and were asking questions in the higher echelons of the police. A public meeting of the Police Consultative Committee was called and the local chief superintendent came to face the public. A few of our people went down and by all accounts gave him a right grilling. Again this was well publicised.

At the moment the campaign is involving itself in helping those arrested to organise their defence, and getting all those that have been victims in any way to make a formal complaint. By any standards it has been a massive success. When the police first arrested four people on the night of the first incident, they were trying to get them remanded in custody and slap affray charges on them. Now they are just trying to get them out of the way on much lesser charges.

EXPERIENCE.

For me, though, much more important than that is the fact that people have experience for themselves that you don't just have to sit back and let the police get away with what they want. If you stick together and fight you can do something about it. The whole thing has been a great experience and a great lesson for all of us. As the graffiti that appeared in the shopping centre during the campaign says:

THE PEOPLE UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED

SOME COUNTRIES HAVE AUTHORITARIAN POLICE, WE HOWEVER, HAVE COMMUNITY POLICE.

Britain we are so often being told, is a "free" country. Unlike certain other countries in the world, often described as police states, in this country, as long as we obey the few laws, we are free to come and go and do as we please. This is the picture that is painted for us anyway, especially by figures in the establishment, the media, politicians, etc. But how true a picture is it?

Well, it is certainly true that we in this country do enjoy certain basic rights that are not available to others in certain other countries, but we should never forget that (1) many of these rights, such as the freedom to form trade unions, and free political assembly were only won after long and bitter struggles against the sort of rich and powerful people who seem to crow the most about them today, (2) this struggle to maintain and preserve freedom is not over and done with.

ORGANISED

It is a fact of life that there are within our society today organised groups that believe that working class people should not enjoy the amount of freedoms that we do, and are actively working to curb them, and take them away.

POLICE BILL.

An example of this is the attack on freedom, by the Tory party, with the introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill. This is quite obviously a blatant attempt to "legally" take away many of the basic rights that we have come to take for granted. When it is done this way there is at least some chance to organise opposition through the system. This is what has happened with the Police Bill, and some of the worst aspects of it have been dropped.

Far more sinister and dangerous in the long term is the recent emergence whereby the police, in certain situations "suspend" the legal rights of certain sections of society, totally off their own backs without any reference to any accountable body. In short the police have at times started to make up and implement their own laws.

For instance, imagine that ten years ago you had described to someone a country where the police had the right to seal off whole areas, and stop anyone that they wished

entering one part or leaving another part, not because any offence had been committed, but because in the opinion of the police an offence MIGHT be committed. It would have been assumed that you were describing some Eastern European or South American state.

What you would have been doing in fact was making a very accurate prophecy of Britain during the miners' strike.

During the strike on thousands of occasions miners have been stopped from leaving certain areas and entering others, purely because the police have decided that that is how it will be.

This act constitutes a massive and sinister encroachment by the police on basic civil rights in this country. They have no legal right whatsoever to act in this manner. They do have the right to arrest someone if they have "reasonable suspicion" that an offence may be committed, but someone going out with a sawn-off shotgun is not the same as a carload or coachload of miners going picketing. Anyway, if they do have "reasonable suspicion" they are supposed to arrest and let the courts decide. If they are not willing to do that, they have no right whatsoever to hinder their movements. It is a clear case of the police making up the law by themselves, for themselves.

TEMPORARY?

The police will no doubt claim that this is just a temporary measure brought in because of all the trouble on the picket lines, and this argument would no doubt win quite a few people over.

But the point that these people would be missing is that once you have allowed the police to establish in principle that there are times when they have the right to make up their own laws, then who is to decide when these times are, or what these laws should be.

POLICE STATE

Unless the police are accountable to the law always, then there is no accountability at all, because if the police have the right to decide themselves when to suspend their accountability, there will be absolutely nothing to stop them doing it how and when they please. They will have the power to make up what laws they want, when they want. A society where that happens is one that can quite justifiably be described as being a police state.

RESIST.

It would be quite wrong to claim that we live in a police state today, but these recent instances of the police acting in an arbitrary and ILLEGAL fashion, constitute a tentative but ominous step down a very dangerous path. It is in the absolute and vital interests of all sections of society that they resist this tendency now, before the police get too confident and start to do it more often. After all, if you let them get away with it today, merely because it is someone else that they are doing it to, then who will be left to defend you when they come for you tomorrow.



WE WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How quickly did you get tired of reading about Ethiopia. The press began to sense reader fatigue, and let it die a death, after about a week, along with the Ethiopian people of course (about 6,000 a day on current figures). Those that are familiar with the press in this country, will view the rapid alternation from bewildering bursts of indignation to serene periods of total indifference, with familiar cynicism. Still the contrast this time was a bit special.

The most unwholesome sight of all has to be the picture of Robert Maxwell pushing his way to the front of the stage, past the seven million that are estimated to be in imminent danger of starvation in Ethiopia alone. He barely outshines Thatcher who in her own publicity stunt issued a "personal instruction" (Sunday Times) that two Hercules Aircraft should be lent, provided that they be returned within a month. One of the leading relief agencies themselves labelled this parody of an effort as "ridiculous". Even the heartbreakers in the Kremlin provided 36 aircraft.

STUNT

Compare this to the lady's response to the menace to the sheep in the South Atlantic. There will however, so we are told, be no billion pounds immediate expenditure in this case. A fraction of that would certainly save the lives of perhaps a million people. What was the principle supposedly at stake in the Falklands that could possibly outweigh this.

Nine hundred thousand people have already been condemned to starve to death in 1984, because warnings sounded by agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (last April) and the World Food Programme (in August) as to the certainty of the coming famine, were ignored by media and government alike. A further 1.8 million will die next year if the present aid explosion is not sustained.

In answer to the agencies call for £200 million of aid, the EEC has come up with 19 million. It has at the moment in store, some 10 million tons of surplus wheat, which would be enough to feed the starving for the next six years.

DECISIONS

Facts such as these would indicate that far from being a natural disaster or act of God, famines such as that in Ethiopia, are just as much the product of conscious political engineering as for example the slaughter of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Mr Timothy Raison, the absurdly named "Minister for Overseas Development" has denied that aid has been systematically withheld from Ethiopia because it is a supposedly Marxist country. As Dr Charles Elliot director of Christian Aid has said, that is of course precisely why it has been withheld. Western governments have happy to see "Marxist" regimes anywhere destabilised by whatever means.

It would be a bit naive to suppose that a government that is willing to starve miner's children in order to force their fathers back to work, would not be willing to extend the principle overseas.

PRO WEST

The Sudan is right next to Ethiopia in the centre of the drought area. It's population will not be experiencing famine however, because it's "friendly" ie pro western government has been receiving



WAITING FOR THE FINAL WHISTLE MAXWELL'S DELAY

substantial aid for some time. Millions of Egyptians WILL survive this year owing 2.5 billion dollars aid from the US alone (in response to the crisis, Reagan has promised 45 million dollars ie 2% of Egypt's aid - to Ethiopia NEXT year.) But then Egypt is amenable to American investment and military direction. So it is easy to see that whether you live or die in this part of the world, depends far less on the climate, than it

does on your government's relationship to the powerful western economies.

And so it will go on. Aid organisations are already pointing to Bangladesh as the worlds next famine area. Very little is being heard about this from the likes of Robert Maxwell and Margaret Thatcher. No doubt they are saving their concern for when it generates maximum publicity.

RUBBISH

Colchester recently had an exhibition called "Colchester is a caring town" (that's the first joke), and some members of Red Action and S.W.A.G. (Socialist Women's Action Group) went along to hand out N.A.C. leaflets in opposition to the 'LIFE' stall there. There was absolutely no literature at all giving advice on abortion, even on the so-called 'Well Women Campaign' stall, so we felt it important to be there, especially as many visitors were secondary school girls.

The day after this exhibition ended, I was given a handful of anti-abortion literature which had been distributed to school girls at a local comprehensive school, during a talk given by 'Women for Life', a feminist (?) group.

LEAFLETS

One leaflet was headed "MASTER RACE, SELECTION STINKS!", and talks about those in favour of abortion as being Nazi sympathizers, supporting the atrocities revealed at the Nuremberg trials! They talk about the total inconsistency of being pro-abortion but against hanging, and then go on to give this advice to 'a young woman who finds herself pregnant (and didn't want to be) - 'don't decide anything in a hurry. . . if pregnancy is continued it gives everyone time - time to adjust, time to solve problems, time for par-

ents to come to terms with their daughter's predicament' - ABSOLUTE RUBBISH and MORE. . . 'Abortion isn't like having a tooth out (is this a fact? I ask myself!) they say, and then describe some terrible after-effects.

What the hell must these school girls be thinking by now - imagine what you might be thinking at the age of 13/14 years?

Well of course there's always question time and this is just one example: A girl asks 'What if the foetus is found to be severely handicapped?'. 'Well, look at it this way,'

came the reply; 'a handicapped child is far less likely to have the sort of problems that normal children have, such as glue sniffing and drug addiction.'

HOW BLOODY NARROW MINDED CAN THESE PEOPLE BE?

Don't they realise that apart from factors such as unemployment that many kids with glue sniffing problems are unwanted children, and as for drug addiction, if they were to see some of the severely handicapped children in our hospitals they would see prime examples of drug addicts; children whose lives can only be made bearable (and that's debatable) by the constant administration of highly dangerous and addictive drugs.

RUBBISH

Have these people got brains, I ask myself? Do they think about unemployment, starvation, suicide, living conditions and all the products and problems of this whole stinking capitalist system? - NO!

We in Colchester will be organising for talks to take place in the schools and will continue to campaign for every woman's right to decide. Please find out if this organisation has visited your local school and do what you can to prevent this sort of propaganda instilling fear and hate into innocent minds. Their address is: Women for Life, 18 Ash Grove, Penge, London SE20 7RD.

NAKED VIOLENCE

Strip searches are not uncommon in British prisons. People are quite often told to remove their clothes and have their bodies searched for hidden "contraband" - drugs, weapons, letters - by the Prison Officers. It is a humiliating and degrading experience, justified by prison authorities as being "in the interests of security". Searches are most often carried out after someone has been moved from one prison to another, or has been taken to a court hearing, or received a prison visit.

Republican women prisoners who are currently in Armagh jail in the North of Ireland are - like many other prisoners - being held for long periods of time on remand while awaiting trial. It is not uncommon in the North for people who have not been convicted of any offence, to serve more than two years in prison before their case comes to trial. For much of that time they may be taken to court once a week, and are also allowed visits several times each week.

Each time the women are taken out of the prison to court, both on leaving Armagh and returning, they are stripped and searched. They may also be searched before and after each visit. The drive to court can take as little as three minutes, they are allowed no bodily contact with anyone during the time that they are in the court building, and they are supervised at all times even when they go to the toilet - and yet they are still strip searched

on their return to the prison! The other security measures make the strip searches ridiculously unnecessary and unjustifiable, but they continue because they are humiliating,

and are seen as yet another way of grinding down the dignity, pride and courage of the women in Armagh.

Jackie Moore, a Republican prisoner, gave birth to a baby daughter, Dominique, in Armagh jail in July this year. She has been made to suffer many unnecessary, petty deprivations and degradations during her time in prison, including the fact that not only is she searched several times each week - but so is the baby!

How sick and sordid can a system be that resorts to such trivial humiliation in order to control its political opposition?

Jackie Moore, Dominique and the other women in Armagh will not be broken by the harassment of strip searches, any more than other Republican Freedom Fighters will be beaten by prison sentences, supergrasses, troops or plastic bullets. "The fight goes on."

Women republican POWs during exercise in Armagh Prison



SUBSCRIBE TO RED ACTION

Red Action is an organisation founded and run by working class people. As such, we have no wealthy sympathisers. Everything we produce is paid for by our members. Each issue of this paper costs us nearly £200 to produce and we get back under £100 in sales. If you agree with our aims or are sympathetic to us, we would welcome your support. You could give us this in two ways.

1. By buying extra papers to resell to friends. This would help us to increase our circulation and reduce our deficit.
2. By taking out a subscription to Red Action. This costs £3 for the next ten issues posted to you and if you wished to send us an extra pound or two, rest assured that we will not be offended.

PLEASE NOTE

TEMPORARY ADDRESS

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RED ACTION IN ACTION

Miners' gigs'

A van load of desperados set out north in search of the land of the midnight sun. In fact they got as far as Newcastle and Durham were just by coincidence Red Action had helped to arrange a couple of miner's benefit gigs, featuring Major Accident, Red London, Burial and Last Rough cause. Confused reports have been reaching us about someone trying to tunnel into Scarborough Conservative Club via a man hole or something. Can't think why. Everybody else seemed to think that it was in a pretty bad state. Anyway, thanks to all of those bands especially Major Accident who were responsible for putting up the Red Action contingent (they must be mad).

and more!

Those gigs were part of a series of several that we have arranged over the last few months, often in association with local support groups, which have raised well over a thousand pounds for the miner's strike. Our thanks to the Newtown Neurotics, Anti Social Workers, Gym Slips, Astronauts, Phase One, Kindergarten, Attila the Stockbroker and the Redskins. Also greetings to Swift Nick in Hull who is by all accounts doing great things up there.

Newham 7

As the continuing saga of racial harassment of Asians in East London continues Red Action members supported a rally in Upton Park called in support of the latest group of young Asians to be arrested for taking direct action against this. As always, we totally support the right of oppressed minority to physically defend themselves whenever necessary.

WE ARE RED ACTION

Red Action was formed in 1981 when a number of working class socialists were expelled from the organisation that they had belonged to. Various reasons were given for this, but it all seemed to boil down to the intellectual leadership showing their distaste for the raucous manners, and undisciplined behaviour or their working class members. We believe that we can organise ourselves as red workers on our own, without any interference from middle class intellectuals. We intend to avoid at all costs, becoming like so many other left groups, with their patronizing attitude towards the working class. We reject the idea that a socialist organisation, has the right to demand unquestioning obedience from its members at all times. Discipline when necessary must be based on respect for, and trust in, those making the decisions, and not blind servile obedience. We believe that socialism belongs to the working class, and that a socialist organisation, while it must be able to give a lead to the class, must also be able to reflect the spirit and consciousness of the class. We in Red Action will strive to this end. To justify our existence before the most cynical audience of all - the working class - and present socialist politics in a way that they can identify with, in their life, their work, and their leisure. We draw great inspiration from the Republican movement in Ireland, from the courageous and principled manner in which they conduct their struggle, and from the way that they have integrated class and cultural expression into their political movement. We unconditionally support the right of their revolutionary armies, the Irish Republican Army, and the Irish National Liberation Army, to engage in armed struggle to free their country from British Rule. We will work in co-operation with all and any groups that support the same aims as us. We do not reject any ideas, tactics or strategies just because we did not think of them ourselves.

WE ARE FOR

1. A working class organisation inspired and directed by working class people
2. United action between socialist groups FOR THE CLASS NOT THE PARTY
3. The Irish National liberation struggle against our own British ruling class
4. Total opposition to fascist organisations
5. Union strength - we support any picket line - in defence of workers living standards.
6. Opposition to all prejudice which divides workers, white against black, men against women.
7. Killing the lie that the "Communist states" are socialist.
8. Young peoples fight to determine their own future.

RED ACTION IS AGAINST

Anything read in



Drinkin'

As the world held it's breath, Red Action held it's third national conference. Due to our usual administrative brilliance, it turned out that hardly anyone outside of London actually knew when and where it was taking place. However not to be dismayed, seeing as this conference, unlike the second one, was actually quorate (having the required percentage of the membership present to make the votes valid) we quickly passed a vote abolishing the quorum before anyone went to the pub. Several issues were discussed including recent internal differences, and also the lack of national co-ordination. It was agreed to found an internal publication to act as a forum for debate and to hopefully improve the co-ordination.

Ireland

Red Action members in London were proud and pleased to be able to attend a benefit social to celebrate the release of Irish prisoner of war John McCluskey, after serving every day of a ten year prison sentence. Our warmest congratulations and greetings go out to him and his family.

Red Action members supported a weekend of action called by the Irish Solidarity Movement. A march and rally on the Saturday was followed by a conference on the Sunday. Red Action supported both of these.

RED FED

No peaceful road to socialism. A rejection of the traditional methods which the Left has used to organise around. The crisis will get worse.

FOR THE CLASS NOT THE PARTY

The points outlined above were some of the principles agreed at a conference called by the Socialist Federation recently. R.A. made a number of contributions to the debate which sought to 'link up' various groups of socialists from up and down the country. There was overwhelming agreement for the idea that this proposed link up could be best carried out by the adoption of a set of minimum principles, which would give the federation a clearer identity.

Despite the arguments for and against minimum principles, all R.A. members welcome the opportunity to strike up links with a wider layer of socialists who, more or less, share the same views as ourselves. A cornerstone of S.F. policy is "For the Class not the Party", just as it is with Red Action. A good example of the link up which may develop is the closer contact R.A. now has with the 'Reverse Order' group in Essex. If there is no R.A. group in your area, there may well be an S.F. group which can keep you posted about R.A.'s activities. Unity is strength.

A FAMILIAR SCENE FROM AN OLD PICTURE

"I readily grant that good work has been done in the past by the unions, but in Heaven's name, what good purpose are they serving now? All of them have large numbers out of employment, even when their particular trade is busy. None of the important societies have any policy other than endeavouring to keep wages from falling. The true unionist policy of aggression seems totally lost sight of; in fact the average unionist of today is a man with a fossilized intellect either hopelessly apathetic, or supporting a policy that plays directly into the hands of the capitalist exploiter."

TOM MANN (1886)

The 1880s through to the early 1900s needs to be looked at by socialists and trade unionists of the 1980s, and re-learned. It represents a period of advance for trade unionism and socialist politics that provoked the ruling class into making reforms so that labour would be passified and encouraged to see reform as realistic, against the uncertainty of revolutionary syndicalism. The advances made then by the working class involved learning organisation and tactics, sometimes in favourable conditions, sometimes not, always with the concerted effort of the bosses to break the class solidarity. There was then "a new spirit" which survived the hardships and the defeats. Tom Mann's "policy of aggression" was made an ongoing reality.

NEW UNIONISM

Tom Mann's rallying call was answered by the thousands of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who organised themselves in general unions under the banner of new unionism. To a large extent organisation was made possible by favourable levels of employment, but the influence of socialists and revolutionary syndicalists brought class consciousness into industrial disputes, a conscious-

ness that went beyond the 'new unions' and affected the old skill based unions particularly among their younger members.

STRIKE

The new unions adopted the strike as its main weapon against the employers. The rising phase of the trade cycle generally brought a good many short stoppages, the falling phase bringing fewer but longer stoppages. Always collecting money from those sympathetic and holding street demonstrations were an essential feature. The success of one group of workers made others anxious to take similar steps. Wil Thorne a young Irishman set about organising his workmates at the East Ham Gas Works in 1889. Within four months of starting, the union had grown to some 20,000 members. Thorne then went on to demand extra money and a change in the shifts which meant a reduction in the working day from twelve to eight hours. And won. After the Gas workers success the dockers got organised under the lead of Ben Tillet and after a strike of some weeks won the 'dockers tanner'. There was hardly an occupation that was not captured by

the enthusiasm to organise.

Employers retaliated by bringing in blackleg labour to break strikes. In this they were assisted by rising unemployment. Thorne's union was ousted only eight months after it's beginning. The dockers had a similar fate. The use of blackleg labour made violence a certainty, for the only way to deal with the threat that they posed, was by cracking heads. In the winter of 1889/90 bitter struggles developed. In one Will Thorne led the Leeds Gas workers, in an attack on a procession of blacklegs, guarded by police and army. The protection of the blacklegs from the bricks and missiles of the strikers, became essential to the employers. However, such was the strength of community feeling that their blackleg organisation, the Free Labour Association, was to become a near redundant force in time. They could not be protected all the time, and it became very unhealthy to be a member of it.

COURTS

The bosses then turned to the courts to get restrictions on union activities and to make their funds available for damages claims. In the 1890s, rulings were made against the blacking of firms and establishing the liability of union funds in such an event. But for a solicitor's error in one case Lyons v Wilkins, it would have been made illegal to even engage in picketing. The Taff Vale judgement confirmed the hostility of the courts to the

their funds liable for damages caused by disputes.

However, the long term aims of the ruling class, sought the accommodation of labour rather than confrontation. A reforming Liberal government gave credibility to and even encouraged, the young Labour Party. In this way the influence of the radicals would be lessened, and reformism would be consolidated in the working class. Trade union immunities were restored, and the threat of new unionism was replaced by a firmly conservative policy.

CHALLENGE

Much of this brief account, will seem very familiar to those who have been following the miner's dispute today. From the use of scab labour, to the use of the police and courts the parallels are there. Like our history, the miner's dispute shows that the power of the workers, lays in the power of the strike, allied with a willingness to crack heads if necessary.

But we have now had a hundred years of that power being used to merely win reforms, reforms which are fast being dismantled. A new movement, from the best traditions of the shop floor, must be won to a revolutionary alternative. As more and more workers find themselves in a situation where they can't operate within the law, a basis will emerge where more and more shop floor militants can be organised for a revolutionary fightback. We must respond to this challenge.