

# Red Action

ISSUE NO. 38 JANUARY 1988 20p

## FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Red Action article

On 21 January, a Bill proposed by Liberal MP David Alton receives its second reading in Parliament. Alton's Bill seeks to reduce the time limit under which women are legally allowed to have an abortion from the present 28 weeks after the start of the period of pregnancy to just 18 weeks. Alton and his supporters try to justify their aims by arguing that, at 28 weeks into pregnancy, the development of a human foetus in the womb is at such an advanced stage that abortion is morally indefensible. To back up this claim, they produce photographs of human foetus supposedly at this stage of development, which are obviously aimed at producing an emotional response in the viewer.

However, for all the emotional appeal of such photographs, it does not alter the fact that all medical evidence shows that a human foetus at such a stage of development can, in no way, be considered advanced enough to be judged an individual in its own right, capable of existence separate from the mother. Alton's Bill also overlooks the fact that an 18 week time limit would effectively outlaw the large number of abortions which occur because the mother finds out that the foetus she is carrying has some abnormality, as many abnormalities cannot be detected by tests until a later stage in a pregnancy than 18 weeks.

### DEFENSIBLE

So, in terms of the practical effects of Alton's Bill being passed, there are good reasons for opposing it. But there are also other, wider, reasons. The Bill is really about far more than whether or not there is a point at which abortion ceases to be morally defensible. It is just the latest in a long line of attempts to weaken and undermine the 1967 Act, which first made abortion legal in Britain. There have been no less than 14 such attempts and they have all been spear-headed by groups such as the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), whose eventual aim is the total abolition of any right to abortion and who are now strongly involved in the pro-Alton Bill campaign as a stepping stone to this real aim.

For his part, Alton shows his compatibility with such groups with statements like "Post conception, a child has begun its development as a unique and new individual and this overriding right must always take precedence before any other claimed rights."

In other words, Alton believes the real issue applies not at 18 weeks or any other number of weeks into pregnancy but "post conception" - as soon as pregnancy begins, and the right of the foetus to exist "must ALWAYS take precedence over any other claimed rights." In his own words, Alton clearly shows that his own eventual aim is exactly the same as SPUC and the other groups, who are currently throwing their weight behind his Bill. That aim is the total denial of any right of any woman to choose whether or not her pregnancy continues.

It is this aspect of the abortion argument - whether or not a woman has the right to choose - which dictates which position all those who consider themselves socialists must take on the issue. We always support and defend the maximum amount of freedom and individual choice possible as long as such freedom does not adversely affect others or society. Clearly, the right of a woman to choose on abortion is such an issue. You don't even have to approve of abortion yourself. It is unlikely that there is anyone who positively approves of abortion.



Women march against a previous attempt to change the 1967 Abortion laws.

Women do not have abortions to demonstrate their approval of it. They have abortions because it is their only way out of an intolerable situation and, as socialists, we must support and defend their right to do so.

### INDIVIDUAL

The issue at stake is not one of whether abortion is right or wrong but one of whether or not the individual has the right to make up her own mind on the matter. Pro-abortionists do not seek to impose their will on anti-abortionists, or to force them to approve of abortion. They merely defend the right to choose. Anti-abortionists, by seeking to restrict or outlaw the right to choose, are trying to force others to conform to their will.

It is when we view the abortion argument in this context that we see quite clearly that in the final analysis, it is not so much about morality as about control. Restriction of the right to abortion is just another means by which those who seek to exercise as much control as

possible over the lives of working class people seek to achieve their aims. They know that such restrictions will not even stop abortions happening just drive women back into the arms of back-street abortionists, with all the dangers to health which this entails. Never mind, at least they have that bit more control.

It is of course only working class women who suffer from the existence of such restrictions. The wealth of the upper classes means that abortion will always be available to them one way or the other. As clear an illustration as you need of the class nature of the abortion issue.

For socialists there can be no hesitation or vacillation on this issue. We totally defend the right of all people to do exactly as they please with their own bodies. Whether it be to choose what sexuality they wish to be, or to continue or dis-continue a pregnancy, there is only one position. Defend the right to choose. FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE.

## BLOODY SUNDAY 1972—1988

Red Action article

The sixteenth anniversary of Derry's 'Bloody Sunday' will be commemorated in Britain by a march through London on Saturday 30 January and Red Action urges all members and supporters to attend. 'Bloody Sunday,' 30 January 1972 saw thirteen unarmed and peaceful demonstrators shot dead on the streets of Derry by the British army. At least a further ten were injured.

The victims of this attack were demonstrating against the government's internment policy, which had been introduced in August, 1971. The scenario was that men and women in Nationalist areas of the six counties were taken from their homes, usually in early morning raids and interned in prison camp. There was no trial nor any reason given. Thousands had been herded off and were to stay in the camps for at least months and, in many cases, years.

### NATIONALIST PROTEST

As part of the Nationalist protest against internment, council tenants in the Bogside and Creggan areas of Derry were withholding rent payments. An anti-internment march was planned for 30 January in Derry and, although demonstrations in the six counties were banned at the time, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) allowed the march to go ahead as they feared it was likely to provoke a riot if they tried to forcibly stop people marching.

The march was due to move through the Bogside and then on to the Guildhall in the city centre but the British army blocked the exit from the Bogside area with concrete and barbed wire barricades. So the march stewards moved the crowd to the spot known as 'Free Derry Corner' to listen to speeches. As the first speaker, Bernadette Devlin, was introduced to the crowd, British soldiers opened fire indiscriminately and for no apparent reason.

### MEDICAL EVIDENCE

The shooting lasted for over half an hour and, when it ended thirteen lay dead. The regiment involved, 1st battalion Paratroopers, claimed they had been fired on first by the IRA and the initial British statement of the incident gave a detailed account of how each of the victims had fired on the troops or thrown a bomb at them.

However, Britain's own inquiry by Lord Chief Justice Widgery found no evidence to suggest that any of the victims had carried arms or was an IRA member. Medical evidence showed that most of the dead had been shot in the back whilst running away. One, Bernard McGuigan, 41 and a father of seven, had waved his handkerchief as a white flag while he went to help an injured young man and was shot dead as he did so.

When Home Secretary Reginald Maudling tried to tell his tale of IRA gunmen provoking the massacre in the House of Commons, Bernadette Devlin, then MP for Mid-Ulster, clouted him with the ceremonial mace. The British establishment and their media were more disgusted with that than with murder of thirteen innocent young Irishmen.

Within a year of Bloody Sunday, the commanding officer of the 1st battalion Paratroopers was knighted for "outstanding service to the Crown."

Show your disgust at this legalised butchery by the so-called forces of law and order by joining the commemoration. Assemble at 12.30 on 30 January at Whittington Park, Holloway Rd, London.



The scene of the Bloody Sunday massacre, Free Derry Corner, as it was in 1972 at the time of the massacre (left) and as it is today.



# The INLA Story part two

## A SECOND CHANCE



Seamus Costello, founder of the IRSP, addressing a meeting

The outcome of the feud last year between the IRSP/INLA and the IPLO has had a massive impact on the IRSP as almost all of the 13 dead and 20 injured had been involved in the IRSP. In Red Action issue number 36, we explained some of the reasons behind the feud and examined the immediate consequences but, to fully understand how this tragic situation came about, it is necessary to study the history of the IRSP/INLA and of the Republican movement, where the answers to the questions can be found. How and why did the IRSP/INLA evolve and how and why did they fail?

The Provisionals broke away from the Official IRA in the early 1970s, mainly because of the latter's reluctance to carry the war to the British but the split was also regarded by some as a rejection of the 'socialistic element' which was being injected into the politics of the movement by the Officials.

The Provos, at this time, were a politically conservative physical force movement, with the membership seeing it as their role to rid Ireland of any foreign interference, which included what some considered to be an 'alien and Godless communism.' Volunteers like Gerry Adams and Bobby Sands were regarded by older IRA members as dangerous radicals and there had even been moves to suspend them from membership for conducting a lecture entitled 'A socialist analysis of Celtic history' when they were incarcerated in Long Kesh.

### BOOK-BURNING

In compound 11, next door, other Provos engaged in a bit of book burning, which included Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital' and 'The Communist Manifesto' amongst others. It was in this climate in 1974 that Seamus Costello, a charismatic veteran IRA officer, left the Officials, who had, by then, abandoned the armed struggle.

Costello had decided to form an organisation which would encompass the most politically progressive elements of the other two groups, the promotion of left-wing socialist politics, combined with a full-blooded commitment to the armed struggle. The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and its armed wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), was born.

During the cease-fire negotiated between the IRA and the British in 1975, the INLA grew in prominence with many new members leaving the Provos to join them. This drift of members away from the Provos plus the continuance of the war naturally caused great embarrassment to the IRA leadership. The radicalism of the IRSP proved very attractive and they recruited people

like Bernadette Devlin and hunger-striker Patsy O'Hara around that time. They had over 800 members.

### INHERITANCE

Buoyed by their early successes, it was perhaps natural that they would challenge or be seen as a challenge to the Provos/Sinn Fein's dominance of the Republican movement, who the IRSP/INLA were entitled to regard as a right-wing breakaway group from the Officials, with no automatic right to the inheritance of the movement. They saw themselves as a left-wing breakaway group, born in feud just as the Provos had been.

Having set themselves up in business and entered into competition, their ultimate aim would have to be to assume the leadership. It can now be seen with hindsight, however, that the rivalry, with the Provos, based as it was, not on the political differences but almost entirely on the prowess of the INLA militarily, severely overstretched the capacity of the IRSP and was directly responsible for many of the subsequent problems which culminated in the 1987 feud.

The failure of IRSP/INLA to establish a left-wing identity often left them indistinguishable from the Provos/SF in their targets, methods and objectives. Consequently, any lull in INLA military activity left them exposed to the arguments exploited by their political adversaries that they were an unnecessary and irritating appendage to the Republican movement and/or they would eventually abandon the armed struggle like those other 'socialists' of the Official IRA. As a result, they were under constant pressure both to justify their existence and to prove their commitment to the armed struggle.

### PROPHECY

By the late 1970s, there was little room to manoeuvre except to fulfill the prophecy of their rivals and so, in an attempt to kill two birds with one stone, they opted to concentrate all

their efforts in an attempt to 'outgun' the Provos, which, of course, led to the inevitable relegation of the importance of political work, leading to the almost total collapse of the political wing. It was a vicious circle. The adoption of this strategy must now be regarded as a mistake and one of the fundamental reasons for the demise of the IRSP/INLA.

The assassination of Seamus Costello in 1977 left a huge hole in the movement politically and militarily for, not only was he the inspiration behind the movement but he was also Chief-of-Staff of the INLA. It is difficult to imagine in what direction the movement might have taken had he lived, but there was one major obstacle to his ambitions which could not be avoided and which any socialist cannot afford to underestimate. That is the hypnotic power and reactionary nature of the Catholic church, resulting in the conservative nature of the working class throughout the island.

As in any other country, the principle enemy of socialism is big business. In a problem exclusive to Ireland amongst European Parliamentary democracies, big business's main ally, the Catholic church, has proved to be the more formidable barrier to social progress. The attitude of the Church towards revolutionary movements throughout the country's history has been consistently one of open hostility.

### RELIGION

Racism, a legacy of imperialism, is a major problem faced by the left in Britain and paradoxically, it is the war in Ireland which most clearly exposes the contradictions and conflicting loyalties which exist within the left and the labour movement. Similarly, the influence of religion in Ireland has had the effect of, at crucial times, clouding the central issues facing the working class, sowing doubt and confusion, and afterwards leaving it even more securely shackled to the web of illusory interests that have no positive political value and which is used instead to encourage the working class to retain its identification with the views and interests of the establishment.

Few in Britain would argue that, in pursuit of a socialist objective, the appeasement of racism or fascism is any longer a viable tactic. Equally, the divisive role of religion in Ireland cannot be ignored as, in any case, confrontation is inevitable with

the Church in the role of champion of the capitalist class, eagerly taking on all challengers and confident of victory.

### COMMUNISM

Even so, the IRA's criticism of the Church has remained muted, preferring to avoid open conflict for fear of losing support. For the same reason, the IRA have been extremely sensitive to the accusation of communism and, as a result, timid in its approach to contentious social issues. This has allowed the Church at critical times to drive a wedge between the Republican and Labour movements.

The IRA's discretion is perhaps understandable for Irish history is littered with the skeletons of organisations and programmes, like Saor Eire or the Republican Congress, which sought to unite the Labour and Republican movements and in historic breakthrough, the Nationalist and Loyalist working class, under an anti-capitalist banner. With just one plaintive wail of "Godless communism" and the pointing of an accusatory finger by the Bishops, these embryonic organisations were effortlessly crushed.

There is nothing to suggest that, today, the power and ambition of the Church has radically diminished. Witness the referenda in the 26 counties in recent years, where an overwhelming majority have voted to enshrine the Church's reactionary attitudes on divorce and abortion into the constitution of the 26 county state. The Provos still portray the ambiguous attitude that inhibited their predecessors, recently describing the Church as a "significant organisation" and making provision for it in the process of drawing up a suggested constitution for a reunited Ireland.

### WORKING CLASS

This challenge can only be taken up by an organisation which has no fear but, indeed, welcomes the label 'communist' because that means it relies on the working class as a whole rather than any religious congregation within it, for its inspiration and support. Either socialism is a science or it is nothing. Religion, based as it is on myth and superstition, is the exact opposite of rational thought and argument, so socialism's outright rejection of a role for organised religion in the political process is both necessary and justifiable.

It is this kind of inconsistency in the politics of the Provos that the IRSP could have exploited but, back in 1977, they were involved in a competition to win the hearts and minds of the Nationalist working class, believing that their credibility within the community was reliant on their maintaining a respectable 'body count' in the war against the British.

They were often forced to make pragmatic decisions to secure short-term aims in an effort to relieve obvious inadequacies. For instance, in an attempt to increase membership and subsequently the firepower of the INLA, they were sometimes not sufficiently scrupulous in who was recruited, finding accommodation for apolitical individuals and criminal-type elements who were, nonetheless, valued for their ability as

By Gary  
Otterburn

'operators.' Some of these rose to prominence in the armed wing, bringing the organisation into disrepute, causing the gradual lowering of standards and morale until, for a time, the apolitical tail was wagging the socialist dog.

### SOCIALIST IDENTITY

To their eternal credit, the socialist wing refused to be intimidated by the criminal element, who had regrouped under the banner of the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLO). The feud was fought to retain the socialist identity of the movement. Five INLA men died for that political principle for, by this time, there was little else left.

Being totally objective, there must be some doubt at this stage as to whether the IRSP/INLA can fulfill its objectives but it is surely undeniable that there is a necessity for an independent and identifiable left-wing group as an integral part of the liberation struggle. Otherwise, there is a danger that the compromises with capitalism and imperialism which led to partition of the country in 1922 and the defeat of the Left/Republicans in the civil war, resulting in the establishment of a 26 county parody of a socialist republic, will merely become a 32 county parody of one. The IRSP have paid heavily for this second chance. They deserve our respect and support.

## INFORMERS

Showing that they are not old enough to look after themselves as well as proving whose side they are really on, National Front members in Leeds shopped Anti-Fascist Action member Paul Bowman to the police and managed to get him a four month jail sentence.

Paul was among a group of 50 or so AFA members who, as these things chance to turn out, came across some local NF members and a political debate ensued. Paul was only involved in the verbal side of things but, unable to defeat him intellectually, the Front pointed him out to the police and he was arrested.

Red Action's members and readers are urged to help Paul's stay in prison pass more easily by sending letters and greetings to P.M. Bowman, T13222, North Unit, Thorpe Arch, Wetherby, West Yorkshire.

## SUPPORT RED ACTION



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

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

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

The cost for this is £10 for one year.

Subscriptions to the paper are still available separately. The cost is £3 pounds for ten issues. Please remember that producing a paper is a very uneconomic business and we are always very grateful for any donations, and especially grateful to anyone who can take extra copies to sell.

PO box 158  
Hatfield  
Herts



INLA - FIGHTING ON

# WHOSE UNION IS IT ANYWAY

By Frank Gerard

The fourth anti-trade union law in nine years of Thatcher governments is currently being pushed through Parliament. And with huge Tory majorities in the Commons and the Lords and a lack of will on the part of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to mount a serious campaign of opposition, the new Employment Bill will become law by the summer of 1988.

## SECRET BALLOTS

Thatcher's previous anti-union laws have insisted on secret ballots on creating political funds (without which it is illegal for a union to even express an opinion on anything deemed "political"), on a union's affiliation to the Labour Party and on similar matters which have always been a part of normal union activities.

The new law goes further. It states that, even if there is a majority vote by secret ballot for industrial action, union members have a legal right to ignore the ballot result. It does not give members the legal right to ignore a ballot result against industrial action. A union member will have the legal right to work during a strike, to encourage others to do the same and even to campaign against union policy. Even if there has been a secret ballot. Even if that member is in a minority of one.

If the union tries to take disciplinary action against such a member, the government-appointed "Commissioner for Trade Union Rights" will give the member legal advice, assist the member to take the union to court and the government (or rather the taxpayer) will pay the legal costs of the member.

The new law will also make it compulsory for each union to re-elect their General Secretary every five years and for ruling bodies of unions (National Executive Committee or equivalent) to be elected by secret postal ballot.

## PROCEDURE

At present, all union officials are either elected direct by a vote of members or appointed by a body elected by members to make such appointments. Each union decides on the voting procedure which it thinks best for its own situation and the procedures can be, and often are, changed by a vote of a majority of members for such a change.

The new law says that a union can no longer choose its own democratic procedures by a democratic vote of members. The procedures are now to be dictated by the government, irrespective of the opinions of the union's members.

Do you recall the outcry a few years ago when the Polish government interfered with the right of Polish workers to run their union, Solidarnosc, as they saw fit? The Tories told us then about the lack of freedom in the Eastern bloc. They are now taking a leaf out of the Polish government's book by interfering with independent trade unions themselves.

Imagine the situation if Tory institutions such as Barclay's Bank, the Church of England or the Carlton Club were compelled by law to elect their ruling bodies by secret postal ballot. It would be condemned as state interference in the right of independent organisations to run their own affairs. Once more, it boils down to one rule for them and another one for us.

## UNION ELECTIONS

The only reason unions were founded and continue to attract millions of members is the need to defend workers against the power of their employers. The anti-union laws are designed to weaken working-class organisations so as to increase employers' control over the lives of their workers.

If union elections are held by voting at a workplace meeting, members can attend to hear the views of the candidates or their representatives before voting. The Tories do not want that kind of democracy. They insist on a postal ballot where the member, sitting at home, only has access to the view of the candidate the Tory newspapers want her/him to hear. Thus, the Tories hope, the candidate they favour will be elected.

Fortunately, it is often not that straightforward and the Tories have clearly miscalculated the views of union members in some of their previous legislation. Ballots held under compulsion of recent laws on creating political funds and retaining affiliation to the Labour party have, without exception, gone overwhelmingly in favour of the funds and the Labour party. Four years after unions were banned at GCHQ, Cheltenham, a hard core still refuse to give up union membership, even though they are on lower rates of pay than non-union colleagues and have been told that they have forfeited promotion opportunities because they have refused to resign from their union.

## RANK-AND-FILE

The TUC leadership have failed in their moral responsibility to build a serious campaign around such opposition to Tory laws. It is therefore all the more important for rank-and-file members to oppose, expose and defy these laws where they can. In the absence of any such serious opposition, the fifth Thatcher anti-union law will not be long in coming and it is widely believed that the government plan to extend the GCHQ ban across the public sector to include all jobs they care to describe as "essential."

# STILL CRAZY AFTER THESE YEARS

By Danny O'Brien

New Year, traditionally the time for reviewing the past and planning the future, seems an appropriate time to take a look at the past and possible future of Red Action. So we asked one of the few Red Action founding members still active in the group to take such a look.

Red Action was formed just over six years ago by a small number of working class socialists, mainly from the London area, who had been expelled from the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) or had left it in protest at the expulsions. There is no space here to go into the full story of these expulsions (see note at end of article). Suffice it to say that the expulsions and the manner in which they were enacted were the culmination of a growing unease which we had felt for some time about certain characteristics of, not only the SWP, but which the SWP shared with all the traditional left-wing groups we had come across.

Broadly speaking, these were:

a) The significant gap between the left and the mainstream working class, both in terms of the composition of its membership, which seemed to be overwhelmingly from academic/professional middle or upper class background, and in terms of an inability to be able to relate revolutionary socialist politics in a manner accessible to the working class.

b) The undemocratic nature of these groups, which all seemed firmly in the grip of self-perpetuating cliques, not averse to holding on to control with methods which had nothing in common with democracy or socialism.

c) An unprincipled approach to political work, gauging their commitment to any issue on the basis of what could be gained from it for their own group rather than political correctness.

So, with what now seems laughable naivety, off we set to form this new organisation, which would eliminate all these faults and turn the left in Britain upside-down. However, as we were at the time blissfully unaware but soon to realise all too soon, the creation of a political movement capable of flourishing, requires a lot more than just proclaiming its existence.

It requires a coherent, comprehensive political identity, on which its members are agreed and united, an analysis of the existing political situation and a strategy for relating to it, as well as an efficient organisational structure. It requires all these and more. Red Action, at that time, had none of them, nor an awareness of their necessity.

## SPLITS

Given this, it is not surprising that the first years of Red Action saw little progress and were marked by splits and arguments, political and personal. New contacts and members from outside the London area were lost. In retrospect, it is clear that it would have been no surprise if the "political organisation" had withered into no more than a glorified social group built around a few people attending left events, before collapsing when the social group drifted apart.

That this did not happen was due to massive commitment and hard work by a few individuals, spurred on by their belief that a new form of socialist organisation was both necessary and possible and also because, for all the inadequacies in the way we



The Grunwick dispute of 1976, in which a largely Asian workforce went on strike for union recognition, was one of the earliest disputes that those who were later to found Red Action were involved in.

were setting about things, it was still striking a loud enough chord in enough places to prove it was not a pipe-dream. There was some basis and justification for our belief.

So, on faith, hope and chewing gum, we hung on in there and began the task of slowly uncovering the massive holes in the flimsy foundations upon which our group had been thrown together, and trying to repair them. It is a task which has hardly yet begun and there are massive goals to be achieved yet before we can even say that RA's long-term survival as a political movement is guaranteed.

## STEPS FORWARD

Yet, it is also true that the last year or so has seen significant steps forward in all aspects of RA's development. This can be seen in the increasing impact of our practical activities - in the role RA played in setting up Anti-Fascist Action, the role we are now playing in Irish support work (such as recently setting up Irish Republican Prisoners' Support Groups) and the role RA has played in disputes such as the Leings lockout. It can be seen in the increasing level of theoretical development in RA, in the more highly developed arguments appearing in our publications, in our intervention in debating arenas such as the state capitalist forum, and in the increased efficiency in our organisation with publications now being produced more regularly.

The results of such developments are already being seen in, for example, our slowly but steadily increasing membership and, even more importantly, in the fact that we are now succeeding in integrating members from outside the London area into our organisation, thus laying the basis for future development nationally.

So there is cause for encouragement without ever forgetting that there is so much which still needs to be done if we are to continue to develop. In my opinion, the primary tasks facing RA right now are:

- to formulate a clear, comprehensive political platform;
- to begin to correct the socially uneven development of RA. By this, I mean that a majority of RA members are from one section of the working class - white, male and under-35.

## CHARACTERISTICS

We should remember, however, that under-representation of women and ethnic minority members is not exclusive to RA among left groups and, because we are such a tiny group, our weaknesses in this respect are magnified. We would not, however, deny that our political failings have contributed to the problem.

Neither should we forget that uneven social develop-

ment is not an exclusive RA problem. In my experience, there is not one left group which has overcome the problem of attracting most of its members from a particular social strata, with the result that a particular social character becomes dominant within the organisation. When things are viewed with regard to the long-term aim of building a mass working class movement, RA's particular limited social characteristics would be less of a liability than those of some other left groups.

We know that we cannot correct the traditional failure of left groups to be able to build their organisations on anything other than professional/academic middle and upper class elements by creating a mirror image organisation which has the same problem in being able to relate to all but the roughest, toughest elements. We must create an organisation capable of relating to, winning the confidence of and representing all sections of the working class. For only such an organisation will ever be capable of smashing the power of the capitalist state and replacing with a state controlled by the working class.

## THEORY AND PRACTISE

I believe that Red Action, in spite of its many failings at present, is, because of its many positive features, capable of becoming a movement which can contribute more to the theory and practise of building such an organisation than any other left group in Britain and that is why I am, and will continue to be, a member of it.

The events mentioned at the start of this article are described in a pamphlet produced at the time. Although the pamphlet does not have much relevance to RA today, it is still of interest to those wanting more information about the origins and history of RA. Copies can be obtained from the Box number for 50p.

# LOOK AFTER YOUR WELFARE

Red Action's national conference, held last May, elected a welfare officer and set up a welfare fund. The fund's purpose is to provide financial help to anyone in need of it and the role of the welfare officer is to manage the fund and investigate claims for assistance. The welfare officer reports to the RA national council, who make the final decision as to any payments made from the fund.

The fund was set up, in particular, to help RA members and supporters should they be arrested at political events. In such a case, the fund could assist with legal costs, pay for items (eg a radio) for someone held in custody and give financial help to the person's dependants.

However, this is by no means the only situation the fund could help with. Anyone, whether a RA member or not, may apply to the welfare officer for help for any reason and each case will be considered on its merits. So far, the fund has assisted a RA member who found himself unexpectedly in hospital and claims currently being investigated include that of a member who has suffered a long-term illness in recent months and another who is in prison awaiting trial.

All full RA members must pay £5 per year into the fund and those who have not yet paid their 1987 amount are urged to do so immediately. Supporting members are also encouraged to pay £5 per year to help finance the fund. Donations from other readers will be most welcome. Cash can be passed to the welfare officer via any RA member. Cheques and postal orders, made payable to Red Action, can be passed on in the same way or may be posted to the RA box number but please include a note making it clear that the money is for the welfare fund. You do not know how soon you may need the fund's help.

# Articles in R.A.

Articles signed Red Action are written, edited or approved by the Red Action editorial board and represent a Red Action political statement. Articles signed by the author represent her/his own views and may not necessarily represent Red Action's politics.



Following the party line can be an arduous task for members of traditional left groups, where the line changes irrespective of principle, thus confusing members.



Delegates at the TUC debating how they are going to stop anti-union laws

# THE VOICE OF REASON



According to a company called Regain Properties there is a housing shortage in London, in the shape of a crying lack of flats for the filthy rich. The company plan to build a nine storey block of about twenty select and exclusive flats, of about four or five bedrooms and bathrooms each. They are expected to fetch over five million pounds each.

At the other end of the market, people sleeping rough are being charged between three and ten pounds each by "landlords" for the privilege of sleeping at select and exclusive sites. This is due to the scarcity of "skip places" resulting from the Tory Council's decision to close off the Embankment arches - a well known skip place for the homeless - to make way for a luxury office development. Help is at hand however, in the shape of Ken D'Cruze, Lewisham's Tory Housing Spokesman, who has suggested that empty council garages which motorists refuse to use through fear of vandalism, could be converted into homes for single people. Many of these are underground without heat, natural light or ventilation, yet Ken is convinced that the homeless "would love them". "We could also sell them off to private developers" says Ken "but the council is run by crazy left wingers who won't do what has to be done" "I have always been a right winger" he adds. Very few would ever doubt that.

Peter Hunt, British Coal Industrial Relations Officer, asked by a journalist whether he thought that life would be easier for everybody if "moderate right-wingers" such as Des Duffield or Eric Clarke were in charge of the National Union of Mineworkers, replied "They are nice men but very naive. They still live in the days when they think that if we give a bit then they can give a bit back."

"In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson told the Greek Ambassador to the U.S. "Fuck your parliament and your constitution. America is an elephant, Cyprus is a flea, Greece is a flea. If these two fellows continue itching the elephant they may get whacked by the elephant's trunk..... If your Prime Minister gives me talk about democracy, parliament and constitution, he and his parliament and constitution may not last very long."

He meant what he said. Two years later the Colonels took over and maintained a military dictatorship for seven years. You have to hand it to Johnson, he sometimes told the truth however brutal. Reagan tells lies. The situation in Central America is not about the Kremlin's wicked ambitions. It's about money and power, about poverty, injustice, deprivation and slavery. The U.S. has always supported, and in some cases created, all military or right wing dictatorships in the continent. Among other verified acts, the C.I.A. brought down the legally elected democracies of Guatemala in 1954, and Chile in 1973. The tortured of Latin America have been tortured for "Christian principles" "freedom" and "the fight against Communism" Thousands of Nicaraguan men, women and children have been murdered and mutilated by the Contras - who Reagan compares to the Founding Fathers. They have been raped, skinned, beheaded and castrated. We have to stop the American elephant."

The words of playwright Harold Pinter.

"It was not a mistake" (November 1986) "I didn't make a mistake" (November 1986) "I do not think that it was a mistake" (November 1986) "Mistakes were made" (December 1986) "Serious mistakes were made" (January 1987) "It was a mistake" (March 1987)

A small selection of some of Reagan's quotes on the "Iran-gate" sale of arms to Iran in exchange for the freeing of American hostages affair.

During a debate in the House of Commons last month on the plight of Britain's old age pensioners, speakers were interrupted by Tory MP Neil Hamilton, who shouted "The IRA ought to be brought in to do away with them." I think we all know who we would like to see the IRA brought in to do away with.

"I became a philosopher during the war. I realised soon enough I was a coward and that it wasn't me I was fighting for but my landlord's land." That's a quote from Johnny Speight, the creator of TV's Alf Garnett. Johnny's obviously no mug though I sometimes suspect from the snippets of conversation overheard at work - "Did you see Alf last night? Funny old bastard, it's right what he says though, isn't it?" - that the satirical anti-racist message behind the original series is lost on, or deliberately ignored by, a large section of the audience, who are instead inspired by the bigoted philosophy of "Chairman Alf." If they are not laughing at him, they must be laughing with him. In these enlightened times, with 70,000 race attacks a year, that cannot be a good thing.

Politics is simply a matter of priorities. The government, elected by the people, decides, on behalf of the people, where the taxes, collected from the people, will be best spent in the interests of the people, or, at least, that's how it is meant to work. Reality, however, is a little different.

Nurses living in hostels now pay more than £20 a week to share a communal bathroom between five of them. Health Secretary, John Moore, is moving into a palatial new office suite boasting a chandelier and private bathroom with bidet. No expense is being spared in the £36 million reconstruction of the 1820 style Whitehall mansion.

Philip Barber, whose son David died recently after an operation was delayed for months due to the cuts, said "There is something wrong in a society that needs me to play pool so that babies can have operations to save their lives." Given this government's priorities, how many extra games of pool will Philip Barber have to play to cover the cost of the "Health" Secretary's chandelier.

Watching the news one evening, I noticed an item dealing with the human rights abuses suffered by political prisoners in the Soviet gulags. The paper that day ran a feature on a similar theme. It read "I remember the first time I went down there. There's a corridor with cells along it. In each one, there's a flap. Out of each flap an arm is outstretched. It's like a sea of arms. They rave and ring bells constantly. It's dark below ground level and you have to walk right in the middle to avoid being grabbed. As you walk along, you catch glimpses of disturbed faces. The radio's left on because the doctors say it's relaxing for these women to hear music but it's pop music played very loud. It could be heavy metal blaring out. It's very bizarre as it competes with all the cries. They're like forgotten people."

The term "human rights" would suggest that all humans have some basic rights but we are often given the impression by the media over here that the issue is the sole preserve of Soviet dissidents. The quote above was from ex-prison officer Julie Davis, interviewed in the Guardian on 9 December, describing conditions in Holloway women's prison, London.

"We could be on the verge of a new age of freedom and a long period of peace, prosperity and stability such as our people have not known in this century," claims Margaret Thatcher.

1. Homelessness has increased seven-fold in a decade.

2. Unemployment is killing 2,000 people a year, according to an analysis of government figures by Dr. Richard Smith, editor of the British Medical Journal.

3. Building societies repossessed seven times as many houses last year as they did in 1980.

4. Sixteen million people - nearly one in three of the population - are living on or just above the poverty line.

5. Thatcher has reversed the fifty-year trend towards greater equality of income which was apparent until 1979. The biggest beneficiaries have been the wealthiest one per cent - 200,000 taxpayers who have, on average, increased their take-home pay by £17,500 per year.

The facts suggest we are on the verge all right. But I suspect it will have little to do with peace, prosperity and stability.

Mr Michael Howard, winding up the debate on the poll tax for the government, claimed that the rating system was "an ancient monument from the reign of Elizabeth I which should never have survived into the reign of Elizabeth II." He neglected to mention that the last time a poll tax was introduced, in the 14th century, it lasted only four years, a census found that the population had shrunk by a quarter, it was responsible for provoking the peasants' revolt of 1381 and the man who put it forward was hanged, drawn and quartered. What are the chances, I wonder, of history repeating itself.

During the Spycatcher trial, Robert Alexander QC, counsel for the government, declared "There is simply no room for saying freedom of the press is important that runs headlong into the principle of confidentiality."

On 3 December, the Attorney General won an injunction banning Channel Four from broadcasting a re-enactment of the Birmingham pub bombing appeal. Lord Chief Justice Lane, who is also hearing the appeal, said he had not yet seen the programme but it was bound to create the risk of undermining public confidence "that the court get it right."

Apart from the decision being a further infringement on the right of people to know, it suggests that, with the prosecution evidence further undermined and discredited, Lord Lane's statement is an early and depressing indication of the likely outcome of the appeal.

The vote in the House of Commons aimed at banning the "promotion of homosexuality" in state schools has been described as "fascist" by some MPs as it is based on a number of particularly dangerous, stupid and bigoted assumptions.

The first such assumption is that there is something wrong or immoral in being homosexual. The second is that admitting homosexuality exists actually encourages homosexuality, the third that simply discussing it "corrupts" children, the fourth that children can be "taught" to be homosexual and the final assumption is that the objective of homosexuals is to "recruit" people to the homosexual "way of life."

The main plank of these idiotic theories is that everybody, at some stage, makes a conscious decision to be either homosexual or heterosexual - bisexuals have an added problem in that they appear to be indecisive as well.

If a 2,000 year-old, world-wide campaign failed to convince everybody to be heterosexual, how could any amount of propaganda now convince anybody to become homosexual? The real effect of this type of crusade is to encourage the "natural" majority to hate, fear and despise the "unnatural" minority.

The violent rhetoric demands eventually violent solutions and one Tory council leader, Mr Bill Brownhill (or is it Brownshirt) talked last year of putting "90 per cent of homosexuals in gas chambers," while the recent firebombing of the Capital Gay newspaper office was applauded by Tory MP Kellett-Bowman, who said "there should be an intolerance of evil."

Homosexuals were persecuted by the Nazis in Germany and 600,000 of them died in concentration camps. There is a saying "Those who start by burning books finish up burning people." It should not be forgotten now.

Obviously James Anderton had one of his famous messages from God (or Ian Paisley) because the Manchester Martyrs' commemoration published in RA issue 36, was banned by the police for the first time this year. Despite support for the march from Manchester city council, the police claimed that the expected loyalist/fascist opposition would lead to serious public disorder and even tried to ban the rally, which did take place. Only about 60-odd loyalist/fascists turned up and it is clear that the march was really banned in retaliation for the Enniskillen bombing. Several hundred people, including the H-Block Martyrs Republican Flute Band from Scotland, attended the rally. Speakers included an IRSP representative but Sinn Fein withdrew their speaker shortly before the rally. Apparently, they saw the rally as too pro-Republican and believe that solidarity groups in Britain should call only for "Troops Out" and "Self-determination for the Irish people."

# WE ARE RED ACTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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