

**THE  
MAKING  
OF**



**RED ★ ACTION**

**1941-1945**



## RECRUITMENT, SECURITY, DEMOCRACY

Practically since its formation in 1981 the name Red Action has been associated with violent, semi-clandestine conspiratorial activities. This image has currency among groups on the far-right and left, and among individuals attracted to the organisation itself. The responsibility lies in Red Action's origins and has been sustained for the same reasons.

Founder members of Red Action were expelled from the Socialist Workers Party in the spring and summer of 1981 for their involvement with the organisation of groups of anti-fascists from inside and outside the SWP to confront similar groupings on the far-right. This tactic was adopted because it was necessary, and because it proved vastly more effective in curtailing fascist influence on the streets, at gigs, etc., than more conventional forms of protest.

After our expulsion, our immediate attention was naturally focussed on this area of struggle apparently abandoned overnight by our parent party. It was in Chapel Market in North London where the National Front has a particularly strong branch (with the ability to call on numbers of between 60 and 100 for street confrontations) that our efforts were largely concentrated. It commanded all our attention, and was in fact at that time, the sole reason for our political existence.

The 'Battle' for Chapel Market had been going on for seven years. First of all between local SWP branches and their NF counterparts and later between the Anti-Nazi League and the National Front. The election of a right-wing Tory government in 1979 destroyed the NF's electoral base, which meant that they placed even more emphasis on the importance of 'street-work'. Instead of adjusting the ANL to meet the new challenge, the SWP, who dominated the ANL, wound it up with the result that to justify the decision SWP branches could no longer support activities against "Fascists" who officially did not exist. (In later years the logic of this policy meant that these "revolutionaries" either shared 'pitches' with the Front or abandoned them if fascists showed aggression). With the withdrawal of the support of the ANL/SWP the NF would have quickly won Islington and from there spread their influence through a large area of North London as well. In fact within just one year the exact opposite had occurred.

Operating with a tenacity borne out of a conviction of our own absolute correctness this 'shadowy' group called Red Action had helped turn the situation on its head. Our propaganda won over, or neutralised, the locals and in frequent physical clashes the fascists were hospitalised, humiliated and demoralised. Around the same time nine of their hardcore were convicted of possession of fire-arms and armed robberies; the branch collapsed. This created a 'domino effect' with other branches in North London completely ceasing activity.

For us in Red Action it meant that our tactics of physical confrontation and our politics had been vindicated. A view not shared by the SWP of course, or indeed the rest of the left who regarded us with distaste and our tactics with suspicion. Not surprisingly due to our almost complete isolation within the left our political ambitions were limited and we tended only to initiate or take part in activities that we felt confident could be physically defended. For instance, during our campaign at Chapel Market we were informed by a



'Tout' via 'Searchlight' that representatives of the NF/BNP and National Action Party had met to discuss the situation, and had reached a decision to "put out a contract" on those they held to be chiefly responsible for promoting attacks on their respective organisations. For us it was further proof of the impact of our politics, and that the paranoia that existed as a result of our high anti-fascist profile was indeed justified. With another group operating autonomously out of Manchester under the name Red Action, the hit and run campaign extended nationally, both our reputation among the fascists and our isolation with the left increased. It must be pointed out that confrontations rarely occurred as a result of political agitation, paper sales, marches, public meetings by us (by and large we hardly did any) but because we sought them out for retribution. Furthermore the campaign was essentially 'negative' in the sense that we never, after Chapel Market, sought to replace their propaganda with our own. On some occasions for tactical reasons (wariness of uniting our enemies) we neither claimed responsibility nor credit for these activities. The success of an operation contained its own political reward. As an organisation our safety lay in our anonymity. There was little danger of infiltration at this time due to the camaraderie and intimacy that existed as a result of the semi-clandestine and security conscious way the group operated. Individuals were forced to remain politically anonymous at work and in the communities in which they lived for fear of identification and retaliation by fascists or their sympathisers. Practically our only other political activity at this time was taking part in and selling our paper which was produced intermittently, at large left wing demonstrations. For Irish or Republican demonstrations we often provided stewards and helped with security, and so for this and for the reasons outlined above we rarely ever marched behind a Red Action banner. We sought neither recognition nor recruits. To describe the structure of Red Action at this time as 'Terrorist' is not intended as a smear or an accolade but as an accurate political definition of how we operated.

As time passed our isolation among the left increased, we could only recruit on the anti-fascist ticket, and of course by now we had been identified by various groups as the sole source of this physical threat. To try and avoid the degeneracy into gang warfare and 'individual' terrorism which appeared imminent, and given the balance of forces could only have resulted in our incarceration or annihilation, we realised that we had to go beyond our own 'necessarily' closed circles. Initially contact was made with an Asian group in Newham (led by an ex-member), a group called Reverse Order and East London Direct Action Movement. From this line of thought Anti-Fascist Action came about.

#### Anti-Fascist Action

The first AFA conference in Conway Hall, London, in July 1985, was on the face of it, considering our isolation, a surprising success. About three hundred people attended, including delegates and observers from other organisations including paradoxically the SWP. However, with the benefit of hindsight it also contained the seed for its own demise.

Up to the conference Red Action representatives had played a major part in all the planning committees, the original conception was in fact ours anyway. It was Red Action who made initial contact with all other groups and organisations. We had also drawn up (on the back of a beer mat) the heart



of AFA's founding statement that AFA would "fight the fascists physically and ideologically on the streets". Under threat from a 'right wing commando group', Red Action naturally assumed total responsibility for security on the day. That apart, considering Red Action's central role in its organisation our actual contribution to the debate was muted and almost negligible. Why? In the first place given Red Action's reputation on the left we felt that too close an identification with AFA could alienate potential support: it might be seen as a Red Action 'front'. Secondly genuine revulsion at the conduct of other left-wing groups who exclusively promoted the interests of their own organisations over or often directly against the 'common interest'. Thirdly, a diffident and self-effacing attitude when involved with people more articulate, better educated and more experienced in the 'cut and thrust' of public debate. These factors combined with a real misunderstanding of Broad-Front work, believing that it was somehow vulgar to energetically promote our own policies, ideas and strategies. Consequently we allowed our position to be presented or misrepresented by others with whom we appeared at the time to be politically compatible. These were the contributory factors but not the main one.

During the conference the main body of Red Action were actually physically outside the debate, involved in security, obviously disdainful of the bickering exhibited by the different sects inside. We were confident that whatever happened, whatever decisions were reached, that when the debating dust settled, the real battles would be fought on the streets. This was to prove a major and elementary error on our part.

This attitude was a direct legacy of our recent "semi-clandestine" terrorist past. After a split in Red Action in 1982 the people who assumed leadership of the group were for want of a better description 'men of action' rather than theoreticians, the best able to implement physically Red Action policies. We were convinced that regardless of who fronted the organisation called Anti-Fascist-Action Red Action would provide the 'de facto' leadership behind the scenes, and on the streets.

The individuals who represented the 'public face' were there for the purpose of public relations, and along with the bureaucrats were regarded as a necessary evil. They were full of their own importance, but regarded by Red Action simply as 'useful idiots'. No way were they ever recognised as the 'leadership'. We felt that the best of them knew where the real power lay, the rest would be convinced by the practical demands of the campaign, if not they could be disregarded or replaced.

We were wrong, and spent the next three years fighting a constant rearguard battle to keep AFA true to its founding statement of confronting fascists physically and ideologically. Because perhaps of our previous isolation, we developed a narrow view of the political world, and never fully understood that it was the politics of Red Action rather than simply a willingness or ability of its membership to fight that led us into the arena of confrontation, belatedly we recognised that AFA would be no different.

The development of AFA or rather its disintegration can be most easily examined through the evidence provided by the subsequent annual conferences. Early in 1986 AFA held its second conference in Manchester. There was a motion submitted that the dilettante anarchist group Class War be suspended for racism, intimidation, acting as police provocateurs, associating with fascists, etc.. The evidence presented by Searchlight to support the allegations was at best



circumstantial, at worst lies and conjecture. The testimony of witnesses relied more on the pigment of their skins and emotional rhetoric than fact. It was simply a sectarian attack because they were 'anarchists'. They did not fit in, you see, with the respectable moderate image the bureaucrats wanted to build. 'The leadership' was flexing their muscles. It was to prove the thin end of the wedge. Our protests were ignored, so we, along with DAM and Class War, walked out.

During the next six months AFA stagnated. An intense inquiry into allegations came to the politically expedient conclusions that Class War had been wronged. Red Action returned but not DAM or Class War. Around this time as well, due to the unprincipled conduct of the 'leadership' another group, the RCG, slipped the leash and disappeared. Red Action as the only autonomous group left in AFA was isolated and vulnerable. Our proposals were ignored, side-stepped or compromised. Often the antagonism that existed between Red Action and the cliques of bureaucrats now began to reveal itself in open sectarian attacks.

For instance, after the Cenotaph protest march in November 1986, which for propaganda reasons was a success gaining AFA national recognition, Red Action came under sustained attack at the following delegates meetings, from Islington Branch. The march of about 2,000 had been attacked as it was forming up by a small group of about 70 fascists. A lot of the crowd had run. The security stewards, 90% provided by Red Action, had not. We were accused of being too macho, of having too many stewards, of not having enough stewards, of monopolising security, etc.. A long standing proposal by Red Action for the setting up of a "standing stewards group" in recognition of these problems had been side-stepped. When the proposal was again raised at the national conference in 1987 both Bradford and Islington ARAFA actually voted against it.

By Bradford 1987 the ideological, structural and directional problems inherited by AFA from its launch, surfaced in conspiratorial but incompetent sectarianism. Initially our delegates were refused entry to the conference building. Then it was decided that our motions for radical restructuring of AFA should not be discussed at all unless all other motions fell. A proposal to convert AFA into an anti-racist protest group was rejected by the Conference led by Red Action. The vote was retaken, and the original vote was overturned, but only half the hall was counted. Uproar. After much argument another vote was demanded which rejected the motion with an increased majority. There were then allegations of ballot-rigging etc and the chair responsible for it suggested that Red Action, the victims, were the villains. They demanded yet another vote which rejected the proposal by an even bigger majority.

It was now perfectly clear that these talentless bureaucrats and public relations spokespersons who Red Action had, through a combination of political naivete and timidity, allowed to fill the positions of leadership held a fundamentally different conception of AFA from its inception. They wanted a respectable Labour Party orientated protest group, as a compliment to their own politics, so Red Action as the hired muscle and the most obstinate defenders of the founding statement were now surplus to requirements. At the next steering committee meeting Red Action were, in absentia, "suspended" for ballot rigging, intimidation, drunkenness and racism, etc.. We refused to recognise it as it was ridiculous but nevertheless the chickens had indeed come home to roost.



Everything had come full circle. Red Action had set up AFA for reasons of self-preservation to broaden the struggle, because anti-fascist work had commanded an almost total monopoly on our time and energies. By spreading the load, transferring responsibility we were attempting to free Red Action and its membership to develop our politics in other areas necessary for our growth as a Revolutionary Socialist organisation. In fact for the reasons outlined almost the direct opposite happened. Originally designed by us as a 'buffer' between Red Action and the National Front, instead we became the 'buffer' between the National Front and AFA.

### London 1988

The size of the conference, about 50 people, reflected AFA's collapse. The 'leadership' (those present at least) had no new strategy, merely presenting a revamped constitution, (which again dropped the founding statement) and was anyway largely irrelevant as the organisation had to all intents and purposes evaporated. A Red Action delegate presented our strategy for the way forward, but a decision on it was deferred because delegates from Newcastle claimed they had not had time to discuss it (it had only been in existence for about nine months). Side-stepped again, a decision was taken that AFA was no longer a credible national movement and responsibility should be divided on a regional basis, North East, South East and South West. However all the old problems still exist and at the time of writing there is little reason for optimism.

### Contradictions and Conclusions

What went wrong? For any organisation to rise and fall so quickly can only mean that initially there was a reason for its existence. Because the objective had not been secured, the responsibility for its demise can be traced to some fundamental, ideological flaw or contradiction. The basic contradiction, from which everything else flowed, was between the opposing concepts of AFA as a militant action group and AFA as just yet another law abiding anti-racist protest group independent from political affiliations. The subsequent 'conflicts of interest' between the bureaucratic 'leadership' and the supporters of the Founding Statement, meant that given AFA's structure, the objectives, press statements, and general propaganda produced on behalf of AFA more often than not reflected them (the bureaucrats) own politics rather than AFA's. The political groups, for all their faults, were originally attracted by the founding statement, they consequently either left or were eased out. They were replaced by unaligned individuals, students, labour party types, etc., attracted by the 'softer' propaganda. The bureaucrats had become the decision makers so Red Action's contribution was regarded as interference. After all we were only the hired help. Similarly while the new recruits strengthened rather than threatened the power bases of the 'unrepresentative' individuals. The calibre of the new recruits actually meant that they were 'unwilling' or unable to implement the tactics and policies necessary to confront a violent party like the National Front. The 'moderate' propaganda attracted moderate recruits, displacing and repulsing 'militants'. Because the 'moderates' proved inadequate to deal with the confrontational aspect of AFA's politics, to retain their support and avoid humiliation, common sense dictated that confrontation must be avoided at all costs. It had become a self-fulfilling prophecy.



## Summary

Within a year of AFA's launch, Red Action were the only autonomous political group left, which meant that all our proposals were regarded with suspicion, we found ourselves being outvoted, outmanoeuvred, or simply ignored by the different cliques of individuals, representing the 'leadership' and who were, by and large, accountable to nobody but themselves. Paradoxically their original reluctance, and later their inability, to set up a "standing stewards group" responsible to AFA left Red Action with total control of security and 'de facto' leadership on the streets.

The result was a power struggle between the leadership attempting to use Red Action 'muscle' to protect their soft initiatives as 'cover' for their confrontational politics. At the decision making level Red Action reps were treated with veiled contempt while at the street level the authority of the bureaucrats were regarded with open contempt.

Inevitably with bureaucrats and stewards involved in a tug of war one must gain eventual control, both equally as one is useless without the other the probable result is the collapse of the organisation.

The whole conflict of interest can be traced directly to Red Action. If from the start we had fully understood the reality of Broad Front work, presented a guiding ideology and programme to deter the entry of the 'sheep in wolves clothing' we would have entered any alliance with our own strategy, secured a position of influence on the decision making bodies at the top, consciously promoted our own politics led from the front, and when necessary compromised from a position of strength. Undoubtedly AFA would have started smaller, but equally it would be in a far stronger position today.

The reason for discussing in depth the rise and fall of AFA is firstly that we can learn from our mistakes, but also because the same germs of contradiction exists in our own organisation, Red Action.

## Revolutionary v Terrorist

The contradiction in Red Action is not between a protest group and a 'confrontation' group but between our development into a genuine revolutionary socialist group or our regression into a closed pseudo-terrorist group. Our failure to recognise and resolve this germ of conflict has impaired our growth, influence, political development and ambitions. It has given rise on occasion to many other tendencies at odds with our stated aims, militarism, elitism, anti-theory, leaving us with a lack of vision and analysis resulting in a lack of confidence, discipline and commitment. Primarily it has affected our recruitment, security and internal structures.

"Marxism tells us that before we can properly solve any problems, before we can work out a plan of action etc., that we must first analyse the given process, ie that we must identify the basic contradiction which is inherent in it and which gives rise to its development and from which everything else springs. It is the basic contradiction which determines the whole process, secondary conditions arise on top of this - these in turn give expression to particular trends, characteristics, interests, etc.. But ultimately everything



is determined and conditioned by the basic contradiction. These secondary contradictions can be tackled, reformed, changed but again they will effect no fundamental change in the given process. The only way fundamental change can be achieved is by changing the basis contradiction which immediately sets in motion a change in all secondary contradictions which are dependent on it".  
(TA 'THOMAS' POWER)

### Recruitment

Red Action is first and foremost a political organisation with a constitution, open enrolment, branch meetings and a democratic forum for decision making. We produce a monthly paper which promotes and reflects our view of the world. It is sold openly on the streets, in bookshops, at demonstrations, etc.. In other words, on the face of it, we operate very much like many other small groups on the left. However, there are some distinctive differences.

In the early days we distinguished ourselves by the fact that white male members of the working class were thrust into positions of leadership of a political grouping. A phenomenon on the left in Britain. Like attracts like. The subsequent nature of our recruits allowed us to make an impact on the anti-fascist struggle in particular that belied our actual numbers. While Red Action has developed slowly little has changed on the left, we still have no rivals in this department. Consequently our reputation as 'street fighting hard men', the 'anti-fascist specialists', has retained currency (Blitz eg). It is time to examine whether the one-dimensional image associated with Red Action enhances or actually inhibits our attempts to build a genuine revolutionary socialist organisation.

Red Action is first and foremost a political organisation whose membership has been forced through the demands of the "struggle" to operate occasionally outside the law in defensive measures, to protect the membership and to survive as an organisation, politics intact. We are not a para-military organisation, or a semi-clandestine terrorist organisation, but we have at times in our brief history adopted the tactics and characteristics of such. Because of our wayward development 'good' recruits are often judged by past and current rather than future needs. In other words if a recruit is prepared and has the confidence and ability to defend physically Red Action political initiatives, then because it answers a particular and immediate need they are of obvious value and so find easy acceptance. If an organisation recruits on this 'reputation' rather than its politics it will attract some who have reached broadly similar political conclusions and now wish an opportunity to implement them. Obviously this can create subsidiary problems. It may attract 'adventurers' who pay only lip service to the politics but who in reality are more interested in the confrontational aspects. Individuals recruited on this basis may find an easy acceptance but then have little motivation to develop themselves in other ways, and later may come to resent the mundane political work which they regard as beneath them.

Of course the Red Action reputation may also repel others. On the one hand they may feel they have nothing to offer, that the necessary pre-requisite to membership is a good right-hook, even worse, they may feel that such a one-dimensional organisation has little to offer them. In that case the image ceases to be a plus and becomes a massive minus, the reputation acts like a filter, and in fact is a handicap on our overall development, and a



self-erected barrier on recruitment. The image dictates that the Red Action recruit is tailored to suit the needs of a semi-clandestine para-military organisation rather than a legitimate political organisation. This means that you command on the one hand, an almost total franchise on the physically assertive on the left in the areas where you are active, but in recognition that a large percentage of the recruits are drawn from a microscopic percentage of the working class as a whole.

Class composition must be accepted as a vital ingredient in the development of a genuine revolutionary party, but to advance we must learn to appeal to and exploit all the skills, technical and otherwise, that exist within that class. A revolutionary organisation needs organisers, theoreticians, journalists, propagandists, typists, artists, poets, etc., to promote and project its political message. Communism is about the collective emancipation of the working class, thereby releasing for full development the potential of the individual members within the class. A revolutionary organisation must at all times try (to regain and retain the confidence and loyalty of the class) to be the living embodiment of that aim. We must recruit those with the skills so that others can learn from them. Nothing should deter anybody from joining Red Action except our politics or theirs.

The newspaper, activities part, is our main recruiting agent. You would imagine that it would provide a useful tool in helping dispel the myths, the web of half-lies and half-truths surrounding Red Action. As well as that it must, having interested or convinced the reader or supporter of the arguments, involve them in the type of activities described which we obviously consider important, and so thereby enhance the prospect of the success of these initiatives. The interested reader is given no guidance or encouragement on how she/he might join Red Action, but curiously is invited merely to support Red Action, thereby assuming a passive role. The 'image' of the semi-clandestine para-military organisation is in the eye of the reader confirmed and complete.

This strange ambiguity to recruitment can be traced back to the group's unique birth and development. While inviting the reader to support Red Action is a step up from merely asking them to subscribe to the paper, we must create the structure where we can confidently appeal for interested parties to actually join the organisation.

### Militarism

Sometimes members, or those in and around the organisation give the impression that fighting fascism is the central reason for Red Action's existence. Fighting fascists is showing the highest form of commitment and that all other political work is secondary and subsidiary to this. There is little analysis except that they must be confronted. Fascism is regarded as something intrinsically evil, rather than a product, like communism, or capitalism. Equally the fascists are seen as a finite number so that the more you take out or deter the less there is left! Anti-fascism is not regarded as a necessary distraction or an inhibition to other political activity, it becomes regarded like a political fetish, not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. With this view 'military' is easily confused with 'militant'. Legitimate political work, ie leafletting, paper sales, etc. can be abandoned for an opportunity for "contact". Fascism and Socialism are incompatible, a victory for one is necessarily a defeat for the other. When capitalism is in crisis fascism only grows when



the challenge to the existing order from the left fails or falters. In any area geographical or otherwise, where fascist ideas have influence, they must be challenged with a view not just to physically defeating or punishing the fascist gangs, but to destroying the desperate hopes a demoralised working class might have invested in them. Ultimately it is only by replacing their lies and propaganda with the truth, by pointing out the real enemy, capitalism, can lasting progress be achieved. If for one moment the real objective is forgotten which is to politicise the working class, then the function of fascist violence which is to deter or distract the revolutionary from this task has already succeeded.

The mistaken belief that 'military solution' is the only answer to the threat posed by fascist growth, creates a sense of frustration and impatience, a feeling that Red Action is not doing "enough", that "fascists are getting away with it", "missed opportunities", etc.. This can manifest itself in a number of ways, ie freelancing etc. "operations" or attacks not sanctioned by Red Action but organised among like-minded individuals with a view to "doing something". This type of freelancing invitation only is a legacy of our terrorist past, achieves little and is directly responsible for the creation of cliques, and mistaken notions of superiority and elitism. The development of "cliques" for whatever reason quickly destroys trust, comradeship and solidarity (ie IRSP) and as we have personally witnessed at least twice in our own brief history.

#### Democracy v Security

For any political organisation there are two basic types of security or protection available to it:

1. the organisation is legal, completely open, above board, nothing to hide strategies, tactics, objectives clearly stated and debated, easy access to membership, etc..
2. the organisation is probably engaged in illegal or subversive activities, and so will rely on vetted membership, be closed, clandestine and conspiratorial.

For a group like CND the first example is appropriate, but obviously would not be a suitable structure for a group like the ALF. Depending on requirements and stated objectives each is equally valid. However if a group is organised on the basis of the first example, but still seeks to retain the ability to adapt itself to the tactics required of the latter, then the tensions, frictions and antagonisms that must arise can only cause confusion that ultimately guarantee disaster. The open democratic nature is an obvious threat to security while equally importantly and less obviously the demands of security are a threat to democracy. Quite simply not everybody can be told, because not everybody can be trusted. While the examples of ALF or CND are perhaps exaggerated, the basic contradiction should be familiar to Red Action members for it is something that exists and has existed since Red Action's formation. In the past for example simple briefings to members etc. on forthcoming events that may involve, due to its nature, some form of confrontation (march, demo, picket) or that required through necessity to be at odds with the wishes or plans of the authorities, may not be complete or shrouded by innuendo due to being out of caution, presented within legal boundaries. Otherwise the individuals concerned with organising some defensive measure to protect meetings, demos, rallies, etc. leave themselves vulnerable later to arrest and



charges on any number of "conspiracy to" assault person or persons unknown, affray, etc. simply by discussing openly probable development.

With government plans well under way to remove or inhibit all legal forms of protest, strikes, pickets, free speech, demonstrations etc., any genuine socialist organisation must recognise the need to make adjustments to combat these infringements and retain the ability to design tactics to remain effective politically. With the swiftly changing nature of the state, the obvious malicious threat posed from outside the organisation (police/fascists provocateurs, touts) is complimented in Red Action by the ever present but equally lethal threat that already exists inside. Under the present structure all members have a constitutional right indeed a duty to involve themselves in discussing all aspects of political initiatives launched by or on behalf of the organisation to which they belong. The prospect and possibility of, and potential for "leaks" to the opposition before or after an event that might "wrongfoot" the organisation are immense, equally the danger of "loose talk" among friends, supporters or "camp followers" represents a constant danger to the individuals within the group. Apart from a high and active profile in Irish and Anti-Fascist work, which provokes 'natural' curiosity from neo-nazis and the state, we are further compromised by a lateral rather than hierarchical structure of decision making which while increasing democracy also increases the risk of 'leaks'. The access and availability of information to all members would be of particular value and attraction to potential informers, infiltrators or recruits. The potential for disaster is inherent.

While we have seen that internal democracy is a threat to both the security and effectiveness of individuals and the organisation, similarly the need for secrecy damages internal democracy. Ideally of course, everybody 'should know' but it is equally obvious given the loose structure that would necessarily compromise "other activities". As there exists no alternative or parallel structure for decision making discussions and conclusions are made on behalf of the organisation by informal groups of individuals or if you like 'cliques'.

During the campaign launched by AFA around a fascist pub in North London the whole campaign, publicity, public meetings, radio interviews, newspaper articles, public demonstrations, etc., was conceived by a handful of individuals within Red Action with the view that it would be unsuccessful and that to dislodge the fascists we would have to resort to more direct or traditional methods of protest. The whole affair from tentatively linking a petrol bomb attack on a local anti-fascist home (which evidence later suggests was unrelated) to the existence of a National Front pub in the area was constructed as a smokescreen and a justification for militant action later. The publicity generated would provide camouflage for known Red Action activists who would otherwise be regarded by police in that area as "natural suspects". Such was the surprising success of the campaign 'alternative' strategies were aborted.

Similarly on the AFA march at the Cenotaph 1987 a plan was hatched by just two members of Red Action to announce to the crowd at the end of the rally, to avoid dispersal by police, that stewards have been invited to defend the 24 hour picket at S. Africa House which had been threatened with attack. This provided us with a legitimate reason in the eyes of the police to march a large section of the crowd back into, instead of away from, the arena of confrontation. The fascists arrived on cue so the plan worked perfectly. Red Action were told of the plan in the morning, AFA as with the other example were never informed.



The point is that while examples given were successful and the secrecy surrounding them made sense and was necessary the actions of the individuals involved was conspiratorial, unaccountable and of course undemocratic. The prospect of operating such an informal decision making structure within a larger national organisation would prove laughable chaotic and of course lead to all sorts of abuses and misunderstandings.

For instance while the individuals in these incidents were experienced and committed members of the organisation they were unaccountable to the membership, which creates clear precedents and justification for other cliques of less experienced or less representative groups to take similar actions in the name of the organisation which might prove less or even counter productive. The necessary exclusion of some members may leave them feeling slighted, insulted or demoralised which in turn provokes the emergence of the very 'cliques' that destroy unity, trust, comradeship.

Red Action is now left with a number of choices:

- (1) it can take a decision in recognition of our vulnerability, to suspend all initiatives that due to their nature, eg anti-fascist, involves contact with fascists or police
- (2) live with the risks and carry on as before
- (3) recognise that if we are to recruit and develop nationally, safeguard internal democracy and remain true to our stated objectives we must make structural changes.

As we have seen the historical development of Red Action has led to the association of Red Action with a dominating one-dimensional image - Anti-Fascists street fighters, which is an inhibition to recruitment. Security of individuals and the organisation is compromised by its own democratic nature while to retain effectiveness, democracy is continually sacrificed in the interests of security. The conflicts of interests are a result of a basic contradiction (terrorist or revolutionary socialist) which cannot be resolved by minor changes, what is needed is radical change in essence a separation of roles. This separating would have the effect of freeing the political wing to develop a new broader identity, expand and recruit on the basis of our political stances on Ireland, anti-fascism, internal democracy, class composition and pragmatic help to strikers (solidarity network). It would, out of necessity, force us to develop and articulate our politics in areas, trade unions, women etc., previously neglected by us. A new public face would in turn allow us to openly exploit issues ignored by the conventional left. The acceptance of the necessity for change aligned to the acceptance of the challenge would provide Red Action with a much needed vision, sense of direction and common purpose. The separation of roles would while encouraging the political body to expand, propagate and recruit, will allow the security wing to retract automatically tightening efficiency discipline, etc..

#### PROPOSALS

1. That Red Action set up a security wing.
2. Volunteers are recruited from existing branches.
3. Volunteers must be full paid up and active members of the branch.
4. That they would need to be involved in Red Action for at least (12)



- months prior to involvement.
5. Make perfectly clear that security work be in addition not instead of other duties and responsibilities
  6. The duties would be to police and safeguard property and personnel on marches, public meetings, paper sales, etc.. Its function would be to increase the effectiveness and impact of Red Action propaganda. It would also have total responsibility for surveillance and intelligence gathering.
  7. It would be completely subordinate to the needs, requirements and discipline of the political body and be accountable to the NATIONAL COUNCIL.
  8. It would, when required, have a representative on the NC But no vote.
  9. It would be organised on a branch basis with squad leaders being elected by squad members.
  10. While for pragmatic reasons it must have an autonomous structure and leadership it will have no independent objectives and in all matters follows the policy dictated by the political body.

-ooOoo-



### FOR THE CLASS - BY THE CLASS

Last month I watched a television programme about the life of an intellectual called Gramsci who was a leading member of the Italian Communist Party in the 1920's, who was imprisoned by Mussolini and witnessed the establishment of the first fascist state. The narrator, in describing this period of history, commented on the various social forces struggling for power. The Communist Party grounded in the trade unions with its strongholds of support in the working class areas, while the fascists reflected the reactionary nature of the middle classes who in turn gave the blackshirt movement its character and political direction.

What struck me most forcibly, and which in turn led me to a startling conclusion, was that in making any analogy or comparison between the revolutionary left and the far right in Britain in 1988, a crucial factor, the class composition, is completely reversed. The fascists, albeit with a traditionally middle class leadership, find their support among, and recruit from, a disenfranchised white urban working class, while the revolutionary left is dominated by people who could be culturally classified as middle class and who would in less reverent journals be identified, and may be unfairly dismissed, simply as 'trendies'. Perhaps more surprisingly the Labour Party, whose leadership put considerable distance between themselves and the factions to their left, have at least one thing in common - a similar dominance of the rank and file of the party by the 'middle classes'. Consequently the selection of their parliamentary candidates are the best representatives of that class and are drawn almost exclusively from the professional classes - barristers, doctors, solicitors, etc. In the general election of 1983, of the hundred seats contested by the Labour Party only one candidate was from a manual working class background. Despite calling itself the 'party of labour' it obviously has little faith in the labouring classes it purports to represent.

Every political party has a philosophy and leadership that reflects the aspiration of the membership. If the rank and file of the Labour Party had been truly representative of the working class it is inconceivable that it would ever have allowed the leadership to consistently adopt economic policies that when implemented were found to be in absolute conflict with their own economic self interest. The very fact that they were, proved that they were not.

That is why it was possible during the winter of discontent in 1978 for the Labour Party when in government to be in mortal combat with the labour and trade union movement over the issue of wage restraint as a tactic to control inflation. The leadership argued that if workers wages rose more than 5%, to keep pace with inflation, the bosses, in order to maintain their own margin of profit, would simply transfer it on to the cost of their produce so that prices would rise accordingly. The Labour leadership never suggested that perhaps instead of the workers taking a cut, the bosses should have trimmed their profits by the 5% or over. But that was such an appalling idea it would have been unimaginable for them. So the Labour Party, who were set up by the Unions as its parliamentary wing to benefit the impoverished, were demanding sacrifices from the exploited to secure the survival of the capitalist system that was responsible for its oppression. From that example it can be seen that the class composition of the party is of vital importance, for in certain circumstances it is the vital factor which ultimately determines its political direction.



Despite the political groupings on the 'revolutionary left' almost automatically inserting the word 'worker' in the title of their organisations which would suggest that they are in the vanguard of a workers movement, and while their papers and periodicals consistently champion causes they insist are in the general interests of the working classes, even a quick visual examination of the rank and file would reveal that the association of the word 'worker' and the organisation to be at best merely accidental, though with some it is obviously such an outright deception that they constantly run the risk of prosecution under the Trades Description Act. It could of course be argued on their behalf that even if the membership in the main is not of the working class, they are propagating and working on its behalf, which gives the names of, and indeed the organisations themselves their validity.

Alright then, let's look at that argument from another angle. If in South Africa for instance you had an organisation called the 'Black Revolutionary Workers Party' whose declared objective was the smashing of apartheid and the emancipation of the black working class, but whose leadership and membership was exclusively white, it would come as little surprise if the integrity of the organisation was regarded by the blacks themselves with some cynicism. And it is equally obvious that the 'Black Revolutionary Workers Party' could march, demonstrate and protest to the end of time and would achieve nothing except perhaps to create a focus for the derision and contempt of both the white oppressors and the black oppressed.

In Britain in 1988 the revolutionary left is equally irrelevant to the working class and vice versa. That this is an accurate reflection of the state of affairs must be obvious even to the most blinkered and myopic member of the left. And if it is accepted that the two vital ingredients necessary to have a 'revolutionary workers' organisation are (1) revolutionary theory, the recognition of the class as a separate economic entity and (2) the active participation of some workers in all levels of the organisation, and that in the absence of either the description becomes invalid, then in any objective analysis of the political spectrum in Britain, and by using that criterion as a guide in search of the above, would simply reveal a void. So by definition the revolutionary left as such does not in fact exist.

If it is accepted that the working class is the only class which has the motivation, numbers and economic power to change society, it seems equally obvious that the political party that really reflects its interests must be completely for and exclusively of that class. Simple isn't it! Unfortunately it happens to be a bit more complicated than that. For instance what is the definition of working class? Is it everybody who works for a living, including even say the queen, which brings us back to square one, or is it just people who do manual jobs like miners or building workers, who have enjoyed a comprehensive education and live on a council estate. What then of the lorry driver who shares these cultural qualifications, but who owns his own truck and is faced by say a nurses picket line. For him the choice is this - if he crosses the picket line he is a scab, if he doesn't he faces economic ruin. So despite sharing cultural similarities he discovers that in a crisis he identifies with an entirely different class, so for him the choice is easy. It should be remembered in passing that it was lorry drivers like this who, as representatives of the lower middle classes, were instrumental in bringing down the socialist government of Allende in Chile, with fatal consequences for progressive and workers institutions. It is only those in whose economic interests it is to bargain collectively that can for scientific reasons be regarded



as working class.

However that does not mean that a political party whose entire membership qualify as 'working class' would necessarily be revolutionary or even progressive; the social composition of groups like the National Front and others prove otherwise. What it does mean is that a 'workers revolutionary party' must be sufficiently flexible to be able to take advantage of, and lend assistance to, any section of the community that is currently in opposition to the state. If say, the students, as in 1968, were in open revolt against the establishment it would amount to criminal negligence for any genuinely revolutionary party to ignore them. But it must be perfectly clear who is using who, the objectives not forgotten or the politics diluted. But surely if you allow people like students to join what is to prevent them from swamping it. Students by the nature of their occupation are often more receptive to radical ideas than the members of the working class, but because they are transient because they are uniform only in the fact that they are students while all the time representing different social classes, traditionally upper and middle classes, they can at one moment be progressive and in the next reactionary. For example, in 1968 students played a progressive role while the workers were largely dormant, but just as easily they can slot into a reactionary strike-breaking role as they did during the General Strike in 1926 when workers were militant. They are 'fair weather friends' but on occasion they may find themselves travelling on parallel lines in the same direction as the workers, but when they diverge on to another track as they inevitably will, it is the role of the 'revolutionary workers party' to bid them farewell. No problem.

However, in flirting with any other class, revolutionaries leave themselves open to seduction and compromise. Imagine for example a group like Red Action in 1968 being suddenly swept to prominence on the tide of student militancy. The ranks of the membership swelled by the (artificial) influx of students, new branches established, a weekly newspaper perhaps - in short, the transformation of the organisation. The revolution to some would seem imminent, and then quite suddenly the student tide would ebb, they would achieve their objectives or tire of the rioting, demonstrating or marching, and then one day they would all be gone, back to the universities to pursue their individual and still promising careers. Their radical credentials established, but the struggle and the workers abandoned.

If the leadership had not warned the rank and file of this inevitability, the demoralisation would be immense and the organisation destroyed. Alternatively the organisation might decide, at the insistence of the residue of students still in it who maybe now form a majority of the membership, to pursue the retreating students in an attempt to maintain the upward mobility of the organisation, basing this tactic on the argument that while the students are less militant now they are still more militant than the working class. The consequences would be to lose sight of its objectives and become corrupted. To encourage them our stand on some policies would be softened and new ones adopted, and if it worked the individual revolutionary workers party would be swamped by an alien class. In 1903 it was Lenin that said: "In the party we need not students nor professors nor petty bourgeois: we need workers. We are prepared to make use of the student and academic movements, or anyone whom we meet along our way, but we must remember that the leading class is the proletariat and that its party must be a proletarian one".

So while the prospect for the revolutionary of returning to the still cynical



and apathetic working class might not be appealing and the retraction in the organisation painful, return it will and return it must. There is no other way.

What purports to represent the revolutionary workers movement in Britain today is the probable result of taking the soft option, and that is largely an academic led and student based movement operating outside its own strata and in effect substituting itself for a genuine workers movement. In the absence of genuine 'proles' they have 'workers substitutes', and the student wing has in fact become the party. It is a deception and once that exercise in self-deception has been achieved the distinction between activity completely in the interests of the class or merely completely in the interests of the party becomes blurred, and the new naive and gullible members are encouraged to believe that the two are indistinguishable.

Having a high turnover in membership, the organisation is constantly seeking new recruits to maintain momentum, so disputes, riots and strikes are seen as vehicles on which the party can feed. Similarly, important issues like anti-racism and anti-fascism became identified with the ANL, which was set up in the late 1970's to deal with the emerging threat of the NF, was taken over, squeezed dry and discarded. The SWP would argue that the NF threat had diminished by 1981, but the fascists are still here and racist attacks more prevalent than ever. In any case the writing was on the wall even at its height in 1979 during a massive ANL carnival at Brockwell Park, sections of the crowd became aware that the NF were going to march through Brick Lane, which at the time was considered to be the centre of the anti-fascist struggle and had received widespread publicity nationally due to the tactics of physical confrontation adopted by the ANL. There was a lot of confusion and the crowd was told that the NF were in fact due to march but that there was no need to go down there as there were thousands there already. This was a lie. The decision not to confront the march, and in fact desert the Bangalis, was taken weeks earlier by the SWP dominated leadership in order to ensure the success of their own initiative, representing soft, white, middle class priorities.

While every possible opportunity is taken to recruit to expand the party, it follows equally logically that everything will be done to avoid a retraction. So unpopular issues will not be pursued, unfashionable ones jettisoned. The death of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, a British MP, attracted the attention of the media worldwide, bringing into focus the whole issue of Britain's role in Ireland. That week the 'revolutionary' paper Socialist Worker had its cover story about some obscure march for jobs not due to reach London for three weeks, and relegated the IRA hunger strike to the back. The capitalist media gave it in-depth front page coverage. The effect of these type of cynical manoeuvres by the left on the working class is indelible and disastrous.

The left generally refuse to confront their collective failure, and when challenged offer many different theories and excuses, while their genuine members and supporters find comfort in delusion. They all claim that when the upturn comes the workers will flood into the organisation and as proof would quote as an example the class composition of the Bolshevik Party in Russia in the early 1900's which was, it is true, made up of full time organisers and students and some workers, although they were not the majority. However, the key word here is majority, which means that they had the ear of the working class and the party contained a significant minority. This is where the comparison ends. However, just for the sake of argument lets examine this 'when the workers rise up' theory. The miners strike of 1984-85 was the clearest example of



a workers uprising in the last decade. The strike was 100% 'political' as it was an attempt by a section of the working class to defy the democratically elected government in their attempt to wind down a nationalised industry, with the eventual view to privatisation. The interests and opinions of whole communities were arrogantly dismissed or simply ignored. The miners declared a national strike. In anticipation of this the government stockpiled coal and provoked the inevitable strike in the spring by blatantly renegeing on previous agreements so that the inclement weather of the winter would not put undue pressure on its coal resources.

On top of that the miners had ranged against them a divided work force, the power of the press and the media, and for the first time in Britain a nationally co-ordinated police force. The strike was hard fought and bitter and despite regular denunciations of 'picket line violence' by the Labour and Tory leaderships, the strike retained public support. During the 'Battle of Orgreave' the right wing Economist magazine conducted a survey to discover public attitudes towards the violence generated by the strike. They were horrified to discover that despite media manipulation over 30% of those questioned still supported the miners stand. A large section of the working class had little doubt whose side they were on, but for the 'revolutionary workers parties' the issue was never as clear cut. The SWP, the largest revolutionary group, consistently attacked Scargill and warned the miners 'not to trust their leaders', even though it was clearly evident that Scargill himself was fighting on a range of issues against his own moderate executive. These gratuitous attacks irritated some miners to such an extent that Socialist Worker placards bearing the slogan 'Support the Miners' had the Socialist Worker logo snapped off.

Similarly the RCP repeatedly called for a ballot which, at the height of the strike, was counter-productive as having once secured the 'democratic' right to vote and having lost, the minority would have undoubtedly exercised their other democratic right - to scab. Like the SWP they too attacked Scargill for not leading from the front, even after he had been attacked and arrested on the picket line at Orgreave. Then in the most bizarre fashion they produced a book entitled "Why We Lost The Strike". It discussed and dissected the tactics employed during the strike and how it was lost. Fair enough, but it was written as if by a miner in the past tense, and was on sale months before the strike actually ended. They were as a result of this apparently barred from the coalfields by enraged miners. Hardly surprising.

It is clear that the leadership of any political party, regardless of their beliefs or ability, must rely on its membership for a first hand account of the current state of play and develop strategies accordingly. If for a revolutionary party the rank and file are neither, as in this case, miners or workers with a genetic finger on the pulse of the class, then the data supplied by the rank and file will probably be false, and it stands to reason that the conclusions drawn from it will be wrong. Once again the importance of class composition appears vital.

Probably the most radical activity during the strike was the appearance of the 'hit squads'. These were organised by the miners to meet state violence with their own violence. Working semi-clandestinely the 'hit squads', sometimes numbering hundreds, attacked NCB installations, scab firms and strikebreakers. On many occasions they ambushed the police, on some occasions shouting their support for the IRA.



This development was the most exciting for any genuine revolutionary because it demonstrated clearly what we have always maintained, that the working class once having identified the 'enemy' (police, state, media) would set out to demolish it, physically if necessary.

This development has taken the idea of rank and file into a different dimension and even though the 'revolutionaries' were not involved in instigating or implementing it, their response once it had happened was even more illuminating. The SWP recoiled in horror and immediately denounced the squads as individual acts of violence which can very easily endanger the strike. It was obvious to most people at this stage that the strike was probably lost, but the issues at stake were very much larger because the very obvious class nature of the struggle had thrown up the very raw material to create a genuine revolutionary party. In all probability the vast majority of miners who helped form these embryonic 'workers militias' had never considered revolutionary politics as being pertinent to their lives, and yet here they were instinctively adopting revolutionary methods to help achieve pragmatic ends. This is surely the very essence of revolutionary activity.

The strike would have turned thousands of moderates into militants and previously militant trade unionists, but still acquiescent to capitalism, into revolutionaries, because they could see from their own experiences that if things were to really change revolution was not only necessary and possible, but even desirable. The confidence of the so-called revolutionary socialist groups in their ability to draw "workers in struggle" to their banner is misplaced, for in practice their theories, tactics and personnel caused the very opposite to happen.

This was undoubtedly a tremendous opportunity for building permanent bridges between advanced sections of the working class and the revolutionary left and the whole affair which should have resulted in massive gains became instead for them a complete and utter disaster. So much for the "workers rise up" theory.

The appearance of miners and representatives of the miners support groups on Troop Out and Republican platforms after the strike showed that lessons had been learned, but as I will try to point out this development can prove to be of little comfort to the left.

A couple of years later they were presented with another opportunity to test their "theory" when yet another section of the working class rose up against the state at Broadwater Farm in Tottenham. For the first time in "mainland Britain" guns were used in a riot against the police and a copper was killed.

Once again the left were shown to be completely irrelevant and had nothing to gain simply because they had nothing to offer. The subsequent appearance of Winston Sillcott's girlfriend as a speaker at an anti-strip search rally last year suggests that like the miners before them they have recognised that the declared objectives of the nationalist working class (in Northern Ireland) are not in fact incompatible with their own.

These developments are I think extremely significant for it can be no coincidence that two sections of the working class, having been radicalised by their experiences and independant of each other, in seeking to make political links felt obliged to 'leapfrog' the rhetoric of the "revolutionaries" to make common cause with the genuine article. In their eyes and in relation to their own



experiences the left were not credible. They have proved time and time again that when presenting themselves to the working class as either workers or revolutionaries, that when it comes to the nitty gritty they are found wanting and do not stand up well to scrutiny.

That is not to say that individual workers are not attracted to these parties, but for the majority disillusionment is swift. As individuals in the organisation they are unrepresentative of their communities and also unrepresentative of the organisation, so any influence they might bring to bear is smothered and muted.

The aggressive working class image of the militant leadership held true for a section of the working class in Liverpool in contrast to the trendy middle class image of the rest of the left, but in the end the differences proved to be largely cosmetic.

In an attempt to accommodate the working class, the contradiction between the prejudices and genuine ignorance common to the class on issues such as the war in Ireland, homosexuals and Blacks, were not confronted and the problems avoided by more or less adopting these prejudices as party policy. All the lies, deceit and dodges proved no substitute for revolutionary theory, and when it came to the crunch they were seen to be morally and ideologically bankrupt.

And so in Britain in 1988 you have the situation where the revolutionary left and a sullen and resentful working class stand apart, as we have seen not without good reason, and regard each other with mutual suspicion. There is no evidence to suggest any of this is going to change.

Where then does all this leave Red Action? Are we already like them now, or are we doomed to become like them at some time in the future? In all the areas that we have worked in we have left our distinctive mark. The organisation has demonstrated and the individuals have shown at times a passion, integrity and commitment that is foreign to the left.

1. On anti-fascist activity the membership have risked life, limb and liberty to counter fascist aggression. A fact that has not gone unnoticed by the fascists themselves, who have felt the need to reorganise in the face of it. Witness this quote from Nick Griffin, chairman of the NF (shortly after Bury St. Edmunds) "We must resist the temptation to hold exciting but basically futile street activities as a reaction to Red provocation. We have been marching down that road for nearly 20 years with very little effect, save to allow groups such as Red Action to use the NF threat to boost their own support on the streets". (Isn't it sad to see such cynicism in one so young.)

2. During the Laings Lock-Out unemployed individuals, many building workers themselves, distinguished themselves by their unselfish commitment to the picket line, again in sharp contrast to the type of 'solidarity' shown by the rest of the left. Again, this refreshing attitude won the respect of the workers involved.

3. It was the IRSP who first gave Red Action to the benefit of political recognition and recently we have had the opportunity to return the favour when through circumstances with which we are familiar they too were treated as political lepers by the British left. Our political stand, though belated, and our pragmatic response to appeals for help has put great distance between



ourselves and even those few groups who would claim that the war in Ireland is one of their main priorities.

Unlike any other left wing faction Red Action was founded not on the recognition of distinct political or ideological differences, but was simply an attempt, after our expulsion, to find a home within the framework of the left, to accommodate other working class socialists like ourselves. The failings of the SWP at the time were identified as cultural rather than political, and so Red Action came about with our political loyalty to the SWP on all major external matters more or less intact.

It is significant that only in the crucial areas of struggle largely abandoned by the left - anti-fascism and the war in Ireland - has the organisation been forced to rely on its own intellectual resources. It is the articulation of our beliefs and the implementation of our policies on these issues, based on a mixture of analysis and class instinct, which have earned Red Action both its distinct identity and its political independence.

On practically all other issues from the role of the unions to feminism, our casual acceptance in the legitimacy of all other groups as revolutionary has allowed them to set the agenda, and not seeing the need for our own analysis we have followed them passively. The consequences of these casual affairs, eg our alliance with the RCP in the Red Front, leave the membership uneasy, confused and lacking confidence in their own organisation, without a real sense of purpose or direction at these times there is a subsequent depreciation in commitment, discipline and comradeship.

It is naturally in the role of the paper where this confusion is most marked. Lacking a clear perspective on issues it is forced to content itself with vague generalities and has on occasions drifted into complete conformity. Similarly issues such as the campaign around the Prince Albert, the IRSP benefit, Cenotaph confrontations, all issues with broader implications and exclusive to Red Action are not seen as significant and as a result are under reported or ignored.

On the anti-internment march in Belfast last year the Red Action delegation outnumbered the representatives of the Irish SWP by four or five to one. After almost twenty years of armed rebellion that fact in itself speaks volumes, for once again it demonstrates that the further sections of the working class advance against the State, capitalism or imperialism, the gap already immense between the class and the parties increases accordingly.

No revolutionary group in Britain had produced a revolutionary programme, so while all the time claiming to be revolutionaries they see no need to formulate a plan to create revolution. This lack of real analysis forces them to respond to each upsurge of resistance in the most opportunistic way. As a consequence their raison d'etre, their reason for being, is simply to maintain their own existence.

The implications for Red Action are clear. We must take a bold and decisive step. We must make a clean break. We must step out from this collective umbrella of reactionaries and reformists and recognise that living in their shadow is a serious impediment to our development, for in the eyes of the working class we are guilty by association. It is time to pitch our tent elsewhere.

It is our job to try and politicise the working class or fail in the attempt.



We must not allow the majority to bend us to their will. We must bend them to ours. We must exploit our strength and be honest and objective about our weaknesses and not resort to self delusion. We must replace the traits associated with and evident in the left, the flawed analysis, naked opportunism and cowardice, with our own traditions, long term commitment, integrity and courage. We must map out a programme in recognition of the above. Like our revolutionary colleagues in the Irish Republican Socialist Movement, who have been forced to break their ideological connections with the Republican movement in an attempt to realise their own objectives (ie socialist revolution) it is no less important that we take this opportunity to do likewise.

"We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined by a freely adopted decision for the purpose of fighting the enemy and not of retreating into the neighbouring marsh, the inhabitants of which from the very outset have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation. And now some among us begin to cry out, let us go into the marsh! And when we begin to shame them they retort: what backward people you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road! Oh yes gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh. In fact we think that marsh is your proper place and we are prepared to render you every assistance to get there. Only let go of our hands, don't clutch at us and don't besmirch the grand word freedom, for we too are 'free' to go where we please, free to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh."

(V. I. LENIN)

-ooOoo-







### WHERE YOU SOW YOU REAP

In an article submitted to the newsletter last March, entitled "For The Class By The Class", it was argued that revolutionary organisations in Britain today are largely student based, academic-led, movements operating outside their own strata and in effect substituting themselves for a workers movement. It was stated that relatively small groups were swept to national prominence on a wave of student, rather than worker, militancy in 1968.

Because students are by the nature of their occupation often more receptive to radical ideas than members of the working class, but because they are transient, because they are uniform only in the fact that they are students while all the time representing social classes, traditionally upper and middle classes, they can at one moment be progressive, albeit in pursuit of their own goals, and in the next in defence, reactionary, they are fair-weather friends.

Therefore the influx of disproportionate numbers of students into a workers organisation would not only be temporary and artificial, but would have the effect if their nature was not recognised, of altering the social composition, character and eventually the politics of the group to its detriment. Though an organisation like Red Action would grow in the climate of 1968 doubling, quadrupling its membership in 12 months, the foundation would be unstable and it would be less rather than more likely to achieve its stated aims. The reason I return to this subject briefly is because even though there was broad agreement for this at the conference it was and still is contentious so it requires further analysis and clarification (the W.R.P. and especially Militant were, it is true, least affected by the student phenomena, however few would argue that the Militant programme for social change is revolutionary (nationalising 253 companies) or that the W.R.P. even at its highest point, ever had anything more than a tenuous grip on reality. Their development and demise should not be ignored, and indeed will be debated in the near future, but it is, I believe, a separate issue).

While Red Action did not exist in 1968 other groups like the International Socialist (SWP), who are still prominent, did. Apart from the I.S. the political group to 'gain' most from the student explosion was a group called the International Marxist Group, a small entrist group in the Labour party. In the 12 months between 1968-69 it increased its membership from 40 to 200. This growth was not simple opportunism but a basic belief advanced by European 'Marxist' intellectuals such as Ernst Mandel that it was students not workers who actually represented the 'new vanguard', the new revolutionaries. The student vanguard was becoming conscious of the necessity of rising up against the bourgeois society, they can and must play a powerful role as "detonator". So, according to him, it is the middle classes who will play the leading role, it is they who will liberate the workers. Another intellectual, Herbert Marcuse, insisted that the real opposition to capitalism only existed and was concentrated in the two opposite poles of society "in the ghetto population... and in the middle class intellectuals especially among the students".

On the basis of the student revolt I.S. launched a Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation in 1968 to rival the apolitical N.U.S.. The I.M.G. led by Tariq Ali, supported this initiative. The I.M.G. believed that "universities could become centres of opposition to the capitalist system". Student power was the order of the day and the I.M.G. believed that universities would become "Red bases".



During this period the I.M.G. was involved in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. As it grew they grew. On October 22nd 1967 5000 marched, just 6 months later 25,000 and a year on 100,000. Again this was largely on the backs of student rather than workers movements. Most of those mobilised were youth and students, outside the labour and trade union movement. Not surprisingly their publications were influenced by its membership and so concentrated on the "campus revolt".

The first issue of Red Mole carried articles on Lancaster, Warwick and Oxford universities, plus coverage of Jerry Rubins trial and the Japanese students revolt. By 1969 the I.M.G. belatedly recognised that the student movement was its best field of activity and set up a youth organisation, the Spartacus League, in 1970. The I.S. which had briefly flirted with the "vanguard theory" and having succeeded in gaining far more recruits from its involvement in the V.S.C. turned its attention to trade union struggles and so avoided becoming a purely student organisation.

The I.M.G. never managed to break from its student base and for the next 10 years was preoccupied with campaigns on Ireland, racism, feminism, Vietnam, etc. At one time it was operating 30 different front organisations, about one for every 11 members.

By 1978, ten years after it had increased its support from 40 to 750, it was confined to a student and white collar base almost wholly lacking a manual, working class or industrial base. Its T.U. work was restricted to N.U.T., C.P.S.A., N.A.L.G.O.. By 1983 it admitted defeat, changed its name to the Socialist League and re-entered the Labour Party from whence it came, and vanished.

### I.S. (S.W.P.)

As we shall see the I.S., later the S.W.P. made a better stab at it altogether. It started life as the Socialist Review Group and originally distinguished itself from the other tiny Trotskyite groups on the fringes of the Labour Party by arguing that Russia was a "State Capitalist" rather than a "degenerated Workers" state.

The orthodox Trotskyist view was that as the state had taken over private property and had kept control of it this fundamental step towards socialism ensured that it remained a workers state, albeit a "degenerated workers state", given the demise of working class political power. The Socialist Review Group argued that Russia was in fact "State Capitalist" and was founded on a more systematic exploitation of labour than was possible in the West. This was based on the fact that you cannot have a workers state without the workers having power to dictate "what happens in society". The basis for the theory was perfectly sensible and practical though its use to distinguish themselves mean that at times, according to the guru Tony Cliff, "welfare state capitalism was being developed" and also spoke of S.C. as being a "transition to socialism" and at the same time "the extreme opposite of socialism". As Trotsky once quipped "State Capitalism has the advantage that nobody knows exactly what it means".

The real implications for the Socialist Review Group was that the development



of the theory freed it from its allegiance and its obligation to take sides and defend a completely discredited and tarnished Stalinist Russia during the Cold War. Because they were able to say that they regarded the Soviet system as at least as bad as capitalism, it provided some explanation and analysis from the sterility of the Communist Party and the equally confused 'Catastrophe Theory' associated with Trotsky, which means simply that capitalism on its own was about to collapse at any moment and, of course, revolution was just around the corner. Like people of sects that predict that the end of the world is nigh, they seemed completely unperturbed when their prediction was not realised.

It was on this basis that the Socialist Review Group grew steadily from 33 in 1950 to around 250 in 1962. Its main field of recruitment was the L.P.Y.S. in competition with the Socialist Labour League, later to become, under G. Healey, the W.R.P..

In 1965-66 with a membership of less than 400 it broke from the Labour Party persuaded that an independent existence was possible on the strength of militant Trade Unionism, tenants struggles and anti-racism. 1968 was the peak year for the International Socialists (S.R.G.). The membership almost trebled to about 1000 and the circulation of the paper from 2000 per month in 1964 to 10,000 per fortnight in 1968.

Student radicalism was the primary source for this explosion, and though the chief object of the group was to establish a new revolutionary movement on the backs of a renewed surge of shop-steward militancy; it was still, through 1968, more visible at the London School of Economics than any part of British industry that year.

In 1970 in partial recognition of the artificially bloated membership it decided to turn towards recruitment in factories and in the working class. Its strategy was based on the belief that it could develop a strong industrial base through the setting up of rank and file groups throughout industry. Significantly the first I.S. rank and file group was established in the N.U.T. and its own paper Rank and File Teacher reached a peak circulation in 1974 of 9000. The real difficulty was how to establish such groups in heavy industry, manual engineering, etc., where the I.S. had few if any members. This amounted, at first, to encouraging student members to find industrial work and focus political activity at the factory gates. Significantly, and unsurprisingly, as a result of this "turn to the class" membership actually dropped by 12% to 880.

Nevertheless I.S. actually succeeded in creating rank and file groups in the car industry, local government, mining, docks, building, social workers, hospital employees, where it was easier to recruit members. All these groups published their own Rank and File newspapers, which ranged in circulation from 1000 to 10,000.

By 1972 the organisation was 2,351 strong, of whom 26% were classified as manual, 31% as white collar. In 1973 I.S. set up 40 factory branches and reached 2,667 members, by 1974 this was 3,900. Similarly circulation of the paper, 350 in 1950 to 2,000 in 1964, was confident of sales of 40,000 in 1974. The indication from this explosion of membership growth influence, and the related figures suggest that I.S. was based on the growth of its Rank and File groups among manual and clerical workers and this was the opportunity



to establish in Britain, for the first time since the demise of the C.P. in the 1930's and 1940's, a genuine, living, doctrinaire free, revolutionary organisation based in the working class.

On the face of it this was what the figures suggested was happening, however a closer inspection of the figures provides interesting reading, and indicates something entirely different.

An examination of the 1974 registration discloses that 48% of the membership had belonged to the I.S. for a year or less, a fantastic turnover of almost 50%. This demonstrates that almost half the membership of 2,000 would hardly have known why they joined, never mind why they left. Similarly the influence of the rank and file initiative among the working class had a negligible effect on the growth of membership, only 368 of the 1974 membership, slightly more than one in ten, was based in factory branches. So 70% of the membership, enjoying a turnover of 48% a year, were still either students, housewives, unemployed or white collar workers.

The whole rank and file strategy, the "turn to the class", was based on an upsurge of wage militancy, which existed in the early 1970's around the building workers, dock workers and miners strikes which eventually brought about the collapse of Ted Heath's Tory government. The subsequent election of a Labour government meant less militancy, disputes, etc and the whole fragile foundation for the I.S. strategy collapsed.

When it was finally abandoned in 1982 the only traces of rank and file groups remained among teachers, social workers and civil servants. The links with the building workers, dock workers and car workers, the 'more esteemed' manual or productive workers, had disappeared.

As we have seen launching a rank and file initiative with an organisation of less than 4,000 and which, even at its peak in 1974, had less than 11% in factory branches, was highly optimistic and with the collapse of the basis for the militancy on which it rested was doomed to collapse.

However, what the figures do not explain is why both the I.M.G. and the S.W.P. had by 1982 still maintained the loyalty and allegiance of workers only in the white collar section of the movement. From these figures it would appear to suggest that it is the clerical rather than the manual that are more class conscious, more committed, in short, the more likely revolutionaries. If that is actually the case and the far left in Britain are typical, then the whole basis of revolutionary politics indeed Marxism itself based on the self-emancipation of the class is indeed in doubt. As it is the 'productive workers' rather than the clerical or administrative workers that hold the power, the economic key to revolution and the establishment of a workers state.

#### Clearly Something Is Wrong

It must be recognised that socialism is based on self-interest, with individuals recognising that the best way to improve their personal social, economic position is by an identification with and forging an allegiance to the collective activity of the working class. Under capitalism elements of the working class, through the nature of their employment, by and large identify their self-interest with that of another class, the ruling class (otherwise capitalism could never



survive). As a consequence they see the stability of the system, the prosperity of the bosses, as indivisible from their own prospects and security. Soldiers, coppers, screws and the loyalists in Ireland, would fall into this category. They almost automatically, as a consequence, adopt reactionary rather than progressive views, and in left-wing academic circles they would be referred to as "backward sections" of the working class. That is not to say that they would never be won over to the side of the working class. But would simply prove to be the last, slowest, most reluctant to switch allegiance. In other words in a revolutionary situation, where smart money would back the working class as the probable rather than the possible victors, and for it to be recognised as such by the backward sections before they would switch sides, finally tipping the balance.

Traditionally white collar workers, bank clerks, civil servants, etc., are generally less class conscious than industrial workers because their economic status and stability aligned to a social ambition "to get on" leaves them confused and ambiguous when choosing sides between the interests of the working class (proletariat) and the lower middle classes with whom they may share educational, cultural, geographical (live besides) affinity. What this means is that in a clear cut battle between workers and the boss class they, having a scientific foot in one camp and a contradictory cultural one in the other, are more rather than less likely to hedge their bets. Instinctively they would be more inclined, as a result of this confusion, to identify with less confrontational, less radical strategies, be it in the conduct of industrial disputes involving themselves, or through the allegiance or support for the tactics of others. For instance, the teachers strike was different in tactics, strategies and objectives than say the response of the miners in their confrontation with the same government (1984-85); in essence less committed, less confrontational, less political and, given their respective roles, the result was less important (unlike the miners there was never any possibility of the development of N.U.T. 'hit squads'). One of the clearest examples of classes in open conflict, Russia apart, was the events in Germany during the Weimar Republic. Despite the confusion of the communist leadership under the direction of Stalin which significantly clouded the real issues by the adoption of schizophrenic policies towards the Social Democrats and the Nazis, the rank and file communists, and the communist para-militaries, knew from their familiarity with the enemy, that there could be no compromise, no quarter asked or given, literally a fight to the death. There were daily and violent clashes between the brownshirts and the communists. Fighting the fascists, then as now, usually meant breaking the law, and always meant rejecting the power and legitimacy of the public forces of law and order. Thus the streetfighters actions were politically radical in that, by the very nature of the conflict, they involved a form of behaviour (ie physical violence) which middle class culture avoided and condemned in everyday life. A study of the occupations of 318 communist streetfighters from 17 districts arrested in Berlin during 1933 bears this out. According to the census of that year waged manual workers represented just over 55% of the economically active male population of Berlin, among the streetfighters, the 220 men engaged in industry, crafts and transport represented more than 93% of the 237 specifying an occupation. The non-industrial trades named by the streetfighters include clerical and office jobs, both relatively skilled (such as book-keeping) and menial (messengers and office boys), commercial activities including helping in shops and independent sales (whether as shop-keepers assistants or street vendors is not clear), gardening, work in entertainment and catering, and barber shop work. In considering the range and distribution of occupations among the streetfighters



this chapter will concentrate on the manual and industrial trades so heavily represented among the fighters (Beating the Facists, 70).

That sample is not too surprising, and coincides with our own experiences and again demonstrates that a revolutionary party must be grounded in the class. When revolutionary parties (so called) consistently fail to attract blue-collar manual/industrial workers and when the workers attracted are, by and large, the least class conscious, least radical and so from the more backward sections of the class, it is quite obvious something is inherently, and fundamentally, wrong. Common sense indicates, and history proves, that a party that advocates revolution will have its most enthusiastic, committed followers among the disadvantaged sections of society and the most disadvantaged sections of the class.

The present state of affairs in Britain in 1989 defies logic. Does the fault lie with the revolutionaries or with the class? There must be an explanation so what is it? As we have seen both the I.M.G. and the I.S. relied entirely, for their initial growth, on the student explosion in 1968, and by 1974 each had increased its original membership tenfold. However, when the I.M.G. folded and re-entered the Labour Party in 1982 its union membership was confined strictly to the white-collar unions. Complimenting this, by the same year, the S.W.P. rank and file strategy was abandoned and had only retained links with teachers, social workers and civil servants. That in itself should not of course be derided, but given the original objectives of recruiting from the productive/ industrial workers, and the less radical nature of the recruits, it needs analysis. By and large what distinguishes white-collar from industrial/manual workers is not manners, ambition or even money, but education or more specifically higher education. Therein lies the key to the "mystery", the S.W.P. etc., are in actual fact no more successful at recruiting among white-collar than blue but are reliant for their influence on the high profile they adopted in the late 1960's, and maintained during the 1970's and 1980's in the country's polytechnics and universities. Quite simply it is here, rather than the office, they are introduced to, or recruited by, the S.W.P.. They then enter local government, social work, teaching etc., in accordance with their academic qualifications and to some the job might be seen as an opportunity for the implementation and extension of their political beliefs.

The advancement of their 'careers' (rather than jobs) through promotion etc., is not seen, either by themselves or the revolutionary party, as in any way being in conflict with the parallel advance of their careers in the revolutionary party. Naturally human nature dictates that as their career prospects increase any militancy that might jeopardise their future advancement decreases, a negative correlation. That is common sense. The descriptive term for this political stance is commonly known as moderate. In other words, where they are not corrupted by financial benefits they are open to intimidation.

Logic dictates that the foundation of a genuine revolutionary party must be built on the basis of its support among the most exploited and disadvantaged sections of the class, because they have least to lose and most to gain, they are the only 'incorruptible' section of society. That is not to say that white-collar workers, students or indeed middle classes have no role to play, they have, but in addition, behind and instead of the productive/industrial workers.

Of course the original student explosion does not entirely explain their continued influence in white collar unions 20 years later.



A New Society survey of 1968 showed that a majority of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign had been active in C.N.D.. Apart from personnel the two campaigns share a number of other characteristics which were to become typical of far left political interventions in the late 1960's and 1970's. Such movements tended to arise around single issue campaigns of loose ad-hoc organisations, they relied for the most part on the impact of mass demonstrations and appealed principally to the young. Far from relying on the membership of mass working class organisations, these campaigns drew on new agencies of protest such as women, students, youth, ethnic minorities in complex ways. These movements were connected with a revived interest in alternative life-styles and even the fashions and popular music of the 1960's. Political convictions of the membership were liberal/libertarian.

It was this movement that launched the I.S. in 1974 and funnily enough it was a similar single issue campaign that arrested its decline in 1977 after its unsuccessful "turn to the class" and the collapse of the rank and file strategy in 1974 - the Anti-Nazi League. The A.N.L. was used as a vulgar recruitment promotion for the S.W.P. and discarded when squeezed dry in 1981.

Looking back it can be seen that I.S., having grown on the backs of students in 1968, turned back to the class in 1970, failed and turned back to the recruitment of "liberal-libertarian" elements to sustain its upward mobility. The danger of such recruitment to a genuine revolutionary group must be obvious. Having recruited, not once but twice in ten years, on the backs of a single issue campaign outside of the ranks of the organised working class, and on a purely opportunist basis, without any real challenge indeed necessarily accommodating the liberal/libertarian student based politics etc., of its new membership, it is doomed to failure.

Inevitably the militancy of the demands implicate in being involved in building a revolutionary organisation must conflict with their own assumptions, self-interest, careers, commitment, etc., which means that either the group loses them entirely or the group bends or distorts its ideology to retain them. Having had some experience of the former they invariably choose the latter. The high turnover, theoretical cowardice, and indeed inactivity bears testimony to this fact. They have initiated nothing in a decade and are unlikely to do so. The downturn theory was hatched to explain their own impotence and was entirely a reflection of the new conservatism amongst its student base rather than any change in attitude of the working class towards the left. Were it now to develop or adopt a revolutionary strategy in relation to Ireland, for instance, they would be obliged to implement it. More significantly a "turn to the class" in 1989, and the commitment demanded of a membership weaned over the last decade on the course of least resistance and the soft option, could have the effect of provoking a haemorrhage in membership that would reduce it in a relatively short time to near its pre-1968 figures.

#### SELF-INTEREST

All politics are based on self-interest, long-term or short-term. Marxism lays the theoretical foundation that states that in the long-term interests of the working-class, revolution and the complete overthrow of the capitalist system is indeed the only solution. If workers living standards are attacked they respond in their short-term self-interest. If the strike dispute is particularly long or bitter even in victory some may recognise that it is only a temporary



respite and that sooner or later they will be forced to fight again, but perhaps in less favourable circumstances.

This comes about because they can see that the forces ranged against them, boss, police, media, judiciary, operate and compliment one another in the interests of separate class forces to their own, the very ones in fact with which they are in conflict, the capitalist class. Through this "understanding" some will develop a long term, as an extension of a short-term, self-interest, ie, to help other workers, or make common ground with and be sympathetic to other groups, possibly outside the domain of wage-militancy (Ireland, anti-fascism, etc.). Some may in fact join an organisation which has the overthrow of the system as its stated objective, incorporating a total analysis of the world at large.

The first stage of development is an awakening of his/her economic self-interest: wage rises, lower rents, housing, unemployment.

The second stage must be recognition of the existence of classes in society, identification with, or voting for, the political party (ie Labour Party) that promises reform; "the peaceful road to socialism".

The third stage is the recognition or dawning awareness that political reform is only a "half-way house", ie that the whole system is fundamentally flawed and must be demolished.

(In a period of social upheaval, working class people make the massive leap from passive acceptance of the "natural order of things" to a real awareness of the potential and necessity for change in, thankfully, a relatively short time).

(The first stage in development can in no way be mistaken for the third, as the S.W.P. believed in the 1970's, crudely put, 'the higher the wage rise demanded the greater the growth in class consciousness, and a rejoicing in wage militancy'). Regardless of what is required of the wage slave/conscious revolutionary, sacrifices, setbacks, mistakes, financial commitment, etc., there is no real contradiction between his/her short-term self-interest, the genuine revolutionary party based in the class, and the long-term objective, it is just that, quite simply, at times long-term self-interest take precedence over short-term gains. The miners strike, 1984-85, provides a perfect example of this, where workers were prepared to gamble or sacrifice their short-term self-interest, jobs, mortgages, etc., in the hope of bringing down the Thatcher government which would benefit them in the long-term by securing their jobs, mortgages, communities, etc..

### NATIONALISM AND SOCIALISM

The support for, and indeed apathy and hostility to, the liberation struggle by different sections of the working class in Ireland provides even more conclusive proof.

Though the Provisionals Sinn Fein/IRA are of the working class, they are not exclusively for the working class. In the North East of Ireland where the major issue is national liberation they enjoy massive support among the working class and rural poor, taking 40% of the nationalist vote. In the South where the central problem is perceived as economic rather than national liberation



and where their emphasis is still on the national question, they get 2% of the vote. The "Stickies" or the Workers party take the completely opposite view, believing that the interests of the working class revolve exclusively around the economic question, North and South. As a consequence they have four elected representatives in the South and are either hated or ignored by the working class in the North. If either party switches priorities, eg, the Provos making the economic question central in the North (abandoning the armed struggle) and continued to emphasis the national question in the South they would probably collapse. For the "Stickies" it would be vice versa, but with a similar result. What is required is obvious, but neither will be able to adopt the necessary policies because, not being Marxists, each is restricted by their own ideology, left-wing nationalism of the Provos, and the reformism of the Workers Party which, as a consequence, makes the very worst kind of collaborators with the state.

During the guerilla war in Ireland in the 1920's the SF/IRA restricted approach seriously impeded a successful conclusion to the dual struggle of national and social emancipation. Against the background of guerilla warfare the Dail (Parliament) continued to carry on governmental work underground. Many wages disputes went to the Labour Department for arbitration. Later it also set up a Land Arbitration Court in 1920 to consider land policy and settle disputes between landlords and tenants, etc..

"It was flooded with pleas from large landowners, many of them unionists, to arbitrate in land disputes. In Connaught and Co. Kerry small holders and landless men seized large estates, mostly owned by absentee landlords, and these were divided up among the workers. The "Dail" Land Arbitration Court leant over backwards to be "impartial" to unionist landowners. The majority of their verdicts were for the restoration of land to the landlords and the IRA were sent to ensure the findings were put into practice by the people. It is significant that in areas where the IRA acted as such counter-revolutionary force, carrying out this outward sign of the Dails collaboration with the privileged classes, the people were the least active in the national struggle. In such areas where the IRA actually collaborated with the people in the confiscation and division of the ranches and large estates the people were behind the national struggle to a man. This was especially so in the West Cork area". (Tom Barry, Flying Column, etc.) (A History Of The Irish Working Class, pp250).

The refusal of Sinn Fein to once again recognise and respond to the specific needs, demands and self-interest of the working class and the pivotal role it could, indeed must, play in the national liberation struggle is not a mistake but an allegiance to a fundamentally flawed and stunted ideology, that of (at best) left-wing nationalism. The basic irrationality of their analysis is demonstrated that in rejecting the support of the working class in the South they turn instead and appeal to the capitalists of Fianna Fail to help solve the national question, the very people, the capitalist class, who have the greatest investment in the maintenance of the status quo, including, of course the partition of the country and, of course, the very people, the ultimate enemy, who must be crushed if "national liberation" is to be anything more than a dictionary definition.

Revolutionaries cannot create the conditions for revolution. They must be patient, equally there are no short cuts. They must fight side by side with the workers to secure short-term interests of the class and by their presence awaken, or spark through practical demonstrations, the realisation that revolution



is indeed in their long-term self-interests and is simply the logical extension of, or final conclusion to, the original strike, dispute, struggle.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY AND THE COMMUNITY

The most prominent struggles for liberation and socialism in the world today are in Palestine, Southern Africa and, of course, Ireland. Though none of the above struggles could in themselves be defined as purely class struggle, or be based on purely class issues each one, including S. Africa, knows that "national" liberation is bound up with and inseparable from social emancipation and so it is of no surprise that it is actually from the communities of the working class that the fighters emerge. Soweto, West Bank, Falls Road. Similarly the struggle for economic objectives in the "occupied territories" is pointless until the real obstacle to social progress is removed, in each case the occupying army. The S.A. security forces are as alien in Soweto as the British in Crossmaglen. To romanticise the Irish, Blacks or Palestinians, to 'mistify' their support for the national struggle is to fail to understand that their absolute conviction is not based on a vague attachment to some ideology, their support for the armed struggle is based on their 'immediate self-interest'. It is the recognition that as the state relies on the argument of force through their military and will never listen to the force of argument that no substantial progress will be made until the army/police/state is dominated, crushed and finally removed.

In contrast, large sections, the vast majority, of the working classes in Israel, white South Africa and the Loyalists in Ireland identify their immediate self-interest with their own economic oppressors, and when their own admittedly limited but privileged position is considered to be under threat from their own governments, they can be found to support, instinctively, ultimatist or fascist solutions.

Not to understand this or to deny these "essential relationships" exist is to run the same risk as the Militant Tendency of ending up perhaps by default in the camp of the reactionaries. The appeal of "marxists" like this to the class nature of the loyalist working class purely on economic questions within the confines of the sectarian divide, is absolutely wrong and of course doomed to failure, for as they see it, any solidarity by them with the nationalist working class on any issue would put in jeopardy their "privileged" position and, of course, be clearly against their interests, short-term or long-term. Their future will be assured, as they see it, not by "class war" but by class collaboration. The solid proof for this is easily demonstrated by the fact that while at least two organisations in the nationalist camp profess socialist or marxist beliefs, there is no reciprocal body (and no history of any) and none look likely to emerge in the near future, in the loyalist community. As in Israel and S. Africa however there is significant support among these working class communities in the absence of the revolutionary socialist solution, for the fascist alternative ie UVF/UDA, Kach movement. A.W.B.

The obvious answer is of course to organise among the "backward communities". But whose job is it? Is it the job of the ANC, PLO, Sinn Fein progressive, left-wing but still "nationalist" to organise support for their policies among a working class who have grown up to regard them as the lowest form of life, who fear and loathe them, who, even today, would celebrate without any sign



of material benefit their utter physical and literal destruction? Obviously impossible. The spark, the initiative, must spring from within.

Revolutionaries cannot create revolution, the economic conditions that foster rebellion between employer and employee must first exist. Equally for socialist or progressive ideas to take root within a community there must first exist the material basis for it, and the revolutionary must exist inside the community. As we have seen the fighters of the PLO, ANC and IRA exist and have the support of the community because they are its sons, sisters, daughters and brothers. It is that, and because of it, that the struggle is sustained. As a consequence and due to its protracted nature, the oppressed require and develop tremendous collective courage and defiance, make fantastic individual sacrifices, are inspired by dreams and visions of the future, remember the past and fight harder for that dream. They look outward and beyond their own struggle and identify with other wage-slaves in rebellion.

In contrast the opposition tend to look inward, develop 'laager' or siege mentalities, "us against the world", get support only from reactionary quarters, are sustained by theories of racism and fascism, dream of the past, and fight to restore it, for them of course it is the future rather than the past that is the real nightmare.

Sometimes these "characteristics" are identified as racial, national or religious in origin. No people, black or white, English or Irish, catholic or protestant, Arab or Jew is naturally more progressive than his neighbour. Their allotted roles were decided by, and in the interests of, the forces of control. The original objective was to sow division and to profit and then later, in each case mentioned to maintain control and so profit from the actual division.

The existence of 'socialist' ideas in themselves in these communities are no barrier to reaction, for history has demonstrated time and time again that a "national crisis" as decreed by the ruling class, the parliamentary socialist will inevitably end up in the camp of their own national bourgeoisie. What is required is an understanding and an acceptance in each community, of the logic of revolutionary socialism.

### THE FUTURE OF THE LEFT AND THE FUTURE OF RED ACTION

So has all of this or any of this any relevance to the left in Britain in 1989? More specifically what is its relevance for Red Action in particular?

Political influence among the working class of 'revolutionary' groups can have never been lower this century. This is reflected largely in the composition and leadership of the political groups currently in existence claiming to be the actual or potential leaders of the working class. Regardless of whether or not they have working class members these people are neither representative of their organisations and more importantly are unrepresentative of their communities. The constituency of revolutionary socialism is the working class, though often popular perception in Britain perceives it to be the property of the middle classes. In broader terms the very basic arguments for socialism are being lost or defeated due to the almost capitulation of the Labour Party (still seen as representing socialism) to the correctness of the "market forces" of supply and demand. Aligned to that is the gelding of the unions through unemployment and legislation. The demolition of instruments of even limited



local democracy and control, GLC, ILEA, council housing, etc., have all contributed to massive confusion, cynicism and demoralisation among average working class people.

What has really happened is that over a period beginning in 1968 (the beginning of recession) the association of the working class and Labour has slowly lost any validity.

The self-interest of the individual, his/her family, community and their natural investment in Labour as a political tool for their collective advancement, has, when in government, been unrewarding to say the least. Normally, at least in theory, this should have meant a large or substantial gain for the independent revolutionary parties to the left of Labour, but it has not. During the 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's the British Trotskyite left had no real points of reference outside its own or Labour Party circles.

Had it not been for the largely artificial growth on the backs of the student, rather than workers power, in 1968 would not this still be the case? As we have seen, despite the impressive militancy of the working class in 1972-74 and the miners strike of 1984-85, the revolutionary left remained peripheral propagandists. After the left's shuddering collision with this reality in 1985, the W.R.P. at least had the decency to self-destruct. The R.C.P. and S.W.P. emerged from strike with theories, strategies, credibility in tatters, but continued on as before, self-centred, arrogant, dismissive and immune to criticism. They remain intact simply because they do not have to rely on the working class for sustenance. As either Marxists or indeed Leninists they are ideologically bankrupt and corrupt. The sole *raison d'etre*, their reason for being, is simply to maintain their existence. In the absence of genuine proles they have worker substitutes, the student wing has in fact become the party. It is a deception, but a self-deception and once that exercise in self-deception has been achieved the distinction between activity completely in the interests of the class or exclusively in the interests of "the party" becomes blurred and new, naive, gullible members are encouraged to believe that the two are indistinguishable.

Having a high turnover in membership, with recruits never properly integrated the organisation is constantly seeking new ones to maintain "momentum", but going nowhere, busily engaged in building the ranks arithmetically. With this in mind there is the constant temptation to embrace the soft option politically, to follow the course of least resistance, and disputes, strikes, campaigns come to be regarded merely as vehicles on which they, "the party", can feed.

They are opportunists and opportunists have no principle other than the strategy that serves the immediate and narrow objective of "building the party". The long-term impact of these tactics on the workers with whom they come into contact with is indelible and disastrous. In relation to the political recruitment policies of the organisations in question the cliched prophesies of where you sow you reap and what you plant you harvest seem particularly apt.

What can we learn from all this and how can we move forward despite all the odds. In the first place it must be remembered that revolutionaries cannot create revolution. The social/economic conditions must first exist, the prospect for radical change, any change, must appear to be imminent and desirable. The greater and deeper the crisis, the greater and more genuine the opportunity. Revolutions never happen while things are cosy. The relationship between



worker and expediator is still the same, the same injustices still exist, the inadequacies and injustices are still apparent, but at times like this when working people are seeing gradual change, gradual reform, small improvements, they are prepared to be patient, they are led to believe that progress will be permanent and indefinite. At times like these in Britain during the 1940's and 1950's and early 1960's revolutionaries would have no terms of reference, no natural audience, temporarily redundant so to speak. It is only when the conditions inherent in capitalism manifest themselves, over-production, inflation, etc., resulting in an obvious open conflict between the self-interest of the employee and employer that the radicals, first of the left then of the right, enter the arena as combatants.

So in one sense to romanticise the working class, to represent their struggle as heroic, is misleading, for are they not fighting for their class interests just as selfishly as the capitalist? They are, the real difference is that they represent the majority over minority interests.

Workers are not genetically any more noble, courageous, virtuous than their rulers, it is the conditions that dictate that to triumph entails sacrifice and courage.

If it was not in the self-interest of workers to strike there would be no strikes, if it was not in the self-interest of the Irish to fight the British they would not fight, if it was not in the nature of the poor and oppressed since time immemorial to fight for their own individual and economic freedoms there would never have been slave rebellions or any revolutions. In other words people do not fight for or against abstract things, say socialism or fascism, but for or against something that carries the prospect of tangible benefit or threat. As P. O'Donnell, Republican Congress leader argued in his book "Monkey's In The Superstructure"; "I'm not one of those who doesn't believe that the Tan War and the Sinn Fein struggle arose out of the 1916 rising, I believe that the executions didn't promote the national uprising. I was in Donegal and I don't believe that the executions of 1916 would have passed into ballads like '98, only that the threat of conscription came on its heels and that it was the threat of conscription that forced the people onto their feet, and Dan Breen raised the agitation to a new level (shot two men in Tipperary) whether it was wise or not I do not know."

It is the immediate or short-term self-interest of the working class that provides the only basis and the real foundation for a revolutionary party and revolution. It must be the role of a revolutionary party to reflect on and respond to, in a practical way the actual problems of the workers and by so doing weld the revolutionary to the class and the class to the revolutionary. However it must be recognised that the class and the revolutionary do not share identical interests. Is our primary objective to "build the party" or help win the campaign, dispute, etc.? The majority, if not all groups, of the left would not hesitate and insist that the revolution is indeed in the long-term interests of all workers and that a revolutionary party is a vital component in the struggle and they are that party, then theft, misrepresentation or any opportunism is simply a means to an end. Absolute garbage, and equally obvious, totally counter-productive. Red Action, as a group, must be, and be seen to be, the instrument to strengthen the class rather than the class being used to strengthen the party. A long-term rather than short-term investment if you like.



As well as that though always keeping an eye on the ultimate goal we must fight for all reforms on the basis that 5 lashes a day are better than 10 lashes a day. To simply demand that it must be 10 lashes or nothing would find few takers among the recipients, they would also be the best judge as to whether the reform was worthwhile. You take everything you can get and if the opportunity presents itself you take everything. Not to understand this is not to understand the only basis for revolution. Does that mean that like Militant for example, we prioritise all issues of short-term economic interest to the working class and either ignore or allow the lowest common denominator to dictate our policy on others? Exactly the opposite, by providing practical and principled help in fighting for short-term goals do we demonstrate and improve the currency of our stand on long-term or ideological issues, ie anti-racism/anti-facism, Ireland, sexism, homosexuality, etc., previously considered alien to or against their self-interest. Without doing the former you find little interest in your ideas on the latter. In this way we can bend the majority to our will instead of them bending us to theirs.

As it is clear that the working class are the only revolutionary class, so in a sense to turn inwards towards the left is to turn your back on the class. Equally as the working class will not come to us we must go to the class. While the workers attracted to the siren call of the left are unrepresentative of their organisations and of their communities, Red Action while in composition almost 100% working class are equally estranged, as almost all live outside the neighbourhood or community in which they were brought up. On top of that our emphasis and involvement in areas of sectional interest - Ireland and anti-facism - has meant that we almost completely neglected short-term industrial struggles, etc. In one sense by appealing to the working class to put ideology before selfinterest we have been attempting to run before we can walk.

As we have seen earlier, the influence of the revolutionary within the class, within the community, is crucial. The job of the revolutionary is to strengthen the link between ideological longterm struggle and the workers. The job of the state is essentially to crush rebellion by isolating the revolutionary within the community. Two basic strategies are employed by the state with the same objective in mind.

The first is to penalise, repress and terrorise the whole community, to demonstrate that it is they that will ultimately pay for the actions of the insurgents. To emphasise the point the punishing response is always more severe than the original action. If an Arab youth throws a stone at a patrol, the Israeli's will bulldoze a few houses in the neighbourhood. If the Nazis lost one soldier, they might shoot 10 or 100 locals in response. The idea is to demonstrate the futile and senseless nature of such activities, in that they only increase rather than relieve the general misery. Passive as well as active supporters are equally culpable, or as Frank Kitson, British counter-insurgency expert explained, "The aim of the security policy should be to make life sufficiently difficult for the host population so that through harassment a desire for a return to normality is achieved".

The opposite but complimentary strategy is to deal with the activists in a particularly ruthless or brutal way. Imprisonment, execution, etc., are obvious attempts to kill the revolution by killing the revolutionary.

The real key to its success and failure is the link often genetic (families, friends, neighbourhood) between the active revolutionary and the community.



The absolute failure of the strategy of S. Africa, Britain and Israel (one soldier said "everything we do boosts support for the Intifada") is because this 'radical virus' that exists was introduced not by agitators from outside the community but has manifested and sustained itself due to agitation inside the community.

#### HERE AND NOW

In Britain today no "revolutionary" group has a visible base in any working class community. There are no "red areas", pockets of radicalism that do exist are based on racial rather than class lines. Liverpool 8, Broadwater Farm, Brixton, etc. The white and black working class youth have no allegiance to any party or ideology. The Labour Party offers no guidance or leadership either locally or nationally and people are left to fend for themselves. They have turned their back on the class at local and national level, destroying a large part of its social base in the process, but more importantly, this retreat has left a political vacuum, leaving large sections of the working class frustrated, impotent, alienated from the process of parliamentary democracy, but ignorant of their own history. This alienation is not in itself a thing to cry over, it is not a bad thing, but if this void is not filled, or partially filled, by the revolutionary left it will inevitably be exploited by the far right.

Already they have fertile ground in which to grow. There are, according to the Runnymede Trust, (a government sponsored body), an estimated 70,000 race attacks a year. The majority owe more to spontaneity than to conspiracy by organised fascist groups. The legislation against homosexuals, clause 28, it could be argued, was the first real fascist legislation passed by government since it has no economic motive, was in any sense artificially created, and so was both a sop and an encouragement to bigotry and reaction.

Of course nothing will happen whilst the middle classes are comfortable and confident. Which is basically for as long as the economy, for them at least, remains 'sound'. When it is increasingly apparent to them that their aspirations and dreams may not be realised, when their straw-grasping solutions such as the illusory share-owning democracy crumble, they are certainly far more likely to find comfort in the ideology of the far-right than the far-left.

That is not to say that capitalism is about to collapse, but that unlike the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's when it was stable, the 1990's promise to be a period of great upheaval, conflict and turmoil, reminiscent of, though perhaps even more acute than, the 1920's and 1930's.

-ooOoo-