

RED ACTION National Council

- A Reply to I.R.S.P

Comrades,

Thank you for your letter, clarifying your position with regard to the planned H.O.I. march at Easter. In your letter you urge that "*The march and rally be supported in the fullest sense since an abject failure would be detrimental to the Irish struggle as a whole.*"

This analysis was very similar to the policy and attitude of Red Action to all Irish work in this country before 1987. We felt that such was the lack of practical support amongst the far left on this subject that any effort would be worthwhile, regardless of the real motives of its sponsors, regardless of the fact that it would be poorly attended and badly organised, that the strategy employed had no prospect of even limited success, and that the event itself could prove to be an embarrassing and futile charade. Nevertheless, or even because of this, we felt obliged to attend and offer our services, because we felt that if the march/rally was badly attended and stewarded, and therefore vulnerable to attack from fascist gangs etc; then this would provide succour to our enemies and the state machine. A victory for them was seen as a defeat for us. This policy led us in the mid-1980's to work closely at the committee level with the Irish Solidarity Movement, now defunct, a front for the R.C.G. Our participation in this alliance came to an end when a march through Islington in 1986 in support of P.O.W.'s attracted a sum total of 50 people including Red Action's contingent.

DEBACLE

This debacle which could certainly be regarded as an abject failure led Red Action to adopt a more pragmatic less charitable approach to Irish work, but the question which begs to be asked and answered is, what should be considered the criterion for success? An analysis of our work in and around the Irish solidarity movement led us to this conclusion.

The abject failure of the P.O.W. march was detrimental to the Irish struggle as a whole, not because it failed to attract support, but because of the nature to the Irish Solidarity Movement itself the failure was predetermined.

Apart from being badly organised, poorly promoted and supported, all the decisive decisions were taken by the R.C.G. Therefore we felt the responsibility for the failure was clearly all theirs. Red Action as passive altruistic supporters, having done its bit, it could wash its hands or alternatively wring them in despair at the conduct of the R.C.G., but either way the role played by us was surely beyond criticism. Then came the realisation that if we were aware that it was a charade and supported it, we as a political organisation were in fact collaborators in this deception.

CHARADE

Why support any event over which you had no control, that could not now or ever hope to provide even the smallest fraction of support or relief for the nationalist people and especially the working class in the north of Ireland. It was, we recognised, an act of extreme cynicism when compared to the length and level of the struggle in the north. Its ineptitude could be seen as nothing more than a gratuitous insult, a mockery of the sacrifices made during a decade and a half of struggle for national liberation and social

It was not the fact that other organisations failed to support this event that caused it to be a failure (given the nature of the far left in Britain, another response would be regarded as a major surprise), this would have been taken into account by the R.C.G. when they called the march. They must have known from the amount of effort and propaganda produced, and the response to it, what the outcome was likely to be. But despite the fact that the event would surely prove "*detrimental to the Irish struggle as a whole*", cancellation would not even be considered. Why? Because the march was the reason for the existence of the I.S.M. which was considered vital to the existence of the R.C.G. at the time locked in con

bat with the R.C.P. and its front organisation the Irish Freedom Movement. Certainly this activity raised the Irish question in the oppressor country, it raised it and debased it. To launch any initiative such as this without the evidence of practical support is to take a grave risk that in all probability it would prove to be an embarrassing fraud. It is a risk the British left have in the name of the Irish people, been only willing to accept over the last 20 years.

It is not the visible failure of such public events that prove so damaging to the anti-imperialist struggle, but the fact that such feeble, pathetic initiatives actually take place at all, such initiatives, such predictable disasters are the real cause, rather than the symptom of the deep malaise affecting the anti-imperialist movement in this country.

MALAISE

Even if it were the intention of Red Action to support the Leninist initiative at Easter purely for the purpose of damage limitation, paper over the cracks etc. it would only in reality help to perpetuate the lie that such an event will advance in any way, shape or form the cause which it claims to support.

Far from being benignly futile, it can clearly be seen that the cumulative effect of following such a policy over the last 20 years has proved to be nothing short of a total disaster.

With regard to the march at Easter, the reason the Easter Rising of 1916 was picked, was not because of any meaningful ideological attachment to the insurrection, but because Easter represented in their own words, "*the only available gap left in the calendar*". An inauspicious enough beginning. If precedents are anything to go by the march will be small possibly so small that it will not even serve the selfish recruitment function expected of it by its sponsors. Very few outside the Leninist will campaign for it, while probably no other organisation with any pulling power will support it. It is easy, very easy to criticise. So what is the Red Action alternative? The traditional retaliatory response would be for Red Action to set up its own solidarity movement, fanning the flames of sectarianism, creating new divisions, provoking even further fragmentation.

ALTERNATIVE

Rather than follow the historical route of the political cul-de-sac, and so compound the original error, we believe to break the dismal chain of expensive failures and wasted effort requires a radical re-appraisal. The only solution now lies in approaching the whole issue from completely the opposite direction. Rather than encourage more and necessarily smaller movements and marches, the first practical step must be to bring together the existing committees who currently organise Irish marches in this country at different times and in different areas, to co-ordinate their efforts and so avoid any possible conflict of interest, for example, rival events being held on the same day, ie; R.C.P. conference - Manchester Martyrs.

CO-OPERATION

We believe a new anti-imperialist coalition would encourage a spirit of co-operation rather than competition. Recent examples too numerous to mention of organisations, the I.F.M. being the main, but not the only culprit who seek to magnify their own importance by being seen to hold the largest demonstrations/rallies/meetings, only at the expense of boycotting what they consider rival initiatives. Also it is vital that a strategy be outlined with a view to creating a rolling, on-going programme of events throughout the year. In line with this, a rational decision would first have to be taken and agreed by all the parties involved to focus on one and only one march per season, approximately every 3 months, for example; Bloody Sunday in January, a Hunger Strike march in Spring, Anti-Internment in summer and the Manchester Martyrs in November. When not immediately organising for their own event, each committee would be expected to propagate, mobilise, arrange transport etc., for each others marches, pool an agreed percentage of the revenue raised and so with the co-operation of the Scottish Bands Alliance, bring about the maximum turn out for each event.

BASIC UNITY

Clearly such basic unity is the undeniable prerequisite before the *raison d'etre* or at least the stated reason for the existence of any troops out of solidarity movement can even hope to be re-

alised, and that is to launch a concerted attack on genuine ignorance, subsequent bigotry and indifference of the working class in Britain towards the war in Ireland.

Most members of the British working class know as much about what is happening in Ireland today as they did 20 years ago. Nothing. Stereotype images carefully cultivated by the state media in the early 70's are merely tailored by the mass media to re-enforce these views today.

Despite this, surveys regularly conducted show that upwards of 50% of those questioned still for one reason or another "want our boys brought back home". Though hostile on the issue of self-determination for the Irish people as a whole.

SERIOUS EFFORT

In the last 20 years no serious effort whatsoever has been made to resolve this contradiction and/or drive a wedge between the right wing ideologues and the perceptions of the average man or woman in the street. T.O.M. and the I.F.M. committees like the Manchester Martyrs are either restricted in the case of the latter, or simply content to organise ritual marches every year, often through 'safe' Irish areas (to avoid any confrontation or contact with the indigenous population). Often neglecting even to mobilise the local Irish community (one Irish woman said after the recent T.O.M. march in Kilburn, "*it was a great march, I wish I'd known about it.*"). Preferring instead to rely on the lukewarm support of their fair-weather friends on the British left. The consequences of this strategy are far reaching. One being that the general approach of the membership is often uninspired and routine, conscious of the fact that whether or not the march/rally itself is regarded as a success, without a coherent strategy it will make absolutely no impact on the intended target, the British State. Some might console themselves and say that despite everything we have done in the last 20 years, nothing has changed, rather than face facts and admit that nothing has changed precisely because of what they have been doing. In reality their complacency and lack of ambition aligned to their "it's not the winning but the taking part that counts: philosophy, practically guarantees it. No doubt an attempt to justify this cycle of insularity and failure will be

made by pointing out that "the natives are hostile to our aims:, without accepting that as long as we continue to regard them as the enemy, their indifference will continue. The whole attitude simply confirms for the British working class that the war has nothing to do with them, simply re-enforcing their own tacit acceptance of the status quo. The above criticisms are harsh but valid, necessarily so. The proposals are in principal correct. The package, broadly speaking, is what we intend campaigning for vigorously in the coming months, and in doing so throw down the challenge for all. Either accept or refute it. Given the winds of change currently sweeping through Africa and Europe, there is an historic opportunity for the British working class to be finally brought ce stage to provide the touch that tilts the balance in favour of the progressive forces in the war against the common enemy.

COMMON ENEMY

The only pertinent question we believe, the existing solidarity movements need ever ask themselves, is not: Do we do enough? The question is: Do we make a difference?

Without exception, we believe that the honest and objective answer can only be: No, we do not! A far more damning indictment, quite apart from the fact that after 20 years of war, none are actually equipped to make a difference, comes the realisation that at present not one single organisation is even designed to make a difference.

In the light of this, and what needs to be done, given the anti-imperialist struggle remains stagnant, except when it further fragments, an deed is in permanent crisis, not to respond positively to these practical proposals, given that 1991 marks the tenth anniversary of the Hunger Strike, during which 10 men made the ultimate sacrifice for Irish freedom, would not be easy in the circumstances to either understand or forgive.

Red Action National Council.

A preliminary meeting is to be held in London in March.

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