

# Red Action

Issue no. 36 November 1987

## THIEVES

## REMEMBER THE MARTYRS



Despite their reputation of respectability, despite their position at the centre of the capitalist economic system and despite the fact that their clients include those at the highest levels of society, stockbrokers are just agents for those who rob working people of the fruits of their work.

Monday 19th of October, the day of the great stock exchange collapse, was in many ways a significant day for those of us who describe ourselves as revolutionary socialists. It was the day when so many of the things which we have always argued about the capitalist system, about its inherently unstable nature, about it being impossible for it to maintain in the long run economic stability and growth, were shown for once to maybe have perhaps a grain of truth in them after all.

Such ideas have always been arrogantly and confidently ridiculed in the past by supporters of the capitalist system, secure and confident through the boom years of capitalism in the fifties and sixties. Even more recently, during the past eight years of Thatcherism, when in spite of increasing poverty and hardship at one end of society, booming profits in the financial and business world, were offered by those enjoying the fruits of them as proof of the successful and prosperous nature of capitalism (as for those who were not experiencing much evidence of this success and prosperity, the unemployed, the old and others caught in the poverty trap, well it was their own fault for not being intelligent or hardworking enough to take advantage of the opportunities on offer wasn't it)

### SCRAMBLED

However these champions of the capitalist system didn't look half so arrogant, or confident about the secure nature of it, as they scrambled about in panic on the floor of the stock exchange that Monday did they.

Whilst such spectacles may offer some temporary amusement and satisfaction, the effects of them are in fact quite serious, and will eventually be felt by the working class in the shape of more unemployment, cuts in ser-

vices and a lowering of living standards generally.

A perfect summing up really, of the absurd nature of the capitalist system. Of the absurdity of allowing a situation to exist where all of the resources upon which the whole of society depends on for its existence, under the private ownership and control of a small number of individuals, who are able to use, misuse or even stop them being used in any way they want, regardless of the consequences of their action to society as a whole.

### GAMBLE

Just because that massive game of bingo which is the stock market, where people gamble fortunes which they don't own or don't even exist trying to make other fortunes which will never exist except as a figure of a bit of paper, just because this whole charade finally comes crashing down as it must, then as a consequence, part of societies productive processes cease to function. Workers are made redundant and denied the opportunity to produce the things which are desperately needed, houses, goods, services etc.

There is absolutely no reason at all why the productive resources of society should be held hostage in this way, to the insane capers of the world of high finance. In fact there is really no need for the world of high finance at

all. Those who are involved in it and live off of it, would have us believe that it is the place where wealth of society is created. What garbage. Real wealth isn't a number of figures on a piece of paper. It is the things which we need to live and run our society. The food we eat, the clothes we wear and houses we live in. The goods and services we use. Without these things, it wouldn't matter how much someone had in a bank account. They would soon drop dead, and none of these things are created by the activities of the stock exchange or any of the other institutions of high finance.

They are created by the labour of working people alone, and all of the wheelings and dealings of the finance world, are really in effect nothing more than an elaborate form of theft, by which those who produce all of the wealth, are robbed of the vast bulk of it by those who create nothing.

That would be bad enough

as it is, but as we have seen not only is capitalism a system based on robbery and exploitation, it is also one that denies us any chance of social and economic stability even after we have been robbed. Economic collapses such as the recent one are an inevitable part of the capitalist system. Even if this particular one should sort itself out without any great damage to the system, there will be others that will be worse. They will always occur as long as we live in an economic system which is based on the idea of competition exploitation and getting something for nothing.

### PRODUCE

Until we create a system based on the simple inescapable logic that we can only eat, use and enjoy that which we produce, and that the best and most efficient way in which we can produce those things, is by everyone working together and doing their fair share.

The annual Manchester Martyrs commemoration march takes place on Sunday 22 November and all Red Action members and supporters are urged to attend. The march is held to remember three members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who were hanged on 23 November 1867. The Brotherhood, also known as the Fenians, was a forerunner of the Republican Movement founded in the early part of the twentieth century and still alive and very strongly kicking today.

The Manchester Martyrs, William Allen, Michael O'Brien and Michael Larkin were amongst a group of five Fenians charged with murdering a police sergeant. Two Fenian leaders were being transported by prison van to Manchester's Strangeways jail when Fenians attacked the van in an attempt to release the prisoners. A shot was fired through the lock on the van door to break it. The bullet passed through the lock and the sergeant, who was inside the van, was hit and killed.

The prisoners escaped but five men were later tried and four were sentenced to death. One, Edward Condon, held US citizenship and was reprieved following appeals on his behalf from the US government. Allen, O'Brien and Larkin were hanged. They were the first Irish people to be executed on a political charge since Robert Emmett had led an abortive coup in Dublin in 1803.

There was an outcry from the Irish community in Britain. An estimated 5,000 marched in protest in Manchester on the day of the hangings and 25,000 were reported to have marched in London in support of the Martyrs. A monument in their memory, paid for by collections amongst the Irish community, was erected in Moston cemetery, where they were buried. A memorial arch was built in the Ardwick district of Manchester.



WILLIAM ALLEN



MICHAEL O'BRIEN



MICHAEL LARKIN

The Manchester Martyrs march became an annual event and was traditionally addressed by leading Irish politicians. Eamon de Valera, then Prime Minister and later President of the Free State, spoke at a number of Martyrs' commemorations up to the 1940s. The Martyrs song "God Save Ireland" - said to be the slogan they shouted from the dock when the death sentences were passed - was in the reckoning to be the national anthem of the Free State when the Dail (Parliament) voted on the issue in 1922. It came second only to "A Soldier's song."

In 1974, anti-Irish hostility in the wake of the Birmingham bombings caused the annual Martyrs march to be abandoned but, in 1981, it was revived. Since then, it has increased in size each year and is now again one of the major Irish marches in Britain, despite the attention it receives from the Liverpool Orange Lodges who usually send a contingent to wave it by.

This year's march will move off from Longsight market at 1pm on 22 November and Red Action is organising transport from London. Contact a Red Action member or the box number for details. Speakers from Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Socialist Party will be travelling from Ireland to address the rally and marchers can expect to be entertained on the route by some excellent Irish music from Scottish bands affiliated to the Republican Bands Alliance, who can be relied upon to bring a large contingent.

**Inside this Issue:**  
**DOWN BUT NOT OUT**  
**THE I.N.L.A. AFTER THE FEUD**  
**plus**  
**WHY UNIONS SELL OUT**

# DOWN BUT NOT OUT

by Gary Otterburn

In Belfast, just before Christmas '86, yet another successful appeal, this time of 26 people who had been convicted a year earlier on the perjured evidence of Irish National Liberation Army supergrass, Harry Kirkpatrick. Amongst those released were a number of 'key players' involved in a factional and ideological dispute, which had been on a slow burner for a number of years both inside and outside the jails and which was now to ignite in violence.

The result of the 'feud' between the IRSP/INLA and the IPLO, which left 13 people dead and 20 seriously injured has had a massive impact on the IRSP, in which, at one time, almost all the victims had been involved. But the direction in which the organisation is now being taken may yet prove to have a profound effect on Sinn Fein and the Republican Movement and on the nature of politics in 32 county Ireland as a whole.

Few would argue, least of all the existing leadership, that, for a number of years, before the feud, the Movement was in some disarray, lacking a sense of direction both politically and militarily and facing mounting accusations of irrelevance and corruption. It is undeniable that the trail of devastation as a result of the assault on the Movement has been left in some ways diminished through the tragic loss of soldiers like Micky Kearney and especially 'Ta' Power and yet, because it has survived, because it was not destroyed, it has been strengthened.

## HOMERS

The dispute arose between the existing leadership and three other factions, made up of disgruntled members, who were united by Gerard Steenson under the banner of the IPLO. Steenson had been expelled from the INLA whilst in prison for doing 'homers' (bank raids carried out in the name of the organisation for personal gain).

The IPLO's political position was as follows. The INLA was impotent, discredited and corrupt and it should immediately hand over all weapons to the IPLO and disband.

While the IRSP would have admitted that there was some substance to the allegations, they, in turn, pointed the finger at those calling for its disbandment as being the very ones responsible for it. Furthermore, they refused to disband and re-emerge under a new banner, as was demanded, without first confronting and acknowledging the mistakes of the past, insisting that, first and foremost, a political critique was crucial if some of the inadequacies that evidently existed were not to re-appear. It was a stalemate.

## CONFRONTATION

In an attempt to avoid what appeared to be the growing threat of physical confrontation, 'peace talks' were arranged to 'resolve differences' at an agreed venue across the border, with a local priest as mediator. The representatives of the IPLO that did turn up were late, wore masks and carried guns and shot dead two of the unarmed negotiators, leading INLA men Thomas 'Ta' Power and John O'Reilly and attempted to kill two others present. It was an obvious attempt to wipe out the leadership as a prelude to wiping out the membership. There was no turning back. The IRSP, as a Movement, and its membership, were fighting for their lives, literally.

Throughout the feud, Sinn Fein repeatedly called for the disbandment of both the INLA and the IPLO, though their assessment of the former did not appear to be shared by the rank and file of the IRA in West Belfast who, on one occasion, even

provided an armed bodyguard for an IRSP spokesperson, allowing him to conduct an interview with a Newsnight team in safety. Similarly, Sinn Fein's Danny Morrison publicly stated that he personally held members of the IRSP/INLA in high esteem.

As the feud continued, Gerry Adams and editorials in Republican News were harshly critical of the tactics employed by the IPLO, especially after the shooting of INLA Volunteer Emmanuel Gargan, already on crutches after a previous assassination attempt.

Naturally, the British authorities, old hands at the divide and conquer techniques, gleefully exploited the situation to the full by propaganda and mis-information, simultaneously keeping their troops stationed in the INLA stronghold of Springfield and Ballymurphy areas confined to barracks as an open invitation to IPLO assassins.

## IMPERIALIST

Fully understanding "the die and let die" tactic adopted by the imperialist forces, the INLA responded by mounting nightly patrols, carrying automatic weapons and wearing flak jackets, in the realisation that they were immune from interference as long as the army maintained this strategy or as long as the 'feud' lasted. After the attempted murder of Kevin McQuillan and the shooting of his brother at their home, the INLA hit back in dramatic fashion, taking out Gerard Steenson, recognised by the INLA as a physical force specialist and the instigator of many attacks.

He was ambushed whilst on a reconnaissance mission in Ballymurphy. Some indication of Nationalist opinion and their attitude to the 'feud' can, perhaps, be gauged by the attendance at Steenson's funeral, which was heavily outnumbered by the RUC and was mainly composed of family friends and political associates, as against over 1000 from West Belfast, who turned out to pay their last respects to Micky Kearney.

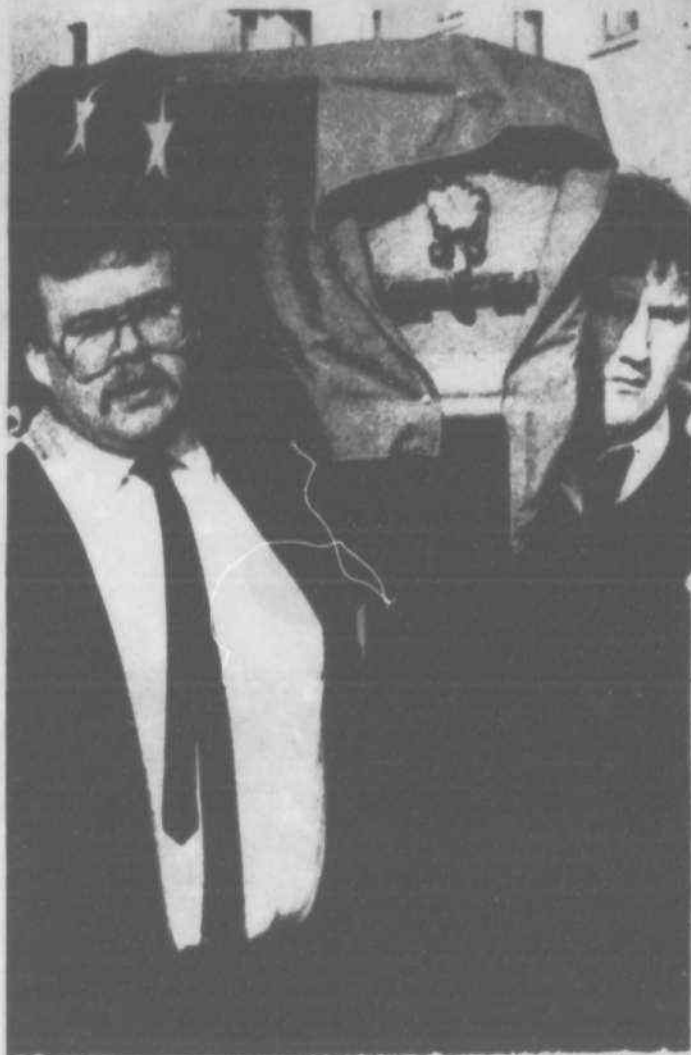
The INLA's assessment of the importance of Steenson to the IPLO and the strategy of the 'surgical strike' was justified, as a ceasefire was agreed shortly after his death.

## HISTORY

Admittedly, that is the bare bones of the 'feud' and the reasons behind it. To fully understand how this tragic situation came about, it is necessary to examine the history of the Republican Movement, where all the answers can be found. This we intend to do in the coming months.

## THE FUTURE

Since the early '70s, of course, the Provisional IRA has moved radically to the left and, in fact, have developed the type of party polit-



IRSP figures Kevin McQuillan (left) and Terry Harkin carry the coffin of Micky Kearney.

ical structure that IRSP members readily admit they themselves want to build. However, there is nothing in Sinn Fein history or philosophy that guarantees that this leftward drift will continue indefinitely and, indeed, at the time of writing, there is evidence to suggest that it may already have peaked.

Take, for instance, the recent comment from Gerry Adams, when he said "Socialism was not on the agenda" and from his book 'Politics of Irish Freedom,' where he said the "Republican struggle should not, at this stage of its development style itself Socialist Republican as this would imply that there is no place in it for non-Socialists."

## SOCIALIST

It is Sinn Fein's intention to try to accommodate non-Socialist ie middle class, to broaden its appeal, instead of trying to capture the support of the urban working class in the Free State with a Socialist programme. The strategy is flawed and may erode rather than strengthen the current base of support for the armed struggle.

When Sinn Fein called for the INLA to be disbanded, they stated categorically that it had absolutely no objection to the continued existence of the IRSP or any other political grouping but insisted there can be only one rebel army. The IRA, secure in their knowledge

that working class nationalists would regard with cynicism the political ideas of any group that did not treat the liberation of the country as a priority.

The IRSP intend to hold their first Ard Fheis (annual conference) since 1984, based on a document produced by 'Ta' Power on the future of the Movement, proof that, despite the tragedies of the 'feud,' it has had the effect of cauterising a weeping wound that had drained the organisation of its initiative and vitality. The tenacity and optimism, with which the membership pursue the task of re-building deserves the respect and admiration of anyone who calls themselves Socialist.

Being totally objective, there must be some doubt at this stage as to whether the IRSP can fulfill its own objectives but, what is undeniable, is the necessity and desirability of an organised and identifiable left-wing group as an integral part of the liberation struggle, if all the mistakes of the past are not to be repeated. Sinn Fein would never allow such a caucus to form from within its own ranks so the only option is to continue the fight outside the Republican Movement, an option which 30 IRA prisoners Communist League have recently taken up. The fact that they have done it now must be significant.

# IRSP/INLA PRISONERS

There are 45 IRSP/INLA prisoners in English and Irish jails. They receive no assistance from the prisoners support groups such as Green Cross, who help IRA prisoners. As part of the re-building of their movement following the 'feud,' the IRSP are asking socialists in Ireland and elsewhere to sponsor prisoners to help pay for relatives to travel to visit them and pay for food parcels, newspapers and the like.

Red Action is proud to have been asked to assist in this way and each RA branch is to sponsor a IRSP/INLA prisoner. Any supporter or reader who wishes to help us do this should contact any RA member or write to the box number. Each branch must pay £8 per month to help their prisoner and it is hoped that individual members and supporters will also keep in touch by post with their prisoner. This latter aspect, in particular, should prove interesting and fruitful.

# SELL OUT

One of the most basic and fundamental principles of socialist ideology, is support for the principle of working class people organising themselves together to act collectively in defending and advancing their living standards - ie trade unionism.

Our support for this principle is based upon our view of the nature of the capitalist economic system. We see it as a system which divides society up into two main classes - employers and employees - which have a direct conflict of interest with each other. Each can only benefit at the expense of the other. The only way in which the boss class can ultimately fulfill its quest for ever greater profits, is by paying the workers as little as possible for their efforts. Similarly, the only way in which the working class can fulfill its interests and increase its living standards, is by screwing back as much as possible from the bosses. There is a permanent and irreconcilable conflict of interest between the two which can never be resolved as long as the capitalist system lasts, and will always ultimately end up in some form of economic conflict. That is why socialists, as supporters of working class interests, support the principle of collective working class action. It is the best weapon which they have against the economic power of the bosses.

Put like that it all sounds very simple of course. On one side the rich and powerful and all of their forces, on the other the poor, weak and needy, backed only by the unions. A clear case of goodies v baddies. Unfortunately, as anyone who has had any experience of trade union affairs will very quickly tell you, it isn't quite as simple as that at all. Trade unions most certainly do not always act in a manner which is in the best interests of the working class. In fact there are numerous examples of where they have done quite the reverse. When they have failed to support their members when involved in industrial action for example, or have failed to respond to appeals for support and solidarity from other unions. Then there is the recently emerging trend of unions competing with each other to try and sell themselves to management. Offering all sorts of concessions detrimental to the workforce (worse working conditions, lowering of manning levels, no strike deals etc) in order to win sole recognition and negotiating rights for themselves.

It is clear then, that trade unions are far from being organisations which always act in the best interests of the working class. And yet this is supposedly their purpose. So what is going wrong? To understand this, we have to understand the nature of trade unions today, and the role which they play in society.

Trade unions today are far from being the sort of small groups of workers organised together, which they were when they were first being formed just over a hundred years ago. Today they are vast nationwide concerns, representing tens and hundreds of thousands, and in some cases millions of workers. In one sense of course, this is greatly to the advantage of the unions. Obviously the more members a union has, the stronger its bargaining power in negotiations, and the greater the impact of any action which it might take. However it is a situation which also contains certain drawbacks.

Because of their vast size, the majority of unions, in order to be able to operate and function smoothly and effectively, need to maintain a large organisational framework with a large number of full time officials and paid workers - ie a bureaucracy. But a great danger, inherent in any situation where you have a bureaucracy based upon a political movement, is that the bureaucracy can begin to become separated from the movement and its aims and interests, and begin to identify and work towards interests of its own.

This is something which occurs very very easily within the bureaucracies attached to the trade union movement today. For a start, full time union jobs being what they are, a well paid and secure career, attract many whose only real interest in the class struggle is how they can best use it to feather their own nest. Such people, in terms of income and social outlook, really have more in common with the bosses than they do with those they are supposed to be representing, and they can be easily wined and flattered (and in not a few cases actually bribed) by them, into doing their dirty work for them.

But it isn't always only a case of self interest or corruption. There are many good committed trade unionists, who become full time officials with the best of intentions, who still eventually find themselves pursuing aims which are at odds with what the membership want.

What happens is that these people, totally immersed as they are in the day to day running of the union organisation, responsible for ensuring that it is in a healthy and viable condition, and most importantly, dependant on this for their own livelihoods, come the health and prosperity of the organisation as an end in itself, and not as it should be, merely a means to the end of fighting the class struggle. What worries them most of all, is anything threatens the smooth running or well being of the union organisation, and their control over it. This is why, contrary to popular belief, the majority of union leaders hate to see their members involved in industrial action. It threatens both the smooth running of the union - loss of subscriptions, the possibility of legal moves against them etc and also their own control over it. In the highly volatile atmosphere which prevails during disputes, members are far less willing to passively accept leadership control than usual.

That is why time and time again we see union leaders doing everything they can, to resolve disputes, and so often ultimately selling out the workers interests by making concessions to management in order to do so. It isn't that they want to see their members living standards or working conditions cut. Of course not. There is nothing that any union leader would like more than to be able to go to the membership and tell them that they have just negotiated a massive rise in wages and improvement in working conditions.

But as we have seen, the capitalist system doesn't work that way. In it, you only get what you fight for, and as we have also seen, the last thing most union leaders want is a fight. They like being the generals, but they don't want to lead the troops into battle.

# BELGIAN VIEW OF BELFAST

Red Action's annual August trip to attend Belfast's internment commemorations was joined this year by contacts from overseas. Here we publish a Belgian contact's impressions of his visit. The English is not perfect but, then, neither is our French.

## FREEDOM

The first time I heard about northern Ireland was when Bobby Sands made his hunger-strike. Then I began to be interested in the freedom fight in Ulster. But when Bobby Sands died, we received no more news about N.I., only when the IRA has made a big attempt and the TV say what they have done but never really explain the reason of their act. That is why people in Belgium think that the Provos are just terrorist and that is why they also ban them.

The people over here think in Ulster there is just a religious civil conflict. They don't realise it is a WAR AGAINST IMPERIALISM. If they think in that way, it is only because we are victims of UNINFORMATION. Why haven't we got the truth? Is it because of the British censor or because England is part of the EEC? I tried to get more information about Irish history and the Irish struggle but I didn't find a book in French about it.

## ILLEGAL

I saw a soldier point his gun at me and the CHILD I had in my arms during a control. I hoped he controlled his gun well because he was so close to me that, even if he did not want to shoot, he could not miss us.

I realised in Belfast that the IRA and the INLA are the people army and the people support their actions. I saw it during the anti-internment march, which was the biggest I have ever seen and it was an illegal march. You can also realise it by the murals. There is no street in Belfast without a mural.

I saw good Republican bands play in a club where all the people sang "A NATION ONCE AGAIN" with their fist up.

I saw no pub or club without the ten hunger-striker pictures (and it is said they had no support). It is impossible to forget the war in Belfast because there are soldiers everywhere. All the clubs



The IRA and the INLA are people's armies and the people support their actions.

## ANTI-INTERMENT

are watched with cameras, there is always a helicopter flying over the town and you often hear explosions.

Fortunately I later met geezers from London who sent me books and papers and gave me more information about Ireland. They invited me to go to Belfast with Red Action for the anti-internment march.

I'll never forget Belfast. I'll never forget its people, who are very welcoming and are always ready to go shares with the only few things they have got.

## OPPRESSION

I'll never forget how BRITISH OPPRESSION IS STRONG OVER THERE. I saw the RUC provoke the people. The RUC wanted to receive a brick or wanted to create a riot just for the pleasure to shoot with their plastic bullets.

## UNUSUAL

I saw so many unusual things for us but not unusual for Belfast people that I probably forget more than I write.

But the best thing you have to do is to go yourself in Belfast. It will be very instructive for you and then you can tell your family and friends what you saw. IF PEOPLE WERE INFORMED, IT WOULD BE A BIG STEP TOWARDS THE END OF THE IRISH WAR.

# MUSIC FOR ALL

## NOT JUST MANDELA

Davy Lamp is a record label with a distinct difference. It is non-profit making, preferring instead to raise money for worthwhile causes. Their first release was a four-track EP for striking miners during their bitter struggle. This was quickly followed by a 12 inch single and, more recently, an LP entitled "Not Just Mandela," both for Anti-Apartheid. Over the past couple of years, they have also organised successful all day benefit gigs in their home town of Harlow in Essex to raise funds for Anti-Apartheid. It was at one of these gigs that Red Action's roving reporter caught up with Davy Lamp founders, Graham Bell and Julie Rogers.

Red Action: Tell us about the origins of Davy Lamp.

Julie: We started off, not as a record label, but by raising money for the miners through benefit gigs. We done two or three of those and, then, as a result of having quite a few local bands in Harlow, we decided to put out an EP to raise money for the miners. That was in 1984/85.

RA: Did it cost much to set up?

Graham: The first single cost £425, which we got as a loan from the council and which was paid back in two weeks. We raised roughly £700 for the miners.

RA: Were there any bands you approached who weren't interested in participating or were they generally keen?

J: Most were actually coming to us to ask us to do it.

G: And they all recorded for free.

RA: On "Not just Mandela," you included The Housemartins. So it's not only Harlow bands then?

G: No, but that album was a bit special. It was for Anti-Apartheid. We got Billy Bragg to do a song with the Neurotics and the Housemartins 'phoned us to say they would like to be on the album.

RA: The majority of benefits have been for Anti-Apartheid. Are they going to be confined to the South Africa issue?

G: We do tapes as well and we've just released one by a band from Grays in Essex with half the money from that going to a Rape Crisis Centre and the rest to a community relations centre who are trying to stamp out racism in Grays, 'cos it's pretty bad there. The deal is that we put the material out and any money the band

make on top, they can donate to a cause of their choice.

RA: Would you be prepared to do benefits for Nicaragua or the Republican cause in Ireland?

G: Yeah, Nicaragua, Ireland, it's up to what the band want to do. We don't dictate which cause so long as it's left wing or that way. We've got a band who wants to do a benefit for Mencap; we've no objection if they want to donate the money to that.

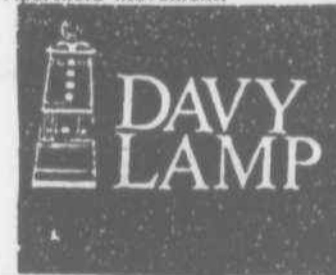
RA: Do the bands have to be politically motivated with their lyrics?

G: No, not really. As long as the songs aren't sexist or racist. They don't have to be political protest songs.

RA: Any more information you want to give?

G: We're going to start doing a political material distribution service through the post soon. We'd like to hear from any bands who would like to help us out and set up more things in the future. If bands want to contact us, we've got a new address: Davy Lamp Records, Latbush Centre, Sutton Way, Harlow, Essex.

The "Not just Mandela" LP costs £3.99 and features Billy Bragg with the Neurotics, the Housemartins, Attila the Stockbroker and some excellent Harlow bands. All proceeds go to the Anti-Apartheid Movement.



## ANNA APPEAL

Anna Sullivan is well-known and well-respected in anti-Fascist circles for her principled and consistent work against Fascist activity.

Recently, her home in Islington, London was attacked during the night. A petrol bomb was thrown through her front window and, although Anna escaped, the whole bottom half of her house was burned out. The cost of the damage runs to a four figure sum.

Although no-one has been apprehended for the attack, there can be virtually no doubt that it was politically motivated. A fund has been set up to help Anna pay for necessary repairs and refurbishment, etc.

Red Action is supporting the fund and invites all members, supporters and readers to contribute. This can be done through any RA member or by sending a cheque or postal order, made payable to the Anna Sullivan appeal, to the box number. Alternatively, donations can be made through the anti-Fascist magazine Searchlight at 37b, New Cavendish St, London W1M 8JR.

A big pat on the back to two RA supporters, who have already made fine efforts on behalf of the Anna Sullivan appeal. One from Manchester raised £35 by collecting from friends and the other from South London, who raised £15 in a collection at his workplace.

All RA members, supporters and readers are invited to submit articles to appear in this paper. The decision as to what is included is made by the editorial board, elected by RA conference. Some articles, therefore, may not express RA policy but the opinion of the author. Any such article appears bearing the author's name to show that the view expressed may not be in tune with RA policy.

# THROUGH THE POST

The pages of Red Action are open to anybody to write about anything they wish. Please keep letters as short as possible, and write to P.O. Box 158 Hatfield Herts



Dear Red Action,

Dean Hancock and Russell Shankland, the two Welsh miners jailed for eight years apiece on a manslaughter charge during the '84/85 strike, are still behind bars. They had a parole board in August, from which they didn't get any joy, and are both in good health and spirits, considering. Russell's birthday is on 10 December and we call upon all who read this to send cards and messages of support to show him and Dean that they haven't been forgotten by working people.

The address is: Russell Shankland, A83 752, HMP Gartree, Market Harborough, Leicester. LE16 7RP.

In Solidarity,  
East London Direct Action Movement-International Workers' Association.

Dear Red Action,

In the summer, I visited Belfast to watch Manchester United play at Windsor Park against an Irish XI. After a drink, I took a taxi to the game. The cab was stopped by the RUC and British Army. I was told to get out. Imagine my amazement when I saw soldiers pointing guns at me while a RUC man questioned me for 25 minutes. The delay caused me to miss the kickoff, to the amused delight of the RUC and troops. Who are the real hooligans?

Kevin, London.

Red Action,

Due to the recently announced new Tory anti-union legislation and the National Union of Mineworkers already at the beginning of a dispute with the National Coal Board, I believe it is now time for a permanent National Strike Network between Red Action and other revolutionary socialist organisations.

Disputes over the last four years like the miners, printworkers, Silent Night and numerous others have proved the necessity of such a network being formed. Far too often, striking workers are sold out by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Labour party and even their own unions in strike action and are having to rely increasingly on strike support groups.

Although these groups do offer vital support, they do suffer certain weaknesses. For example, it is very often late into a strike before such groups are organised and this is very often only in the area where the dispute is taking place. Red Action, in the past, has proved it can organise itself effectively, for example the part it played in the setting up of Anti-Fascist Action. I would therefore suggest that the RA National Council considers my suggestion and let us be organised for the obvious strike actions that lay ahead.

Yours in Solidarity,

Alan,  
Merseyside.

## SUPPORT RED ACTION



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

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

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

The cost for this is £10 for one year.

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

PO box 158  
Hatfield  
Herts

# THE VOICE OF REASON



When asked if US naval manoeuvres in the North Pacific could be seen as provocative by the Soviet Union, General P.X. Kelly of the US Joint Chief of Staff's office replied "I hope it is."

On 1 April 1984, United States agents planted mines at the entrances to Nicaraguan ports. US State Department deputy secretary Kenneth Dam said "The US has the right to mine Nicaragua's harbours as an act of collective self-defence."

On 24 September 1987, US President Ronald Reagan wrote to the US Congress (a house of the US Parliament) accusing Iran of planting mines in the Gulf. He wrote "Mining of the high seas without notice and interfering with navigation is unlawful and a serious threat to world public order."

The "high seas" where the Iranians were alleged to have planted mines are within sight of the Iranian coast. At its widest point, the Gulf is only about 200 miles across. As the crow flies, the nearest point of the US to Nicaragua is 900 miles and, if the US crow (or is it eagle) flew by that most direct route, it would have to cross hostile Cuba to get there.

Whilst on the subject of the Gulf, do you recall that it used to be called the Persian Gulf. Persia is an old name for Iran. In those days, Iran was ruled by a Shah (King) who had originally been put in power by Britain to act in western interests. However, the Iranians, fed up with more than a century of British and US imperialistic domination over their country, kicked the Shah out. Almost overnight, the western media dropped the Persian tag when referring to the Gulf. Any day now, expect them to slip in the prefix "American" instead.

During the controversy over the child abuse cases in Cleveland, local Labour MP Stuart Bell said "The idea that we are a nation of child abusers is dangerous. The time will come, if this goes on, when half the parents in the country will be considered unfit to look after their own children." You must agree that MPs are usually heard baying that too much time is spent on the criminal, yet here is an MP proclaiming the innocence of people who may yet be charged with rape. Had the alleged victims been adults, his position could have proved politically disastrous but, in this case, he faced no such dilemma as his constituents under suspicion were adults and the victims children. You see, children don't have a vote. Childline receives 9,000 calls a day from the little people with no vote.

"We recognise the National Front is particularly odious to most people and we do not feel members of Life could work with them." So says Gordon Whitehead, chairman of the anti-abortion group Life on the infiltration into the group by fascists. It may come as a shock to Mr. Whitehead to hear that many people find his group pretty odious as well.

"GEC has a policy of only paying about the minimum subsistence level set by the government. This is some 300 Rand per month lower than the living wage level as demanded by the Confederation of South African Trade Unions."

Alternatively, the British Industry Committee on South Africa insists that British companies "are making an important contribution to the welfare and advancement of their black and coloured workers."

Now, which of these two is lying? We feel the first statement has a ring of truth about it, mainly because it was made by James Prior, chief executive of GEC, who went on to say that GEC is proud of its record and cannot be expected to pay workers at a level above market rates.

"If a man is serving 20 years with no prospect of parole and he's put on report for having his hands in his pockets, it's obvious he'll develop a grievance. That sort of thing happens all the time." - Jimmy Boyle, ex-con and author of "A Sense of Freedom," commenting on some of the reasons for the recent riot at Peterhead jail. The leaders of the last protest were sentenced to 10 years on top of the sentences they were already serving.

Fox-hunting is most closely associated in the public mind with the well-off. The royal family, the landed gentry, that type of person. The type who always vote Tory (unless they are members of the House of Lords and, therefore, are considered too important to have a vote). Now, examine this quote from the memoirs of Robert Churchward, former master of the Shropshire foxhounds: "The huntsmen came towards me with the fox's brush (tail). The master brought it up to my face smearing me with the wet, bloodstained stump, still wet with the traces of excrement clinging to it. I must have flinched because I heard someone say 'Stand still, boy, and take it like a man.'" They refer to this activity as sport.

"I would be surprised if many English nine year-olds are worth £2.50 for a full day's work." - Times columnist Auberon Waugh on stories of child labour. Could it be that he is judging things by the pay rates at Rupert Murdoch's Wapping plant, where the Times is printed?

A Red Action member had an unusual experience recently when he was invited to be a crown witness in a case against one PC Michael Shaw. Shaw was charged with assaulting the RA member causing him grievous bodily harm. The incident took place after a spontaneous clash between a group of National Front supporters and some RA members in Islington, London in November 1985. During and after their arrest a number of RA members were assaulted, including the witness who sustained fractures to a hand, a cheekbone and his nose and also suffered loss of teeth. He also needed 15 to 20 stitches to various head wounds.

Three police officers, including an inspector, told the court of PC Shaw's violent behaviour on the evening. After hearing evidence from a special constable the he saw Shaw beat three other men with his truncheon, the prosecuting counsel put it to Shaw that he was "baton happy." Shaw denied this claiming that he had only twice before had cause to use his baton, "once to fix a car seat and, on another occasion, to put a cat out of its misery." The jury, obviously friend of neither man nor beast, found Shaw not guilty.

"The best thing we can do for the blacks is send them back into the jungle to recover their culture." - Comedienne Marti Caine, who later claimed she had been quoted out of context.

The new Tory trade union laws state that all unions must hold a secret ballot on whether or not to strike and, if the result is in favour of strike action, the people who voted against it can ignore the result and cross picket lines with impunity. The union, of course, are forbidden from taking disciplinary action against anyone who does so. What is the point of all the palaver about a secret ballot in the first place?

On the face of it, it seems a good idea and one which should be implemented nationally so that the 60 per cent who didn't vote Tory could completely ignore the result of the last election. Furthermore, it could be decided upon by secret ballot and, if a majority opposed the idea, the ballot result could be ignored.

On BBC's Open To Question programme, footballer Terry Butcher stated that his father had always voted Tory and so had he. In the next breath, he admitted "I know nothing about it" - the "it" being politics. At least he is consistent in his stupidity.

Great news from West Belfast. Despite relentless pressure from the media and the Catholic church and despite intimidation from the RUC and British army, the people of the Falls area have elected two new Sinn Fein councillors to bring the Republican representation on Belfast city council to nine seats. In the Upper Falls, Mairtin O'Muilleoir polled 4,101 first preference votes compared to the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) candidate's 3,375, whilst in Lower Falls, Fra McCann's victory was more a massacre than a landslide. He polled 5,425. The other four candidates only got 3,057 between them, including the SDLP's mere 1,918.

"The accident is so boring I can't bring myself to talk about it any more" - 'Zany' Noel Edmonds talking about hod-carrier Michael Lush, who fell to his death doing a stunt on Edmonds' Late, Late Breakfast Show.

In an attempt to extract himself from allegations made by the right that he was a left-wing sympathiser, Mrs Aquino's Press Secretary said "I am a member of the left as much as Pope John Paul is a member of the Sicilian Mafia."

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## SELL OUT

Of course when management attempt to impose something particularly unacceptable on the workforce, then union leaders, in order to justify their position, are forced to make militant sounding noises, and on occasion lead the membership into action. But probably, as soon as that action starts to pose a threat to the structure of the union organisation, whether financial legal or whatever, they start to look for some way out. In such a situation, ending the dispute becomes more important than achieving the aims for which it was launched.

### PERFECT

So we have to say that trade unions today are far from being perfect organisations but, for all that, we cannot turn our back on them. Whether we like it or not, it is not possible to organise to defend working class living standards by turning away from unions. To do so would only be to the advantage of the boss class, who would like to see workers living standards reduced only to make more profit for themselves.

What we have to do is support the unions but work with them to try to make them more effective organisations and more representative of working class interests.

That means we have to campaign against the undemocratic structures under which unions at present operate for and end to 'job for life' union officials and make them all duly accountable to the membership for their actions. We should campaign for an end to the perks and high wages top union officials enjoy and make sure none of them are paid more than the average wage of the members they represent.

We have to work towards creating a union movement which operates from the bottom up and not, as they do today, from the top down. We need a union movement where the real power of decision lies with the rank and file and officials are controlled by the rank and file, not the movement we have today, where their top officials are privileged dictators. We have to build the union movement and make it strong. Only then can it make us strong.

# WE ARE RED ACTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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