

RED ACTION

Issue 75
Autumn
1997

£1

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Years On...

A Reservoir of Reaction

In February a European Youth Survey which involved face to face interviews with 1,600 16 to 24 year olds in eight countries found that the British were "by far the most racist and reactionary" in Europe including those countries where far-right groups have greater public profiles.

In April a committee of the United Nations criticized Britain for not banning far-right groups.

In May a report from the New York based Human Rights Watch reveals that Britain has one of the highest rates of racially motivated crime in Western Europe - a situation as desperate as that experienced by minorities in Germany. The group spent three years compiling the report which concludes that one in five crimes suffered by members of ethnic communities is linked to the colour of their skin. A spokesperson said "These kinds of attacks have a political element to them. It is a human right to determine your place of home and families have been forced out of their homes. These attacks have a quality of ethnic cleansing." It castigates the state for failing to deal with the epidemic but notes that some of the cases of the most murderous brutality were carried out by the employees of that same state; the police. Last year a United Nations report noted with serious concern the disproportionate number of ethnic minorities who died in (British) police custody, corroborating in the process many of Human Rights' Watch findings.

The conclusion that the attacks are 'politically motivated' is a direct echo of a speech made by an AFA organiser at a public meeting in south-east London in November 1993. Speaking of the inadequacies of the ANL/YRE/ARA tactics in dealing with the deteriorating situation he called for the "terror to be reversed".

"In response to the ethnic cleansing being pursued by fascist supporters and sympathisers in areas of south-east London we refuse to believe that...lobbies of the council are an adequate response. The race attackers and fascists within the community must be flushed out, identified and isolated or they will continue to identify isolate and murder us."

He argued that "it was a case of cause and effect. Wherever there is racial violence the BNP will be. Where there is no racial violence they will organise it. Where they

organise, is where the situation no matter how bad will quickly deteriorate from the random attack, to a coordinated and politically motivated campaign...what the evidence shows is that if you stop the BNP you stop the terror".

Meaning that where fascism is denied an influence racist attacks are minimal. Where fascism has got an influence then either race attacks are of epidemic proportions or alternatively as the mother of race murder victim Stephen Lawrence observed recently, an informal apartheid has been installed instead.

The BNP, the largest fascist group in Britain, stood over fifty candidates in the General Election, saving their deposits in three seats with their best result being 7 per cent of the poll. In all, fascist candidates got less than 50,000 votes. In normal circumstances particularly when judged against the situation elsewhere in Europe (Austria, France Italy and Germany where five thousand fascists recently marched in public support of the Wehrmacht) there could be an excuse for a complacency bordering on smugness.

But the reality as we all know is somewhat different. Austria has Haider, France Le Pen. Germany has had Rostock, and the burnings of the refugee hostels at Soloigen and elsewhere to alert everybody to the menace of the far-right. But in Britain race attacks and the implications, despite attempts by AFA over the years to bring attention to the issue, remain a hidden epidemic.

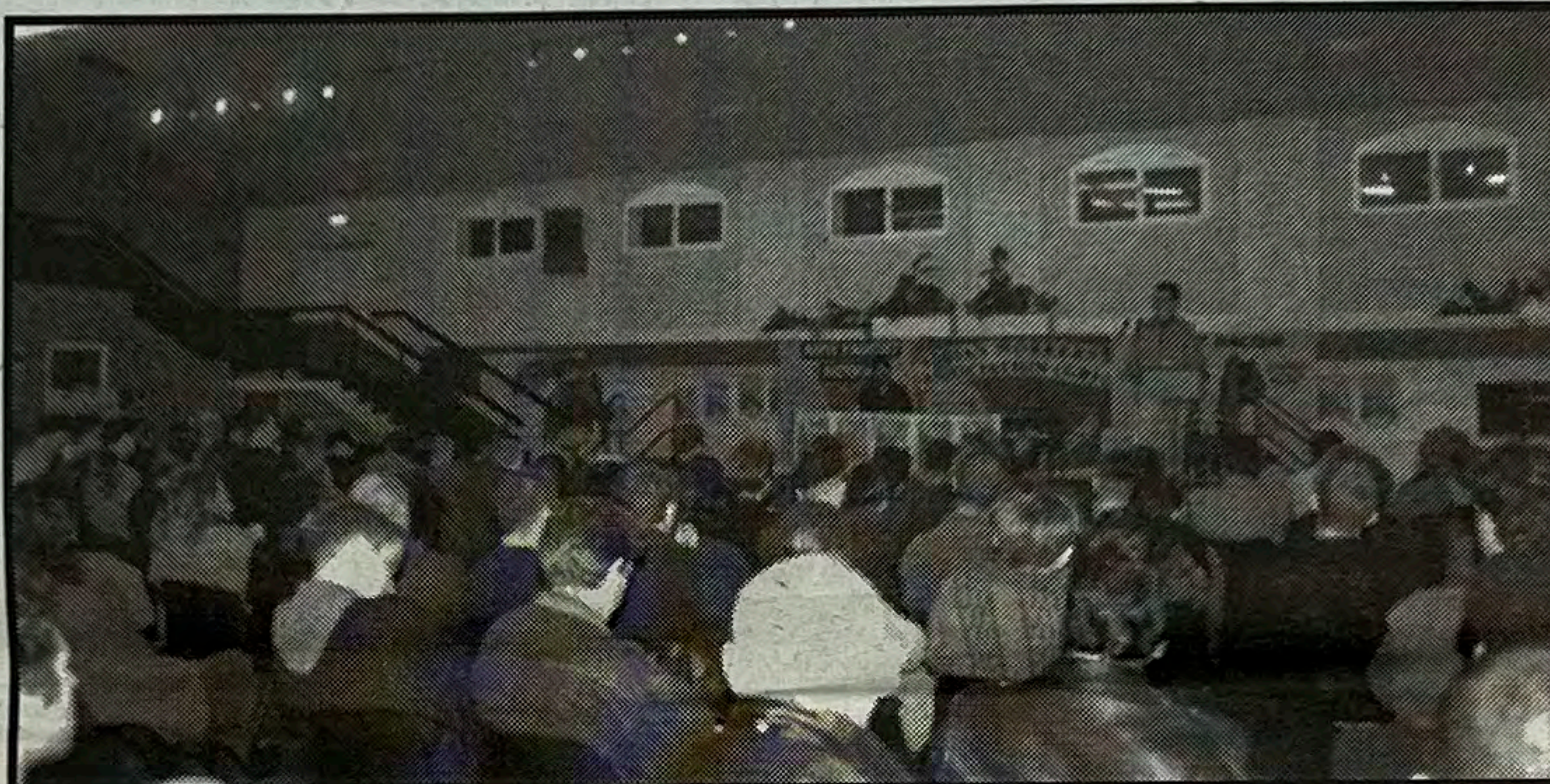
There are two reasons for this. The first is that for the last fifteen years groups like Red Action and later AFA have time and time again gone through the fascist ranks like a rat through cheese. Due to the prolonged assault on the infrastructure and morale of these groups their electoral returns bear little relation to the reservoir of reaction they know exists, and desperately seek to politically represent.

Secondly, the British left are in denial. A decade after AFA publicly raised the issue of a hidden epidemic with a 2,000 strong march and wreath laying ceremony at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day to commemorate "The victims of fascism yesterday and today" the Left, apart from occasionally chasing ambulances to milk the publicity from another tragedy, have done nothing. Instead their attacks on AFA

have been as relentless as AFA's attacks on the fascists. They remain in denial because the existence and growth of racism is a constant challenge to their analysis that fascism /racism is an aberration; a diversion from their onward march to a more egalitarian, progressive and multi-cultural society. A march moreover, they maintain, they are leading. As British society can only be going in one of two contradictory directions, race attack statistics are of acute embarrassment. A constant and painful reminder of a fatally flawed line of thinking.

In May 1989 as AFA was single handedly crushing attempts by Blood and Honour to organise a 1,200 strong gig in central London, one of the largest organisations at the time offered this

The only time this fact ever registers on the Left is when this alienation threatens the Labour vote. Then, its all hands to the pump. If electorally the fascists are beaten back as on the Isle of Dogs, then its congratulations and champagne all round. The problem, for the Left anyway, has been vanquished. No question of investigating why the far-right should be so strong in working class areas that are otherwise Labour strongholds. No question of apportioning blame, never mind attempting to remedy the situation. As long as the situation is not cause for embarrassment the race attackers will always be with us is the attitude. "Tories Out!" is where the class struggle is at was a familiar admonishment.



November '93. South East London AFA public meeting addresses 'ethnic cleansing' in the area.

typical comment: "The disturbing thing today is that no matter how obscure the fascists become, many of the left will waste time and energy chasing them...we ought to leave the minuscule right to rot and get on with the job of opposing the government that has rendered it redundant for a decade."

Apart from inverting the real relationship between the extra parliamentary far-right and a right wing state the RCP was accurate on one point. The election of a Tory election did make the far-right politically redundant. What they neglected to point out was that while the NF as an organisation effectively collapsed, the rationale behind its existence survived and indeed prospered.

Statistics show that race attacks either despite, or because of the NF's electoral demise were higher in 1982 than the hey day of the NF in 1977. And they have continued on that upward spiral ever since.

In the late 80's the Runnymede Trust made an estimate of 70,000 race attacks annually. Today the same organisation puts the figure at almost double the number. What this shows is that the alienation of sections of the working class has deepened and, in some areas, taken root.

Well, the Tories are well and truly out. Now that society is once again moving to the left the ANL has decided to close down its offices. They appear to have forgotten that the last time Labour was in government was the last time the fascist vote gave an accurate reflection of the widespread support for far-right solutions. In 1977 the NF got 117,000 votes in the council elections in London alone. Can it be that the far-right need Labour in government to organise them? 'Socialists' in government have certainly done the trick elsewhere in Europe.

Compounding the problem is that the anti-racist organisations which enjoy the greatest media profile will remain within the 'Greater Labour Family' even though the party is objectively now right of centre. And that assessment is gauged by current standards rather than when it was last in power. Judged against the Callaghan government commitments in '79, Blair would have been on many issues to the right of Thatcher. So the Thatcherite experiment will continue under new management. New Labour is its human face.

In anti-racist circles this may eventually result in a strident political correctness fantasy coupled to Thatcherite reality. A political monster of

truly Frankenstein proportions. Under these twin pressures the dam will almost certainly burst.

There is little hope that the orthodox groups to Labour's left including the Socialist Labour Party will be the ones with their fingers in the dyke. Arthur Scargill insists his sorry outfit is the fourth largest party behind the Liberals. While its true they had the lions share of the 75,000 votes cast for the left of Labour candidates, this was from a total of 103 constituencies. The BNP with 56 candidates got 35,000 votes. Proportionately, almost neck and neck. And Arthur would do well to consider how well his organisation would have coped with the political and physical onslaught suffered by the far-right for over a decade.

Overall the surveys, including the election, go a long way to proving what AFA has been saying all along.

- 1) Attitudes synonymous with fascism are wide spread and deep rooted.
- 2) Race attacks and the tens of thousands of race attackers are politically rather than criminally motivated, so as a mere symptom of a wider problem cannot be solved by legislation
- 3) The gap in public support between the far-left and the far-right is currently negligible.
- 4) Because of the two other factors the potential for the growth of the former under a Labour government is immense, while the quality of the current opposition is at best unproven.

As in the 1970's support for radical right wing solutions will again prove fashionable, and fashionable is something the orthodox Left will never be. The rebirth of the far-right in Europe have demonstrated two things; one, they have ambition, and secondly the Left (with very few honourable exceptions) are not up for it.

On the evidence Britain is likely to be little different. As a result the entire responsibility rests with militant anti-fascism. So its strategy is critical. It must be both precise and all encompassing.

In order to continue to make a difference rather than propaganda; vigilance in regard to the far-right must be maintained. In order to obstruct any efforts by the likes of the BNP to cast themselves as sole champions of the poor, Labour must be hounded with the same degree of relish previously reserved for the far-right.

Couldn't be simpler.

Newtown

Birmingham City Council is a bed-rock of Labour sloppiness and corruption. The council bears all the hallmarks of a secure Labour stronghold - urban neglect, expensive and senseless projects and above all, complacency; the belief that come rain or shine their tenure is as solid as rock, their decisions unquestionable and their faceless bureaucracy virtually unaccountable. The city council is in denial - repeatedly failing to recognise the immense problems endured on the estates from day to day.

One such area is Newtown, north of the city. A densely planned 60's housing development and as with most of these estates that haven't already been knocked down, decay has set in. The area is flanked by Lozells, scene of riots during the eighties - part of a wider area now renowned for Yardie gang wars, including several shootings. In Newtown itself a large number of flats and houses are left lying empty, many derelict, anti social crime has rocketed and by day and night youth gangs have an increasingly free reign on the streets.

The police though are not in denial, they've just got little or no regard for the area. Their failure to act, even with the most straightforward of cases implies a deliberate policy of containment. Like the council they have been willing accomplices to the creation of the ghetto of Newtown.

"They do not have our interests at heart but the interest of controlling the whole community. An incident in Alma Way in the summer proves the point. When a police officer was hit by an alleged mugger over 20 coppers raced to the scene within minutes, running around the area like caged animals. Compare that with the following week when a schoolboy on his way home spotted an elderly mugging victim looking dazed. His father called the police and it was days before they eventually came to interview the woman. Enough said." **Newtown Independent Newsletter 3/97.**

Many aren't privileged with a police visit. These are two relatively unspectacular examples from hundreds since brought forward, highlighting the true police role locally.

To say that the residents had no representation until recently would be an understatement. At the beginning of the year a residents' group, under the auspices of a couple of salaried council mediators, was set up. This hapless attempt by the council at stemming growing discontent amongst the residents was entirely futile, in fact it marked the end of what was left of residents' confidence in the city council. Concerned more with litter problems and disused garages, attracting no more than half a dozen residents and unwilling to confront or even acknowledge the real local issues, the project was doomed to fail.

At the beginning of March people in the area produced and distributed

a newsletter entitled the 'Newtown Independent'. Delivered to approximately 1500 homes, the objective was to gather support for a bona fide residents' group, independent of the council and other outside interests. The newsletter asked awkward questions and all the controversial things the council didn't want to hear. The leading article slammed the council-run 'Six Ways Residents Association'.

The Independent covered other topics as diverse as housing, debt, Jobseekers Allowance, mugging and an appeal for sponsorship for a local under 16 football team, Newtown Rovers, after council funding was withdrawn.

Local resident activists were pleased with the response. The newsletter had stirred up a hornets' nest - so when the police and council took measures to find out who it was treading on their toes, the formation of a truly independent

able were under constant threat, the gangs were virtually controlling the estate by a regime of fear, targeting anyone who stood in their way.

There were isolated acts of retribution - one notable case involved a family member of a mugging victim who systematically hunted every member of a particular gang with a baseball bat. One of the muggers was killed by a car some weeks later after committing another mugging. To protect the community and alleviate the problem needed organisation and numbers, isolated attacks weren't adequate, the support of the whole community was essential.

In an attempt to gauge logistical strength a public meeting was called for 21st March, at Holte School in the centre of Newtown. Some 2000 leaflets were distributed throughout the area.

The leaflets had barely had time to drop on the doormats before the police visited the home of one of

council move to an area of their choice. They had obviously done some homework because the family in question had tried desperately for three years to get a move only to be knocked back time and again. Most of the mugging victims on the estate would tell you you'd be lucky even to get a visit from the police after an attack, let alone the offer of witness protection schemes and such handsome and enticing rewards.

The opportunity to turn supergrass was angrily rejected. Having tried frightening off the organisers and then attempting to buy them off, the police were sent packing empty handed.

The response to the leaflets was encouraging - the timing impeccable. Racist elements on the estate were stirring, talking of building barricades "to keep the niggers out". To counter this the NIRC took a strong anti-racist stand-point, in order to ostracise the racists, even before the campaign had started in

If Newtown was to be anything near habitable the sense of community would have to be rediscovered and the problems confronted head on.

Effectively, Newtown Independent Residents Association, (NIRA) as it came to be called, would have to contend with the young gangs for control of the area. A simple choice between working class rule and gangster rule, and the choice was not being overstated. Various suggestions were put forward by residents at the launch meeting - an escort service from a pool of volunteers, thus providing security to the elderly and vulnerable. Outing muggers and where youngsters were involved, confronting families with a view to isolating those who persistently refused to curb anti-social youths. Volunteer street patrols were called for, particularly geared towards mugging hotspots. NIRC's initial concerns about possible calls for saturation policing were quickly dispelled. The overwhelming feeling of residents was that the police had, without any pretence abandoned the area.

On the night of the 21st an official committee was formed, representing a good cross section of the community, white, black and Asian. All with different backgrounds and different stories to tell, but with two things in common - a determination that something was going to be done, and a realisation that the fate of Newtown as a community lay not with the police or absentee Labour councillors or MPs but with the community itself.

For the next fortnight the committee met and discussed the way forward for NIRA. A second public meeting was called for April 4th at Holte School and Leisure centre with a view to putting some of the many proposals into action.

In front of an audience of 150 NIRA supporters the committee announced its plans for a march through the estate on May bank holiday and a campaign to by-pass the council and brick up key alleyways on the estate known locally as rat-runs, used extensively by muggers. The committee appealed for information to be gathered on known offenders, the focus was becoming sharper as the campaign gained momentum. The campaign was on everybody's lips, not just in Newtown but other areas too - spirits were rising.

Towards the end of the meeting a known mugger had the audacity to enter the rear of the hall and was taken outside by a couple of residents and sent packing. Within minutes he had returned with a gang looking for one of the lads who had told him where to get off. Needless to say he was promptly despatched by stewards. Let off lightly considering the circumstances, elderly residents complained that he'd deserved harsher.

A week or so after the skirmish the police contacted the Holte Centre and told them there had to be a police presence immediately outside the building at any future NIRA meetings. Anticipating no further trouble and well aware that the police had always been present



Newtown: Public Meeting and march to reclaim the working-class community's streets from anti-social elements

group ceased to be just an attractive option and rapidly became an absolute necessity. With the police and council already showing signs of nervousness, it was an ideal time for the community to get organised.

As the seeds of an independent residents group were being sown, the problem of mugging in and around the estate was growing more acute. Reports of attacks were flooding in from across Newtown. Mugging gangs, comprising largely black youth, were operating with impunity. It became apparent that there were particular hotspots where muggers were so self assured that they wouldn't even leave the scene after committing an attack. The very young, elderly and vulner-

the local organisers, whose wife and child had been mugged the previous weekend. The police let it be known in no uncertain terms that his phone was being tapped, not really surprising, but what was intriguing was that they were telling him about it. A shot across the bows perhaps? Obviously a shot from much higher up the police hierarchy than lowly PC Plod.

Increasingly it dawned on the NIRC that they had hit on a raw nerve. This realisation became glaringly obvious when, halfway through their brief the police threw their cards on the table. Identify the muggers, testify in court and in exchange the family would be rewarded with a much sought after

earnest.

On Friday 21st March the first public meeting took place. 200 or so people turned up with people having to be turned away due to a lack of space in the hall. Many victims spoke emotionally from the floor. Of those present 106 had been mugged, some several times and this was without taking into account a multitude of burglaries and other crimes against the community. The mood was angry, as one by one speakers tore into the police and council. One woman summed up the meeting, "I felt I couldn't do anything on my own but looking at all these people here tonight I feel we can do something."

Clearly there was no turning back.

Continued Over

anyway, NIRA chose not to argue. However within hours the police demanded representation within NIRA meetings, effectively trying to muscle in on the campaign. The choice was accommodate the police onto the committee or face a ban, not only from the Holte, but all council premises.

Of course the police never expected NIRA to agree to such a demand, the move was blatantly designed to obstruct the progress of the anti mugging campaign, and in the short term it did. The message sent out to Newtown was that it was okay for muggers, to use Holte's facilities, but the community in its opposition to them were banned. Like all the authorities countermoves to date, it backfired. When the next public meeting scheduled for April 1 8th had to be cancelled, word quickly spread as to who was responsible and why.

Furthermore, the police had been quick to scupper NIRA's chances of obtaining other venues in the area - the idea being to cut off the committee's lifeline to the community. The police had managed to pull off another PR.. disaster - yet again they were seen to be actively working against the NIRA campaign, whilst the muggers still operated with impunity - proving locally that politics preceded the countless vicious muggings on the police list of priorities. Publicly they paid lip service to the anti mugging initiative, moaning to the press about how they and the council were being locked out by NIRA.

On May 1st, residents of one street gathered in front of the press and TV cameras as NIRA bricked up its first rat-run. For several years people had been demanding the council do something about the maze of alleys that wind throughout the estate, the council had done nothing. However within minutes of the wall going up council officials were on the scene; where there's a camera, there's a councillor! The council official whined for the press about how they'd been cold shouldered by the residents association and how the community was "not necessarily going about things the right way".

The empty waffle of the council lackey spoke volumes. Still nursing their wounds a few hours later another council official contacted committee members, threatening "the walls not safe, either you knock it down or we'll knock it down for you". But for all their bluff and bluster it was a case of once bitten, twice shy. That night the unusually quick "Quick Response Team" battened the wall and kindly boarded it to allow the compo to dry.

The committee chairman also received a visit that night, from a police chief inspector wielding more threats - if the march went ahead he would be arrested under the Public Order Act, unless an application for police permission was signed and granted. The offer was firmly refused owing to the fact that such an action requires 6 days notice and with only 3 days until the march, co-operation would have been futile. Quite apart from the principle that the people of Newtown had every right to congregate freely in their own community. Growing used to being snubbed by now the police left empty handed.

On Monday May 5th, residents took part in the anti-mugging march dubbed "Reclaim Our Streets". The march was well supported, with a lot of new, younger faces and plenty of support from residents en route. The media coverage was again favourable with all the local press TV and radio turning out to cover the event. In contrast to the anticipated confrontation the police assigned to tag along with the march had clearly been well briefed on "client relations", going out of their way to sympathise and commiserate with the marchers - clearly one of their better PR moves to date. It was only after the culminating rally, when most NIRA supporters had gone home that the committee chairman was arrested and cautioned under the P.O.A. for organising an illegal demonstration. Just when it was going so well, yet another shot in the foot for community/police relations.

During a series of post-march radio and TV interviews it transpired that NIRA was supposedly planning to hold talks with the council the

Welwyn & Hatfield

On Friday July 4 Labour leader Jackie Russell announced that after months of secret negotiations the Welwyn and Hatfield District Council had agreed a final settlement with Slough Estates in regard to the £48 million awarded against the council in a high court decision 18 months previously.

Having already handed over 10 million of residents money plus a further £3 million in interest accrued, the final deal was for a further £20 million. A total of roughly £33 million. Council Leader Jackie Russell declared that this amount was "manageable" even though the council's annual budget is £9 million.

One suspects that what she meant was that, the situation was now politically manageable. And that in her estimation Labour, the principle culprits in the scandal might yet escape the wrath of local residents. Just six days later that assessment appears a tad optimistic after a by-election result on July 10 in which the Labour vote collapsed.

The Slough scandal broke late last year with the initial announcement of the High Court judgement and fine of £48 million. Senior officers on the council and group of six Labour councillors were named in the judgement and Justice May offered a damning verdict of their and the council's behaviour:

"There was a policy to tell lies .. from July 1987 onwards, the council was nursing a lie and has set itself a time bomb."

The 'policy of lies' was designed to induce one set of property developers (Slough Estates) to build a shopping mall by lying about the intentions of another set of developers [The Carroll Group] already building another one up the road. The secret deal would have been worth millions to the Carroll group. So far however there has not been a single prosecution. Indeed the council have shelved any talk of an inquiry into the motives behind the campaign of lies and deception and are attempting to write of Sloughgate as a type of 'natural disaster'. There is cross party support for this approach and were it not for the Residents committee this unbelievable scam would have been implemented without protest. The fact that the deal was based on an illegal act, or that the council had no mandate from the residents to negotiate with Slough, or that the principle architect is being investigated on a separate corruption issues was regarded with benign shoulder shrugging indifference by all the major parties.

In normal circumstances the political pressure would be expected to come from the conventional parties Tory and Liberal but for different reasons, both have tactically supported the ruling Labour group. The Tories because they are also

implicated, and the Liberals who simply appear to lack the bottle for the fight. So while a local pressure group The What Went Wrong Committee was a cause of initial embarrassment and concern it began to look as if Labour and its allies would brazen it out.

Then just three weeks before the May 1 district election residents in Welwyn Hatfield decided to stand a candidate against Labour in a single ward in South Hatfield. They decided to contest the ward of George Wenham, one of the councillors named in the High Court judgement. Having been constantly taunted by Labour councillors on the lines, "that if you think you have support stand against us", local resident Debi Piper took up the challenge. Privately, Labour councillors took side bets that she would not get more than 60 votes. After a three week campaign canvassing working class area with an entirely inexperienced team she took 50% of the Labour vote 1100 votes in total. At the count Council Leader Russell and newly elected MP Melanie Johnson were visibly perturbed

Russell herself with a majority of only a couple of hundred were all to clear. So while failing to take on steps in the public interest and standing four square behind her colleagues, all proven liars and almost certainly corrupt, the hint of threat to her own self interest seems to have sparked a hitherto dormant public conscience. Of more immediate concern was the difficulty she had in getting anybody to represent Labour in the ward. Her first choice politely declined the poisoned chalice while second choice decamped to the Anti Sleaze anti Slough campaign!

Within two days of the Residents strategy becoming public; (Saturday to Tuesday; to be precise) Ray Little former Council Leader and the 'dark prince' in the whole affair had been forced to resign from the Labour council. Immediately Russell named two other Labour councillors she felt should fall on their swords. However, with the backing of the newly elected Labour MP for whom Little was the de facto campaign manager they have so far declined. The party is now clearly split on how

Sleaze! No to Slough! Campaign became in effect redundant.

Despite the ambush the Residents candidate again took over 30% of the Labour vote with just 94 votes! The discrepancy is explained by the fact that the Labour vote itself collapsed!

Labour had crashed spectacularly from 600+ and a 200 majority over the Tories in 1996 to second place with 282. The Tories won with 406 a net gain of all of 6 votes from 1996. Labour tactics had sabotaged the residents electoral plan but were unable to save their own seat. From the figures it is clear that former Labour supporters had initially switched to the Residents campaign, something borne out by the canvassing returns, but saw little point in voting for the No to Sleaze! No to Slough! platform once agreement had been reached. However rather than switch back to Labour the working class simply abstained as the exceedingly low 25% turn down from 42% in 1996 bears out.

Ironically, even though the Residents Campaign polled less than 1,000 votes than in May, as a tactic, it has proved more productive. Allowing for the fact it was the timer rather than bomb itself that went there is still blood in the water. The device of democracy itself is being re-set and the Labour Party now feel that sooner or later it will blow up in their faces.

As a supporter of the campaign told the Big Issue: "Slough wasn't a departure from their normal practice - it was their normal practice. It was a private members club operating beyond the reach of all democratic process. The Slough case was just the deal that went wrong."

What is true for Welling and Hatfield is also true for Labour Party custom and practice up and down the country. Camden, Glasgow, Doncaster Hackney Birmingham, and so on share the common hallmark of sleaze and unchecked corruption and total contempt for the communities that elect them.

Labour, like that other great British institution Her Majesty's Police, is inherently corrupt, and like 'PC Plod' is irreformable, and until challenged from inside working class communities often appear invulnerable.

Because it is only the working class that suffer from the council and police corruption, it is only the working class communities themselves that show any interest in challenging them.

As things stand none of the major parties or institutions even pay lip service to working class interests anymore so increasingly the working class have begun to represent their own interests.

Proof of that is the fact that after a period of little more than three months a small working class residents committee in Welling and Hatfield, has become the boroughs 'official political opposition'.



Above: residents' candidate Debi Piper confronts Labour Council leader at public meeting.
Below: 'No to Sleaze, No to Slough' candidates posing for *The Big Issue*.

by the implications.

Though Labour still won, the margin of victory was a 1000 down on a 70% turn out. That this was almost exactly the vote for the residents candidate did not go unnoticed in certain Labour circles. The conspiracy of silence had been breached.

Within weeks another by election was called this time in Welling and the residents were the first to throw their cap into the ring. They also announced that they would "stand residents representatives in next May's Council elections against those who have pursued an unjust and secret deal with Slough Estates".

As intended this put the cat among the pigeons. Now not only were the guilty ie those implicated directly in the affair, but also those being left to clear up, and indeed help 'cover up' the mess afterwards, now also in the frame. The possible ramification for Council Leader

to proceed.

Meanwhile in the Panshanger ward of Welling, the residents candidate Peter Coen, standing on a No to Sleaze! No to Slough! ticket was getting a good reception, again particularly amongst natural Labour voters. From early canvassing returns the campaign was on course for a shock upset.

Then came the announcement of the settlement with Slough on the Friday before the election. As with the Little resignation the timing was designed, it would appear, to give the impression of Labour, even if little belatedly, taking control of the situation.

As expected it had a direct impact on the campaign, though not entirely the one Labour anticipated. The settlement was lined up as a torpedo against the Residents campaign; orientated as it was to preventing a settlement. Once the settlement was signed and sealed the No to

Twelve Days in May

The war is over and the good guys have lost." This was Bernadette McAliskey's verdict on the IRA cease-fire in August 1994. This view was shared in part by the entire British Left - almost. But behind the crocodile tears at imperialism's triumph most were exultant that the good guys had lost.

"Even Arafat" the SWP crowed "got Gaza, Adams got nothing!" Generally the Republican leadership was castigated for "making deals with imperialism" particularly by those who invariably canvass for Labour in elections. While sharing the popular mood the RCP were a little less triumphalist but equally emphatic: "There is no avoiding the grim reality that the peace process represents a historic defeat for the liberation movement." Significantly while the British Left were in agreement on the reality of the IRA surrender if not the reasons behind it, the British establishment whose initiative it was deemed to be and therefore whose analysis might be expected to be more astute were evenly split.

Some maintained that the IRA were quite simply beaten, and that there was in fact "no peace process just peace". Others felt that the terrorists had moved "centre stage". The right-wing Spectator gnashed: "To say the [Downing St] Declaration was a great victory for the IRA is not rhetoric; it is hard gradgrind fact."

Controversially the position of the Red Action paper went quite a bit further than the Spectator. In a series of leading articles it argued:

- 1) The cease-fire was part of an IRA/Republican rather than British agenda.
- 2) Consequently it was neither a surrender of military methods or political aims.
- 3) The Hume/Adams talks which formed the basis for the Downing St Declaration would be more correctly titled Adams/Hume.
- 4) The Bishopsgate bomb was the lever for talks and more might follow if talks collapsed.
- 5) That there would be no hand over of weapons.
- 6) An internal settlement was too little too late.
- 7) Unionism would join constitutional talks or be represented by a surrogate.
- 8) Sooner or later loyalism would be forced to swallow the bitter pill of betrayal.
- 9) Major did not know there was going to be a cease-fire and was deliberately misled about the possibility of it collapsing.
- 10) M15 with media help was working to derail the peace process.
- 11) The cease-fire took place on the understanding that all-party negotiations would take place with the purpose of an interim settlement as part of accommodating a face-saving British withdrawal.
- 12) Until the IRA's faith in Britain's intent to withdraw is restored, all party talks or not, the cease-fire won't be.

(The last comment on the matter was in Spring 1996)

Events, and the release of internal Republican documents since, have gone a long way toward validating

the Red Action analysis of August 1994 and after.

However, back in 1994 commentators gave the credit for persuading the IRA to abandon violence to Major/Hume/Clinton more or less in that order. Few believe that now. The cease-fire ended when the IRA leadership concluded that the British had reneged on the core reason for holding discussions. But if the British do not want to leave after all, the purpose of negotiations with or without preconditions, would only mean the active collaboration of the republican leadership in securing for the British an internal settlement. This is what republicans mean when they accuse the British government of "bad faith".

And what applied to Major/Mayhew now applies to Blair/Mowlam. Which is something they only very recently seem to have grasped. Initially they began where Major left off: tough talk of 'last chances' and 'trains leaving stations' was familiar to all and just as contemptuously dismissed. The reality is that the 1994 cessation of armed struggle had fundamentally reinforced and changed perceptions particularly on the nationalist side. Unionist intransigence and Brit duplicity has been the nationalist conclusion at the ending of a 17 month cease-fire.

So when, in talks with Sinn Fein, Labour began where the Tories left off i.e. decommissioning; Lurgan was the answer. The message was graphically clear. We have had enough of British ultimatums. It is not us, but you the British, that needs to convince on the question of war or peace.

Prior to the cease-fire the argument ran that the only impediment to a negotiated settlement and a united Ireland was armed struggle. Violence was futile and counter productive. Britain was neutral. Loyalism was merely counter terrorism. If only the men of violence could be made to lay down their arms Britain could be counted on to respond 'imaginatively'. This seductive mantra was repeated by all parties but with particular doggedness by the SDLP. Then in September 1994 the IRA called the collective bluff.

A disorientated Ulster Unionist leader James Molyneux in an unguarded moment spoke of 'the cease-fire destabilising the situation'. Major bluffed and blustered destroying his credibility internationally in the process. Hume already almost isolated within his own party gave the impression of a man on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

And any wonder. To a man British commentators were largely bemused not knowing what to make of it all.

So much for the 'generous and imaginative response'. If that was not bad enough for Hume and the SDLP, worse was to come. First the Paisley/Trimble victory jig after SDLP influence helped broker a deal among the Garvaghy residents which allowed the Orange

Order to march in 1995. Then came Drumcree 2. A twenty five year old snapshot of how it all began and what the struggle was all about. A scenario that as it unfolded shot thirty thousand plastic bullets through the concept of an internal settlement while the loyalist pogroms made nationalists everywhere think fondly of the IRA. This mood change has been reflected in successive elections, first to the Forum, to the General Elections in the six and twenty six counties and the six county council elections.

"Certainly the Drumcree factor played a part in increasing Sinn Fein's vote. But Sinn Fein's opponents held back from saying why. The truth is that Drumcree confirmed the Sinn Fein analysis of the northern state. In the weeks after Drumcree last year republicans lost count of the number of times that people came up to them and said: 'You were right all along.'

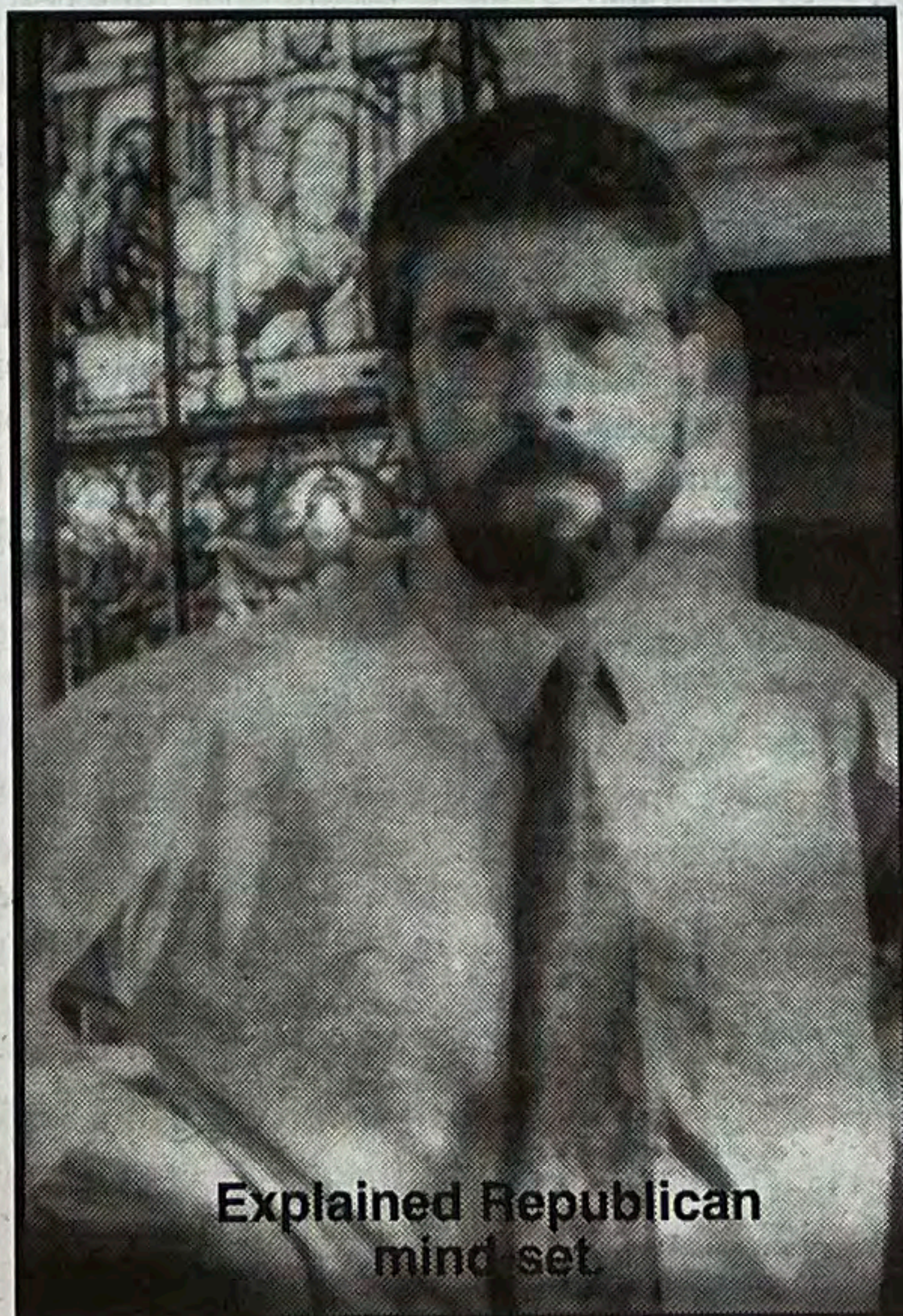
The other side of the coin is that the SDLP was wrong. Most, not all SDLP elected representatives, had no wish to think too deeply about the flawed nature of the state. They tried to work within it and gain what they could, supporting the RUC - Drumcree blew their ideological world apart. They could not explain what had happened much less do anything in response."

(Brian Campbell Republican News 29 May 1997)

Then came Drumcree 3 where the betrayal was actually carried out by a Labour government that Hume had warmly welcomed and confidently expected great things of. In 1985 the Hillsborough Agreement was sold to the British as necessary to save the SDLP from the Provos. Then, the Provos had 30 per cent of the nationalist vote, now they have 45 per cent. Who is going to save the SDLP now?

Certainly not the Unionists, who themselves approached Drumcree 3 in a state of intransigent trepidation. The Protestant RUC was faced with the task of confronting the Orange Order, while the latter was equally unnerved by the prospect of offending, never mind facing down, the Loyalist paramilitaries.

As one leading and harassed Portadown Orangeman told a senior NIO official late at night during the stand off in 1996: 'If we don't go down the Garvaghy Rd, we the Orange leaders will be burned out of our own houses'. That reality was



Explained Republican mind set.

borne out by the kicking to death of an RUC man by Loyalists in Antrim in June. So, from the outset, it was clear that Drumcree 3 was a trap set by loyalism for itself.

Which is precisely what the delegation from the spook community, led by Andrew Hunter (known as MP for Johannesburg through his former association with BOSS) and M15's Sean O'Callaghan would have told them when they met in the week prior to the Garvaghy Road march.

The credibility of moderate nationalism is in tatters. The Provos are in the ascendency. The British slap in the face to the new Irish government has gone some way to restoring the pan-nationalist front demolished by Bruton. Unionist intransigence also caused the end of the Labour honeymoon at home and internationally. Revenge will certainly be exacted. Precisely because Labour's reputation as peace brokers has evaporated, the effort will of course still have to be made. Which means that sooner or later the bluff will have to be called and unionism faced down.

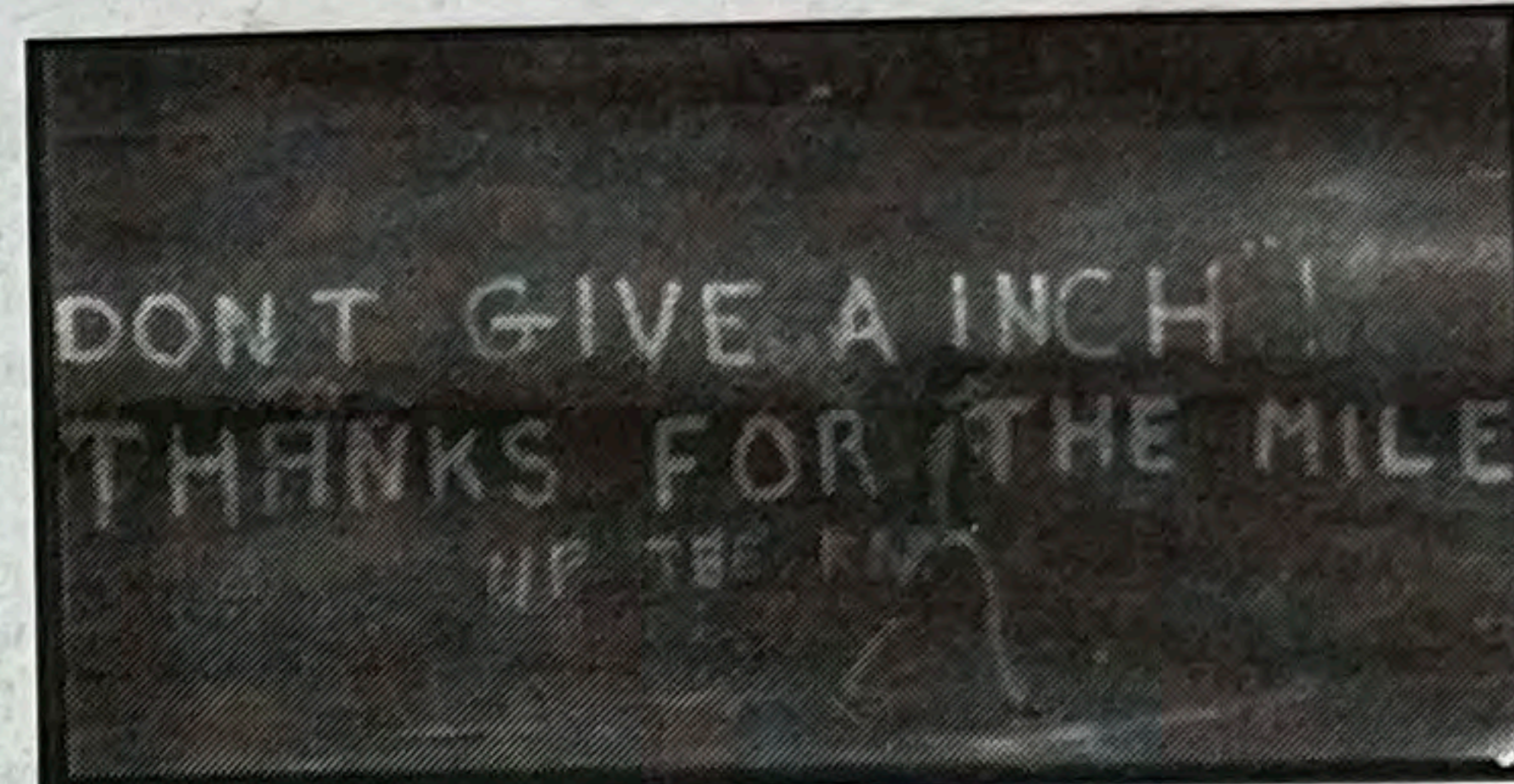
In the meantime Mowlam, if she is still there will have to talk to the credible representatives of nationalist opinion - Sinn Fein. Paisley/Trimble insist that should that happen they as unionists will not be there.

But, unlike Sinn Fein, for the peace talks to happen they don't have to be. Unionism can be represented by a surrogate - the British government. Negotiations after all are carried out between enemies not friends. So magnanimity is the card to play'.

Robert Salter, the head of the Orange Order, saw the trap alright. But he also knew that the ethos of

'not an inch' unionism means that there is no room for subtle manoeuvres. Any perceived loss of face of this magnitude means instant internal crisis - and fratricide sooner or later.

The subsequent climb-down in Derry and the Ormeau Road showed that the rest of the leadership also recognised that this time they had over-played their hand.,



and because of it, international opinion had finally begun to draw the distinction between freedom from religious and political persecution and what the Orange Order represented, which is the freedom to practice it.

Despite efforts to put a PR varnish on the capitulation, the backlash was swift, with damage of historic proportions. Before you could say 'DOB', the Orange Order had conceded its reason for being; Unionist parties lost the argument on decommissioning and instantly put another major piece of the intricate IRA jigsaw in place, and, most significantly, for the first time in living memory, unionism lost its right of automatic veto - all in twelve days in May.

Despite Republican reminders that negotiations are an area of struggle, not an end of the struggle and despite the possibility of further skirmishing, the feeling that we are in the endgame persists. The endgame moreover of a Republican agenda. And although the war is not over, it can be said with some confidence that the good guys are in pole position.

Off the Cuff

■ The British are still at war with us. For the British, negotiation is war by another means and the British are still trying to defeat the Republican struggle. Maybe the IRA initiative [the cessation] took them by surprise: maybe they're are still trying to come to terms with it. Would you like to have been the head of British military intelligence, called in on the first of September and asked, 'Why didn't we have a report on this?' So maybe the British are wrongfooted by all this. I don't think the British are a monolith. I think the broad British establishment wants a settlement and there are probably different tendencies within it. Undoubtedly, some would like to see a settlement which would be fundamental, and which would indeed bring about an end to the union. Others would not countenance bringing about an end of the union, they want to see it preserved. And in between those two poles there are a range of other opinions who will settle, understandably enough from their point

of view, on the best terms and in the best general interest, as they see it, of their side. Then in the middle of all that you have the military and intelligence - the spook constituency - who obviously want very little change in the situation. Now, these tendencies probably like the rest of us argue out the toss, argue out the way to go, what way not to go. If we can manage it properly, we can move the situation in ten years time into one where the union will have ended, or there will be an agreement for a timespan in which it will end. We can have whatever transitional measures are required to move us into an all-Ireland situation, which may be short of the goals of Sinn Fein, but would be perfectly in keeping with our primary objectives at this time. The benign scenario is that. The malign scenario is that the Brits footer about, mess about, and the peace process breaks down." Gerry Adams in interview with David McKittrick May 1995 taken from *The Fight For Peace* published 1997.

Beyond the Pale

Red Action • PO Box 3355, Dublin 7

No Blacks, No Dogs, NO IRISH

"On a daily basis the Gardai have to deal with cases of robbery and assault involving asylum seekers"
"Currently scores of Romanian women, clutching toddlers, can be seen begging on street corners"
"Refugee Rapists on the Rampage"
"Refugee Housing now costs state £20 million annually".

The above quotes are a fairly representative sample of the pages of recent newspaper coverage on the increasing number of immigrants arriving in Ireland. Five years ago less than one person per week entered Ireland as a refugee; in the first five months of 1997 1,200 asylum seekers have arrived. The media hysteria generated by this increase has led to refugees becoming a general topic of conversation, casual racism and the frequent expression of ignorant stereotypes of immigrants. Immigration also became a factor in the General Election campaign with some candidates seizing the opportunity to grab a few more votes by playing a thinly disguised race card, masquerading as concern for Irish 'poor people'. For the first time an Anti Immigration candidate stood for election in Co Cork.

All newspapers from the tabloids to the liberal 'Irish Times' have printed articles attacking refugees. The views of anti racists have mostly been ignored. The serious irresponsibility of journalists has been most obvious in the language used. The media uses the terms 'immigrant', 'refugee', 'illegal', 'economic migrant' and 'asylum seeker' as interchangeable, despite the fact that they have distinct and different meanings. Any crime that involves refugees gets coverage far out of proportion to its news value. Shop lifting, fights at taxi ranks, and other minor incidents get large headlines when refugees can be dragged into the story and an anonymous police 'source' found to speculate about an 'immigrant crime wave'.

The current increase in the number of Eastern European and Black people in Ireland is the result of the continuing wars, dictatorships and ethnic conflict in African countries and the break up of the Soviet Union. The activity and strength of organised nazis in Germany and France has forced their not very reluctant governments to introduce draconian anti-immigration laws and repatriation of refugees. In Ireland, which does not have an organised racist or nazi group, a number of politicians have recently expressed pro-repatriation sentiments without the assistance of nazis to encourage them.

The General Election campaign provided a convenient bandwagon for politicians to pander to racism. Joan Burton, a Labour Minister for State said: "Once the Refugee Act is in place and we're making decisions we will be putting people back on planes again". Liam Lawlor, a Fianna Fáil TD ranted about "Floods of illegal immigrants into Ireland". In Cork South West Aine Ni Chonail ran claiming to represent something called the 'Immigration Control Platform'. Ni Chonail is a 51 year old school teacher who lives at Chapel Lane, Rosscarbery and

teaches at the Sacred Heart Convent in Clonakilty. She said 'I am standing in this election on a single issue - the need to take strong and urgent measures to control immigration to Ireland'. Ni Chonail has identified 'two strands' of foreigners to be combated by 'tough and radical decisions'. Strand One is opposition to immigration from the EU; mainly British and German people. Strand Two involves "the influx of alleged asylum seekers (mostly bogus) from Eastern Europe, Cuba and Third World Countries". Other gems from this racist old bat include "I value the level of homogeneity we had in this country...I don't want us to end up with cities like Bradford and Notting Hill...Political asylum is not a human right". She claims that "Multi-Culturalism is one of the greatest heresies of the 20th century", and wants an 'Ireland for the Irish'. She refuses to state whether she is a racist or not. I think we can work it out. Ms Ni Chonail thoughtfully provided a mobile phone number on her election literature. It is 088 2769349. She got 293 votes out of 35,000. Another self proclaimed anti immigration candidate, attempting to gain votes from an anti refugee prejudice, was Dean O Nuallain of 153 Herberton Rd, Dublin 8, who ran in Dublin South Central. He achieved a spectacular 80 votes.

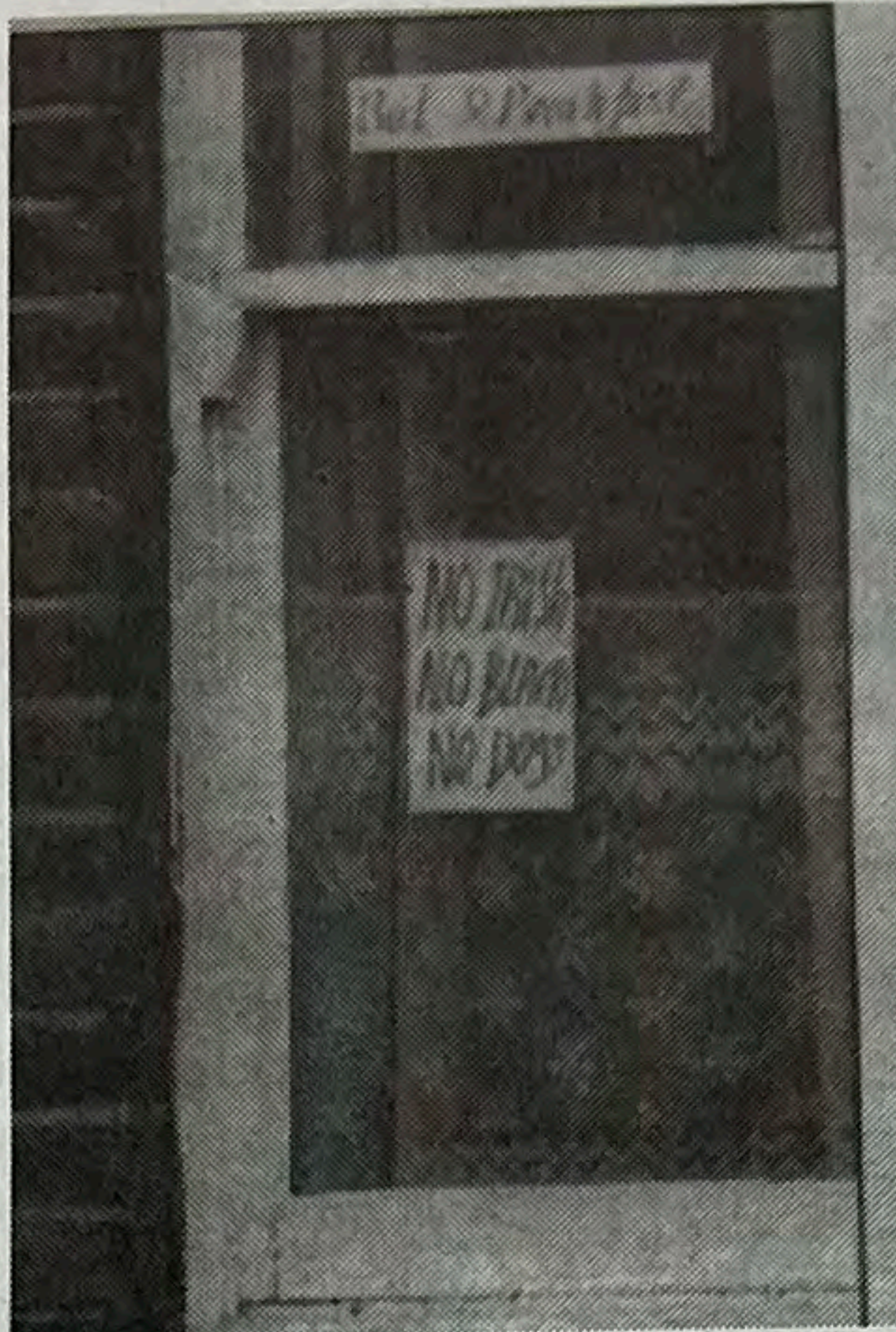
The fact that these candidates are of the political fringe obscures the worrying fact that anti immigration, in the current climate, was a viable election policy. Mainstream politicians attempted to benefit from popular racist feeling. The most breath taking hypocrisy has been displayed by politicians pandering to prejudice while seeking votes in working class areas. Fintan O Toole put it succinctly in the Irish Times "there is also the rather sickening sight of people who never gave a tuppenny damn for the homeless and the poor suddenly discovering them...the question that ought to arise is why are there so many natives living like refugees in their own country". Refugees provide convenient scapegoats for the failure of political parties to address poverty, unemployment and homelessness among Irish people. The cheap B+B's used to house refugees are located in inner city areas. The rules of these guesthouses force the residents to leave each morning and families have no option but to spend the day wandering the streets, creating the impression of large numbers of refugees. Refugees are also, not surprisingly, dumped in the same deprived local authority estates and inner city flat complexes as the Irish working class people. Colm McGrath, a Fianna Fáil candidate in Tallaght/Clondalkin area, where some estates have over 70% unemployment, issued an election leaflet calling for restrictions on the number of immigrants and attacking "alleged political refugees milking the the social welfare

system". McGrath and other politicians will undoubtedly deny any responsibility for attacks on refugees that may occur due to their hate mongering.

As usual class lies at the bottom of the anti-immigrant feeling. Some immigrants have always been accepted and positively encouraged. Millionaires lacking in ancestral connections with Ireland can buy citizenship in the form of an Irish passport. The 'Passports For Sale' racket emerged when a family of wealthy Arabs were given Irish passports in return for an investment of £1 million in a company owned by the family of the then Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds. Similarly large numbers of artists, pop stars and actors have been encouraged to move to Ireland by the state provision of tax exemptions for artistic activity.

Ireland has long wallowed in a comforting notion that it is not a racist society; the contribution of the catholic church to missionary work, large donations by Irish people to famine; our history as a colonised nation, etc. supposedly proved our concern for the welfare of poor Black people. In reality Ireland has never had any significant population of people of other cultures, races or religions. Racism is not the caused by the presence of people of different ethnic origin but by the reaction of the native population to that presence. The one Irish ethnic group, Travellers, are subjected to both casual and systematic state racism and neglect to the extent that over 20,000 people are condemned to live in sub human conditions, endure an appalling child mortality rate and are hounded from town to town by the respectable 'settled' population.

The reaction of many Irish people to the small number of immigrants now resident in Ireland reeks of hypocrisy. The 'economic migrant' tag attached to immigrants is the most repugnant. Poverty and lack of industry has meant that for the past 200 years Ireland has been a net exporter of people. In the aftermath of the Famine 1 million Irish emigrated to England, Scotland and America. The Freeman's Journal reported in 1847 "The scene in New York is truly lamentable. The Irish are there walking and begging in the streets, in as numerous groups as you will find them in Liverpool". The appalling poverty in the Irish slums of major cities in the 19th century was on a par with the shanty towns of the Third World today. Irish Immigrants were the victims of pogroms, discrimination and racism; in America they overcame this by being even more racist in turn towards Black people. In every decade since the foundation of the Irish Free State, with the exception of the '70's and the '90's, hundreds of thousands of Irish people moved to England, the US and Australia. In De Valera's Ireland cattle and children were bred for export. Irish emigrants in Britain met signs stating "No Blacks, No



Dogs, No Irish". In the mid '80's almost a whole generation of school leavers emigrated to America, up to 40,000 people per annum moved to the US as illegal immigrants. The political furore created by the emigration wave of '80's did not relate to the need to create employment in Ireland. Instead the political focus was on gaining them the right to live permanently in America. Statistically very few Irish people have ever had to leave the country due to political persecution; Irish emigrants were not refugees. After the Famine the vast majority of emigrants could have remained here, admittedly living in poverty and with little prospect of employment, but unlikely to die of starvation. They can only be defined as 'economic migrants', exactly the same excuse used to attack refugees in Ireland now.

A common anti immigrant argument is that tax payers money is being used to house refugees in hotels, implying a life of luxury. The chronic shortage of public housing and the lack of state investment in the provision of accommodation means that large numbers of homeless Irish families are also forced to live in B+B's and cheap hotels. In recent years the government has given massive tax breaks for the construction of private apartments and small hotels in inner city areas, in preference to the providing much needed Corporation housing. The welfare payments received by both Irish people and refugees are one third below the accepted poverty line. The contradictions inherent in ranting against 'beggars' while simultaneously calling for a reduction in welfare for refugees has not been commented on.

A recent IMS poll conducted for the Irish Independent showed that 56% of those questioned expressed anti immigrant feeling, calling for restrictions on the number of immigrants entering Ireland. Given the atmosphere of scare mongering in the weeks before the poll this figure can be interpreted as quite low, but is nevertheless worrying as it will give comfort to isolated and potentially violent racists who may be emboldened with the belief that they have public support for their opinions.

The long term implications of the current hysteria about immigrants has potentially serious consequences and ones that Red Action and AFA in Ireland are already addressing. In the 1980's a small number of racist skinheads in

ELECTION ROUNDUP...

The recent General Election in Ireland, a lacklustre affair with the usual lack of relevant political debate, did throw up some interesting results. Instead of debating policies to address massive poverty, long term unemployment and the ongoing drugs crisis the political parties discussed the so called 'Celtic Tiger economic boom' and the rejigging of tax rates. The outgoing Fine Gael/Labour/Democratic Left coalition was defeated, the 'Rainbow government' dissolving with the dramatic collapse of the Labour vote. The overall Labour decline of 9% does not reflect the reality of the disaster for Dick Spring. In some areas of Dublin Labour lost up to one quarter of their 1992 vote and in Dublin South West lost their two seats in the largest working class area in the city. Labour also managed to lose both their ministers in middle class liberal Dun Laoghaire and Dublin South. Another gratifying sight was the collapse of the Progressive Democrats vote. While fantasising about 15 seats the Thatcherite PDs ended up with a rump of just 4 TDs. Party leader Mary Harney made a major mistake in attacking lone parents, proposing a cut in benefits and forcing single mothers to remain in the family home rather than receive local authority housing. Instead of stopping digging the PDs then announced the new party policy to cut 25,000 jobs in the public service. Fianna Fáil eventually told the Harney to shut up, fearing a complete wipeout. The new government will be a minority coalition of Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats but dependent on the support of Independents.

The first Independent to be elected was Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party (previously Militant). Higgins' victory, after running a close second in a previous by-election, was built on the base of the anti water charges campaign and community issues. Proof, if it was needed, that Militant is still tied to the apron strings of Labour comes from Higgins' post election comment "The coalition has been the downfall of the Left, particularly of the Labour Party, which tragically submerged itself with two right wing dominated coalitions". Joe appears to be unaware that the record of the Labour party has always been to prop up right wing governments. What is tragic is that someone who claims to be a revolutionary socialist cannot see this simple fact.

The massive victory of Caoimhín Ó Caoláin for Sinn Féin in Cavan/Monaghan, with a rise of 12% and receiving the sixth highest personal vote in the country, has been much commented on. While this was a remarkable achievement the contest in Kerry North was far more interesting. This is the constituency of the Labour leader Dick Spring, who has pumped massive amounts of EU money into home base of Tralee town. Sinn Féin's Martin Ferris, who lives on a Council estate in Tralee, is an ex POW who served 8 years on a charge of attempting to smuggle a massive arms consignment into Kerry on board the Marita Anne. Since his release Ferris has been active in community politics and has played a major role in the anti drugs movement in Tralee, a town that has seen several suicides of young people due to drugs. His slogan was "Drug Pushers Out, Martin Ferris In". Despite continuous Special Branch harassment and regular media smears about alleged 'vigilantism' Ferris achieved 16% (a rise of 13.5% in the Sinn Féin vote) with a total first preference of 5,691. Being a 3 seat constituency totally dominated by the 3 main parties Ferris had little hope of transfers but remained in the running until the final count when the elimination of a Fianna Fáil brought a party colleague over the quota. In contrast Dick Spring's vote dropped by 4%. Sinn Féin also recorded less spectacular increases in Dublin, leaving them in a good position for gains in the local elections and was the only party to record an overall increase in votes in all contested constituencies.

The election also saw Fianna Fáil heading for the hills on the abortion issue. Fearing the loss of a few hundred votes to the clericalist right Fianna Fáil gave a commitment to another abortion referendum, the fourth in 14 years, in another attempt to permanently ban terminations in Ireland. In reality the 'family values' brigade received derisory votes. The National Party and the Christian Solidarity Party, claiming to represent the 'disenfranchised' 49% who voted against divorce in 1995, received only 3% nationwide and came nowhere close to winning a seat. The danger to womens rights and the influence of reactionaries is not an electoral one, but rather lies in their ability to pressurise the main parties into adopting their fundamentalist policies. The power of the conservative catholicism and the right is alive and well in Ireland. The liberals who have consistently failed to realise this fact, instead glorying in legislative concessions on social issues, had better wake up to the fact that another defeat on abortion is likely to be the outcome of any abortion referendum.

Dublin were beaten off the streets by the people who are now active in RA and AFA. At this time the Nazis had no focus for their racist views, it is difficult to whip up hatred about or attack Black people when none are visible. The conditions now exist, aided by irresponsible and prejudiced media coverage, for the emergence of racist attacks on immigrants, whether this is likely to develop into a more organised form of Nazism cannot be assessed just yet. Undoubtedly there are isolated racists and fascists in Ireland, but there is no organised group or indications of one at present. In recent years there have been sporadic outbreaks of racist graffiti and an

increase harassment and threats against Black people living in Dublin. A recent fire at a city centre guesthouse is being investigated as a possible racist fire bomb attack as a number of asylum seekers live there. If this is the truth behind the incident then it is a very serious escalation of racism as no such attack has been reported here before.

AFA has held a number of street and area leaflettings and has held a national organising meeting for members and contacts to plan an anti fascist response to the increase in racism. Anyone with information on racist or fascist activity in Ireland, or who wishes to join AFA, should write to: AFA, PO Box 3355, Dublin 7.

Red Action

5p

NO1 FEBRUARY 1982

THREE MILLION

REASONS WHY!

Why Red
Action?

In the main feature of this issue, the present editorial board of RA looks at the development of our organisations publication over the last 15 years and seventy five issues.

The first issue of *Red Action (RA)* appeared in February 1982, was a single A3 sheet costing 5p and contained five articles. The headline was *Three Million Reasons Why!* and predicted more riots as the consequence of wide scale unemployment.

Two other articles headlined *Islington - The tip of the iceberg!* and *simply Ireland*, covered two themes that would dominate subsequent issues of RA over the following years and became increasingly seen as the main political themes that would be identified with RA as an organisation. *Islington - t.t.o.t.i.* referred to an ongoing battle between fascists and anti-fascists for control of the streets in London which at the time centred around the area of Chapel Market where National Front paper sales had been consistently challenged over a number of years. The article stated that,

"Both Red Action and the Anti-Nazi League in Islington say 'do not ignore them - fight them whenever and wherever they raise their heads!' Some say we are waging a campaign that is narrow and self defeating, that by concentrating on fighting the Front, we are not involving the workers movement. This is not

so. Nazis need to control the streets. If they can do this they can not only influence people faced with mass unemployment, but they can attack ethnic minorities and create a nest of racial tension that can tear a community to pieces. The ANL successes of 1978 well and truly routed the NF. But they came back as soon as they thought the time was right, and you couldn't find a better time than now. The result was many violent attacks, and the NF stopped trying to be a respectable political party, and instead resorted to violence and terrorism. This (the NF's recent decline in the area) would never have happened if we hadn't fought them, and provided a focus for others who wanted to fight, in a key part of the class struggle".

On Ireland RA had this to say, "The right to self-determination for Ireland is a central issue for British workers. Until British workers come to terms with their countries imperialist past, and today that means Ireland, their anger and militancy will be open to being channelled up the blind alley of reformism and nationalism right across the spectrum from the NF's 'British Jobs for British Workers' to Tony Benn's call for import controls to save British industry. Ireland really shows which side of the political fence people are really on. Those who support armed liberation struggles in El Salvador, Zimbabwe, Vietnam and Angola fall

strangely silent when the war is on their own doorstep and the guerrilla movement is fighting their own master, the British ruling class. Labour MP's sing the red flag and talk of socialism, and attack Thatcher as a vicious reactionary, then salute and applaud her when she murders Republicans and socialists in Ireland.

Early Issues

Issue Two appeared in April of the same year as a four-page paper and set the basic format that would last for the next six years and take it up to issue forty.

The early issues of the paper although aiming to be the voice of RA's working class militants also saw itself as having the role of putting forward general 'revolutionary socialist' arguments in a jargon-free style. This was in a climate where there were still relatively large numbers of free open air festivals, marches, demos and gigs with 'political' bands which attracted ordinary working class people.

Street sales of the paper could also be very fruitful with the added bonus of providing humorous anecdotes, whether about the fascists who were stupid enough to challenge our sellers and ended up kissing the tarmac or the left who would usually respond with worried looks and the squeal of 'but you look like the National Front'!?! Then there were those strange geezers in pin-stripe suits who would take a furtive look over their shoulder before quickly handing over their money and stuffing a copy into their briefcase!

Right up until issue sixty-four, copies of RA were produced with painstaking hours of typing and letrasetting, often in cramped, poorly lit, cold basements or in member's living rooms with articles being trod on and photos sticking to the soles of trainers. All the lay-out and articles were done by amateurs with no professional journalists or 'intellectuals' on the editorial board. It was a paper genuinely written and produced by the working class membership but the quality of some articles was difficult for many on the Left to rationalise when they saw who sold it, hence the often repeated question 'but who writes your paper'!?!

None the less despite the 'technical' difficulties in producing *Red Action*, issue 17 was able to report the decision taken at the RA conference that year ('85) to move to production

of a monthly paper.

Early issues of RA also committed itself to promoting or reporting on various aspects of working class culture with football and music featuring heavily. *Culture Corner* included articles and interviews with punk/oi! bands such as the Newtown Neurotics, Burial, the Anti Social Workers and later interviews with the likes of Mensi and Gary Bushell before he defected to the Sun. On a practical basis many of these and others played benefit gigs sponsored by RA for strikers such as the miners.

Some of the early editions of the paper obviously influenced other publications such as *Class War*, with a sense of humour and style not normally associated with Left papers.

All Change

In 1988 certain political shifts took place within RA that would inevitably impact directly on the paper itself. The majority of the RA membership backed a proposal at conference that would fundamentally question RA's relationship to the left and RA's previously stated position of standing within the 'revolutionary socialist tradition'.

The adoption of these proposals led directly to a small number of RA's members resigning including the then editor.

By now a number of members believed that the paper had long become stale and had even begun to alienate many of the membership. For a number of years it had simply regurgitated general 'socialist' arguments about the decline of the health service, etc, many of which could have been bettered by the likes of the *Daily Mirror* anyway, accompanied with naff Leftie headlines such as *Build A Fighting Socialist Movement* and *Unity Is Strength*.

The presentation of the paper was given absolutely no thought which often meant that the same old photos were used again and

again along with the same letraset. The pressure to sustain a monthly paper for a relatively small organisation was taking its toll on quality and issue 39 carried two articles with very basic flaws. The desire felt by some members of the organisa-



Issue 62

tion to be taken seriously on the terms of the left had meant a drift towards a very bland paper which was now devoid of the cutting humour that had once been its trademark.

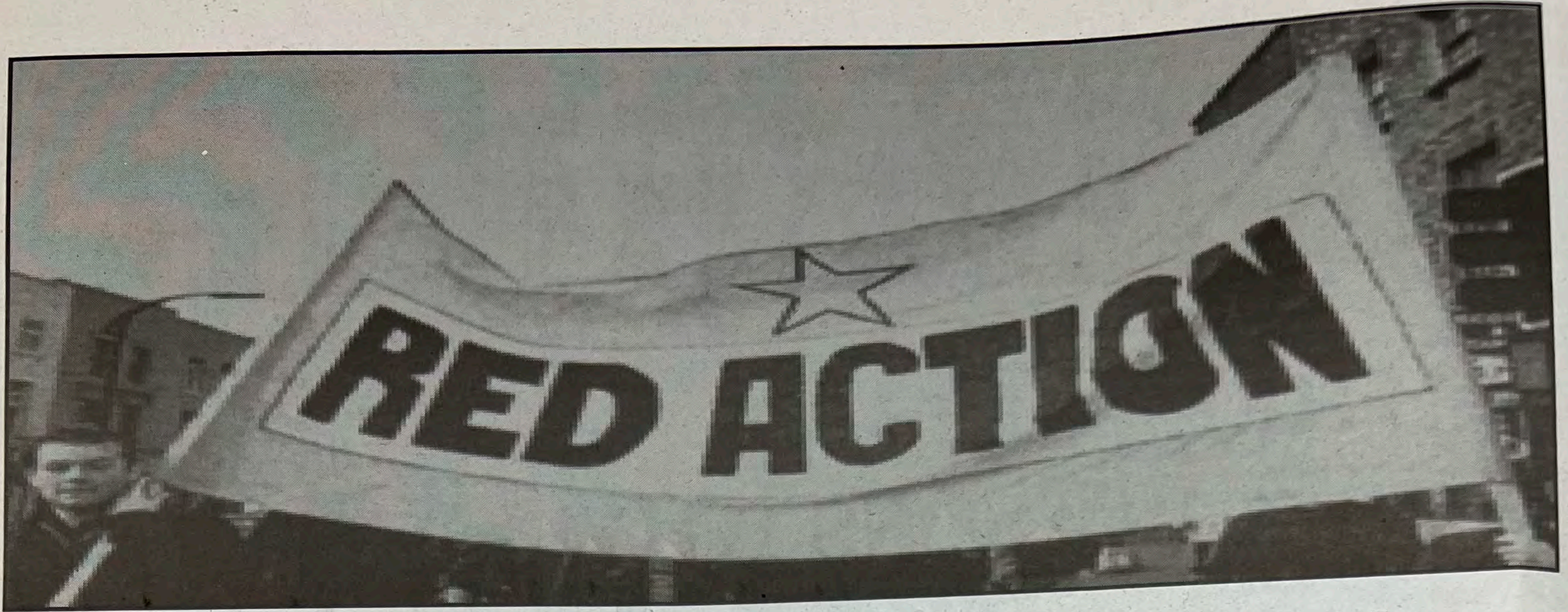
Another fatal flaw of the paper was its policy of not reporting or giving little prominence to the activities that RA was involved in, not even in the semi-humorous style of *Red Action In Action*. This was partly a reaction to the antics of the self-promoting, trumpet-blowing, groups on the Left and the sectarian nature in which they would report on events. There was also a genuine self-deprecating element that what we were doing was not really that important in the wider scheme of things. The logic of this position was that in issue 26 for instance the front page articles were about Central America and the Unions; while tucked away on the back page without its own headline was the story of the smashing of a NF march through Bury St. Edmunds by AFA and RA members that led directly to the fragmentation of the NF!

The real effect of this approach was to present the actions of RA as secretive, something that only those in the know were told

**BBC BAN
RED ACTION**



Issue 61



Preaching to the Inverted

In 1988 a Red Action national conference reached a controversial conclusion that led to a split in the organisation with one of the founding members and de facto editor of the paper leaving. An intense discussion preceded by the circulation of documents and counter-documents voted for the following motion: **"Red Action recognises that the representative groups on the Left are neither worker nor revolutionary. The time has come for a clean break from their ideology and philosophy."**

This was a belated acceptance that the type of problems inherent to organisations like the SWP; Militant etc were not 'cultural' and would not be automatically solved by a transfusion of working class members. At face value this judgment was straightforward enough. Particularly, as in the end only a small number of members actually resigned as a result RA's rejection of the left's entire philosophy.

However the decision posed far more fundamental questions for those remaining. For instance did the rejection of the contemporary Left as a revolutionary role model mean the rejection of Leninism? And if as the Leninists claimed Leninism and Marxism were indissoluble, did that mean in effect the decision had by default, put RA firmly in the anarchist camp?

In order to answer these questions with authority a root and branch exploration of revolutionary theory and practice was immediately set in motion. It began with the intense scrutiny of the writings of Marx and Engels, Bakunin, Lenin and Trotsky and also lesser known figures. The project was approached from an objective stand point, with no pre-determined bias built in. And equally unique, the subsequent debate was conducted publicly through the paper.

This led to much confusion on the Left. Some felt that the washing of ideological lines in public represented a power struggle within RA which would herald the collapse of the group.

Others felt that it represented a mixture of ignorance, naivete and confusion. Many were simply startled by the appearance of theoretical articles in Red Action at all, believing that RA was essentially anti-theory with little interest in "dead Russians."

One of the first articles that appeared tackled the core question of the dictatorship of the proletariat ie the rule of the working class following revolutionary overthrow. The initial conclusions drew wide applause from anarchists and an edited version of the article was printed in the 'Class War' paper.

They were to later choke on their cheers when shortly after the question of anarchist theory and practice come up for scrutiny.

Having created the dynamic, the exhaustive process explored many pivotal areas of working class struggle from the Paris Commune, to the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War. The hunger for debate also spilled over into other journals; notably the theoretical journal *Open Polemic*, *The Leninist*, *Workers Power & The Starry Plough* in many cases with devastating effect. Later some of the key articles were translated and published abroad with the same view of provoking discussion, a development which has continued to the present day.

The initial amusement at RA's efforts from sections of the Left turned to resentment and mortification at RA's energetic and sacrilegious destruction of a whole herd of sacred cows. Initially Stalinists, Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists, & Anarchists rushed to rebut this or that slander, and just as quickly back-pedalled in retreat, ideology and political reputation in tatters. Because they could not discern where RA was coming from; could locate no fixed position, they were more determined that we should have one. This was partly reflex and partly damage limitation. Once a label was fixed the easier they found it to dismiss the challenge. So the RA phenomena was and still is referred to by Leninists as

Anarchists and vice versa, while in one glorious moment of Trotskyite delerium one group, squared the ideological circle by referring to Red Action as "utopian Stalinists".

Understandably, due to the corrosive effect on the morale and standing of their own organisations this rich seam of entertainment and enlightenment soon dried up. So there was to be no ultimate victory; no championship belt. Instead RA became like the young fighter familiar in



Trotsky's most enduring contribution, his analysis of fascism, is conspicuously snubbed by his disciples.

boxing circles, who comes out of nowhere takes on, and destroys all comers and thereafter cannot get a bout. Though middle ranked, and of modest public reputation he is most likely to stay that way, as he is the one fighter everyone else in the division is most anxious to avoid.

Politics apart, what made the demolition so easy was that their research was sloppy when not simply dishonest. As is so often the case with the Left they tend to judge others by their own standards. Their objectivity on a

given subject went as far as addressing the guiding principles but never questioning their legitimacy. And because RA's research went further we often knew more about their historical antecedents than they did. As with all sects, their belief is, in essence, religious. And of course the purpose of theology, is to prove, not question, the existence of God.

Judged against the reality of the twentieth century; two World Wars and the emergence of totalitarian twins; Stalinism and Fascism, the record of the Left's guiding ideologies, Marxist-Leninism, Trotskyism and Anarchism is absolutely appalling. While of course for much of the time the strict adherence to the various ideologies eschewed common sense and as a result denied its followers any influence. At critical times when the ideological influence was applied, the results were without exception disastrous for the working class. The career of the exiled Trotsky is a case in point.

Trotsky, who in the early 1930's made partial amends for his earlier rubbish on the workers state with the clarity of his strategy for beating the fascists, (a strategy incidentally that found little favour amongst his followers then or now) found his credibility was undermined by both Stalinist smears, and his promotion of the fantasy of the 4th International.

So here, at a the most critical time for the working class internationally, we had a situation where there was Trotsky, a general, literally without an army, and an army of hundreds of thousands of Communists without any revolutionary leadership.

To a degree this set of circumstances has typified the performance of the Left in a variety of arenas and countries since. Unable to see which way the wind is blowing; unable to form any contemporary analysis as momentous events explode around them, and, as our own research has shown, unwilling or

unable to correct fundamental theological errors even with the benefit of hindsight.

As the function of ideology is to conceal contradictions and invert reality its impact on working class struggle is invariably negative when not completely reactionary. All ideologies and their adherents have in the eyes of the broad working class been long regarded as bogus, false prophets or harmless well-meaning idiots.

In direct contrast, Marx and Engels from the very beginning denounced any attempt to label their approach to revolutionary work as either an ideology or an 'ism'. Instead they employed a simple combination as their modus operandi. On the theoretical plane the issue was always squarely addressed from the class aspect of the initiative. On the political side they demonstrated to the working class how to combine two notions: delight that the capitalist class and the state are compelled to resort to certain measures and, at the same time refusal to support them politically.

Had either Marx or Engels for instance been alive in 1969 when Labour prime Minister Callaghan sent British troops to the Six Counties both would have been delighted. First, because it exposed the real nature of the state, its inherent instability, and so on, but simply because they welcomed it, does not mean they would endorse it. That is political support, and does not automatically follow from an understanding of the enemy predicament. On the contrary Marx and Engels would have taken up position in the class struggle as generals in a battle the better to exploit it.

This is why Leninist ideology does not find its converse in anarchism but in Marxism. Marxism is not an ideology but a method that is in essence hostile to ideology. Which is why Marx himself proclaimed: "I am not a Marxist!". This, and the fact that it was people like them he opposed all his political life, is clearly something the Left of the 20th century have not yet come to terms with.

Taking Up Cudgels

Red Action V The Left

Marx or Lenin

The following article is not the kind normally associated with the publication Red Action. This is not because we are anti-theory but because we are working class socialists and as such judge things very differently from the middle class academics and the pseudo intellectuals that populate the sects on what passes for the revolutionary Left today. The importance of this 'discovery' is that it clarifies and enlightens. Its particular relevance to Red Action is that in sentiment it is entirely consistent with everything we have ever stated to be valid true or correct. It offers up this delightful prospect (depending on your point of view) that if on this issue [dictatorship of the proletariat] we are right then it follows that their [the Left's] basic approach is completely and utterly wrong. What can no longer be in dispute is that on this vital question choice is necessary. It is not a case of Marx and Lenin but quite simply Marx or Lenin.

For Marx and Engels from the beginning to their end of their careers and without exception, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat meant nothing more and nothing less than the rule of the proletariat, the conquest of political power by the working class, the establishment of a workers' state in the immediate post-revolutionary period. It did not mean the rule of one man, clique or party. It means the rule of class. Class rule means class dictatorship by the class, not over the class. What Lenin clearly understood by the term was a dictatorship of a minority - a complete negation of Marx. *RA - Issue 53, 1989*

Workers' State

Before Stalin could use a bastardised Marxism as its formal political basis, Marxism had to be rehashed and re-processed and warped into something entirely different. The Bolsheviks did not cause Stalinism but this justification for substituting the dictatorship of the party over working class rule from below certainly facilitated it. Trotsky took the lead in gutting socialism of its organic enrootment in the mass of the people. It was also he who found it necessary to justify what had been done in the name of Marx by the Bolsheviks, by accepting "workers state" for Stalin's totalitarian regime solely and exclusively because it maintained control of property in the hands of the state; continuing his lamentable record of separating the concept of workers state from the question of working class control from below.

The Trotskyist groups currently dancing on the Stalinist graves will be unable to detach themselves from the mistakes of the past face a similar crisis themselves in the near future. *RA - issue 54*

Dustbin of History

While it is hard to imagine a group of Leninists who explicitly reject Marxism, the article in RA 53 on the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' makes a case for rejecting Leninism on the principle of Marxism itself. First, that the

position of Marx and Lenin regarding the "dictatorship of the proletariat" are completely divergent. Second, that Leninist principles led to the dictatorship of the party as distinct from the class. Thirdly, that the "traditional Left" is utterly and completely wrong in their estimate of the principles and consequences of Leninism. The re-evaluation of Marxism and Leninism is valuable and long overdue. Nevertheless the sweeping rejection of Leninism/Bolshevism, and the rest of the British Left contained in the article, throws a number of theories and principles into the dustbin of history that may have to be fished out again.

RA - letter, Issue 54, 1989

Leaders and Led

What many people, presumably anarchists among them, fail to understand is that anarchism denounces most ideally democratic forms of decision making as authoritarian and evil; for the will of the individual must not bow before an outside demand. What do you do when people disagree in an organised society, where individuals have to, live in concert? Anarchism has no answer! In words it rejects both despotism and any form of democracy as authoritarian and gropes for a third alternative. But none is found, just more talk about freedom. The real choice before anarchists is this. The safety of high minded but meaningless rhetoric, or a resort to special forms of an elite dictatorship. In other words there will always be leaders, the real question is whether they will be accountable or not. It was Bakunin who inaugurated anarchism on the basis of the second solution.

RA - issue 56

No Blueprint

'The Leninist' reacted in typical fashion at the suggestion that their idol Lenin might not after all have been infallible: "Those great contributors to the rich tapestry of Marxist thought Red Action have recently taken up polemical cudgels against Lenin and the dictatorship of the proletariat." Their middle class indignation heightened by the fact they believe semi-literate ruffians should be content to wield cudgels of the more traditional variety and refrain from trespassing on their intellectual preserve. We are not looking for a blueprint or the Holy Grail. We are just after the truth. All other alternatives have been exhausted but no effective substitute has been discovered. We need to know the truth because if we are going to do it by ourselves we need to know what works. *RA - Issue 56, 1990*

Invisible Dictatorship

Bakunin's lust for absolute power - to be a secret chief over an invisible dictatorship - isn't necessarily true either. I've read lots of versions of this and it all depends on who you read and how you interpret what he meant. But even if the most paranoid accusations about him are true its irrelevant today - just as its been for 100 years. It's easy to take quotes out of context to try to prove anything,

especially when such quotes were written as part of a propaganda war from Marx onwards. *RA - issue 51, letter from Liverpool Direct Action*

RA reply: Like Bakunin, Proudhon (the father of anarchism) is revered as a great libertarian because of his industrious use of the word liberty with a big 'L' and constant talk of revolution from below. You may indeed be willing to regard his Hitlerite form of antisemitism (*the Jew is the enemy of human kind, it is necessary to send his race back to Asia or exterminate*) as an irrelevance. Or his principled racism in general (he thought it was right to keep blacks in slavery since they were lowest of the inferior races), or his glorification of war for its own sake (in the exact manner of Mussolini), or his view that women had no rights; "I deny her every political right and every initiative, for women's virtue lies solely in marriage, motherhood and domestic duties". But as you agree "he helped shape and influence your movement" can you also regard as irrelevant, or does it depend on how you interpret it, his violent opposition not only to trade-unionism and the right to strike (even supporting police strike-breaking) but to any and every idea of the right to vote, universal suffrage or the very idea of constitutions:

"All this democracy disgusts me, what I would not give to sail into this mob with my clenched fists".

His notes for the ideal society notably include suppression for all other groups, any public meetings over 20, any free press or elections.

Was he completely insincere about his professed love of liberty? Not at all! It is only necessary to understand what anarchist liberty means. The central principle meant; That any man who cannot do what he wants has the right to revolt against the government even if the government were everyone else."

Contrary to your central contention anarchism is not concerned with the creation of democratic control form below only with the destruction of "authority" over the individual. This includes the most extremely democratic regulation of society that it is possible to imagine. Anarchists do not advocate political freedom but freedom from politics. Anarchism is on principle fiercely anti-democratic since an ideally democratic structure is still authority. Anarchists who are freest with all this talk about 'something from below' reject this goal. The anarchists who rightfully take their place in the roll of honour of the Spanish Civil War do so not because of their attachment to anarchism but in spite of it. The anarchists who fought hardest and with the most confidence and conviction were not those who remained loyal to doctrinaire anarchism but those like Durrutti and later the Friends of Durrutti who deviated from it." *RA - issue 51, 1990*

Ho Hum

Why does a group whose very existence is due to breaking with the anti-democratic policies and

practice - the lies and smears of the SWP - resort to those same methods against anarchism or, let's be honest, just Class War? ...So what has got your back up comrades? Why do you lower yourselves to this level? Why do you accuse CWF of "throwing in a few fucks to disguise their dilettantism and lack of analysis" when you know this is pure shite? I personally believe it is because CWF has achieved what you would like to have achieved. From the proud beginnings you sadly have come nowhere - in influence, members or paper sales. Yes, you have a good record on anti-fascism, but in building political organisation and influence you have failed. *RA - issue 57, letter from London Class War 1990*

Stalin - Patron of Anti-Fascism?

I really can't understand why your newspaper, which is firmly anti-fascist, which puts the fight against fascism at its centre, and which has no time for the petty utopian cries of the lefties, should devote 2 pages to praising people who were obviously aiding fascism!...The article says that in '36, 25,000 of the party's members were urban middle class lefts - that just 10% - ie it was 90% working class and peasant! What the article doesn't mention is the enormous contribution of the communists - the arms supplies and military volunteers from the Soviet Union. Fascism would have taken Spain in months had it not been for the Communist Movement in Spain and internationally. *Letter from Communist Action Group*

RA reply: 'CAG' suggests that 90% of the communist party membership consisted of workers and peasants. In fact 76,000 of the peasants - almost a third of the entire membership were peasant proprietors as distinct from agricultural workers.

CAG talks of the 'worker-peasant' alliance as if the peasant proprietors represented progressive forces in rural areas. There were two social forces in these areas; the proprietors themselves, and the far more numerous agricultural workers who after the revolution, formed the village committees and co-operatives to work the land collectively. In this context, the peasant proprietors were a counter revolutionary force. Realising that the communist party represented a return to the conditions of the bourgeois republic, they swarmed to it in droves.

Stalin had decided that a revolutionary Spain would drive the democratic countries into an alliance with the fascists, instead of, as he forlornly hoped, an alliance with the Soviet Union. To this end, a trickle of Soviet armaments was allowed to enter Spain under the control of the Spanish communist party, now

itself under the control of Soviet 'advisors'. So much for Stalin as the patron of anti-fascists. *RA - issue 67, 1994*

Squeamish Utopian Stalinists

Workers Power recently published an article on Red Action, in which they concluded that RA rejected Marx's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They have since apologised and acknowledged that RA does not reject this concept - just the reverse. It [the apology] is accompanied by a second attack on RA. RA is stigmatised as practising "vulgar sociology" and of being - wait for it - "squeamish utopian Stalinists".

In their article Workers Power say that Marx criticised the Commune for not being "authoritarian enough". Let us see what Marx himself wrote in his major published work on the 1871 events, the Civil War in France:

"In their reluctance to continue the civil war, the Central Committee made itself guilty of a decisive mistake in not at once marching on Versailles."

What was this Central Committee? Marx says it was the "provisional government" of the working men's revolution of March 1871. Workers Power tell us further that the Central Committee was "self selected" and praise it for being so: "The Central Committee of the National guard gained power not through an election but through an uprising."

This is quite unequivocal: the Central Committee, say Workers Power, was not elected and allege that Marx supported it against the elected body of the Commune. It is difficult to know whether this is a conscious effort at misrepresentation or simple incompetence.

It is too late for Workers Power to sneak back in the closet and claim they didn't really mean to endorse the imposition of a "self selected" putchist and explicitly anti-democratic clique over the authority of the elected representatives of the call, or that the process was somehow not a 'real' election.

Marx himself bars the way unequivocally: "The Central Committee was elected by virtually the whole body of the National Guard...Never were elections more sifted, never did delegates more fully represent the masses from which they were sprung." All of this, let it be carefully emphasised refers to the election of the Central Committee which Workers Power praise precisely for being "unelected", and as being evidence of Marx's support for the dictatorship of unelected authoritarian cliques over the class!! It must rank as one of the most bizarre, contorted and embarrassing arguments ever produced by a revolutionary sect. *RA - issue 63, 1992*



Continued From Page 7

about, and coupled with the paper's stance of not offering the readers anything more than the chance to support RA or take out a subscription, actually came across as quite elitist. This would change in subsequent issues as the paper came under 'new management' but old habits would take time to break fully.

Under New Management

The first issue of RA appeared later that year under a new editorial board and signalled a gradual shift in direction rather than an overnight conversion. Part of this shift was in recognition that opportunities to impact directly upon the working class were becoming fewer and fewer and often we were only selling to the Left now anyhow. However by taking steps to redefine the role of the paper it ensured a significant rise in membership and a much higher profile amongst the Left and even at times the national press.

It would take a number of issues until the paper adopted a style that would begin to truly mark-out its unique style. Three main guidelines were introduced into the paper to ensure that this happened:

- 1) That we begin to give prominence to reporting on events and campaigns that RA members were involved in.
- 2) That we begin to challenge the modus operandi of various organisations and campaigns on the Left.
- 3) That we begin to politically challenge the theories of orthodox Marxist, Leninist, Trotskyist and Anarchist organisations.

Up until now much of what the mainstream Left had put forward as theory was largely accepted by RA's membership. What was needed it had been argued was a more democratic 'SWP' that would be led and composed of working class militants and hold an uncompromising line on issues such as Anti-Fascism and Ireland.

But this was now challenged as there was obviously more than just a 'cultural' difference between RA and the Left. The paper was used to define exactly why if RA was 'right', then why the rest of the Left was 'wrong'. Also to debunk many of the theories created by the Left's intellectuals and examine how they had twisted many aspects of communist and socialist history to justify their own existence.

This process began in issue 53 with an article entitled *The Dictatorship Of The Proletariat* and led to an expansion of the paper to six pages in issue 54 and then to eight pages in issue 58 in order that these important debates be given space.

And Finally...

It wasn't until Dec '92 that the production of RA became fully computerised and expanded to a 12 page tabloid format, eventually rising to 16 pages.

As RA celebrates its 15th birthday and reaches its 75th

issue, RA members are at the moment debating the way forward for our publication, the role it has to play and the way it relates to our work within the working class.

Ireland

The war in the North of Ireland has from the very outset been described in the pages of RA as the litmus test for revolutionaries in Britain. Support for the political struggle for Irish self-determination and the armed struggle in particular, was one of the main characteristics of the paper alongside that of anti-fascism which gave it its distinct identity from the rest of the left press.

Even before Red Action was formed, it's soon-to-be membership were already travelling to the North of Ireland as part of Troops Out Movement delegations, demonstrating solidarity with the Irish struggle.

Red Action delegations to the Six Counties have always been a feature of RA, reporting on the experiences of those who took part in the delegations and advertising future trips, described usually as the 'highlight of the political calendar' for RA personnel.

But these delegations had an importance far beyond a simple expression of solidarity and were neither about 'revolutionary tourism' nor being part of the 'provo's supporters club', criticisms that have been levelled at RA members at times from various sects. No, these delegations gave us the opportunity of demonstrating to our new members and supporters, within a hour of jumping onto a plane, exactly how our own ruling class behave when the 'gloves come off'. Any illusions individuals

their commitment we as members of the British working class had an opportunity to gauge our own political and personal resolve. Though not initially designed as such, in time the 'Belfast trip' became a filter for our own membership.

Not surprisingly, some, faced with the brutal reality of the conflict, gained a personal insight into the inadequacy of their previous understanding of the words 'revolutionary struggle'. And so, having returned safely to the 'mainland' we never physically laid eyes on them again!

Equally the politics of other individuals led to rather different conclusions and a number of high profile arrests and convictions in the early 1990's earned the Red Action 'brand'

the IPLO and INLA and the gradual demise of the Irish Republican Socialist Movement up to the present day. In many cases articles such as *From Connolly To Corleone* and *Deadly Divisions*, were penned by former members.

Apart from commentating on events in Ireland itself, the other aspect that RA reported on was the activities of the various Irish Solidarity organisations in Britain.

From the very outset, although far from content with the direction of these bodies, RA did not see it as its role to publicly criticise them. It was argued that with so many of the British Left lined up against Irish Revolutionary Nationalism our job was to direct our venom at them rather than the few groups

public challenge that appeared in an open letter to the IRSP. It stated, "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".

It took until 1995 before RA was able to put its ideas into practise, when the Saoirse campaign for the release of Irish political prisoners was formed. It was clear from the relatively short period we were involved that the strategies we had long identified as pointing the way forward were realising their potential. 'Part A' of the strategy, the mobilisation of the Irish working class in Britain was already under way, with the most dynamic campaign to work around the Irish question.

However eventually even Saoirse itself fell victim to sectarianism and what RA described in issue 73 as:

"The same politics that have dogged campaigning in Britain on all issues for decades - namely Labourism. Hence all policy, tactics, etc, are decided with the interests of the Labour Party in mind, the same policies and tactics that have correspondingly failed year after year, decade after decade". It would appear therefore that RA's ambition to build a dynamic force for British withdrawal within Britain itself will remain permanently on ice.



Women's Day 1988. Red Action women's delegation outside Maghaberry jail, Ireland.

additional notoriety from a slack jawed Left and unwarranted attention from the state.

Through the 'Belfast trips', RA members gained sufficient intimacy to allow us to learn immense and invaluable political lessons from both the Republican and Republican Socialist Movements, while retaining 'enough room' to be able to objectively analyse and learn

who were working in support of it, however badly a job they made of it. This was a policy that continued right up until issue 48 (1988) when to continue not to comment on the fragmented and feeble state of the 'Irish Solidarity Movement' in Britain would, we felt, have deemed us culpable by our silence.

RA's line has long been one of attempting to build maximum unity amongst the few organisations which actively support the fight for self-determination but it was clear that this could not take place unless basic criticisms were made and subsequently addressed. A series of public documents were circulated amongst the various Irish Solidarity and Irish Republican supporting Left groups, suggesting a working coalition. In a typical piece that appeared in issue 53 (1989) after the failure of the Hands Of Ireland! campaign (of which RA had been an initial sponsor) RA argued that, "The fact clearly remains that there is an urgent need for a genuine Irish solidarity movement in this country. We say that now is not the time to blunder into immediately forming yet another organisation, such as The Leninist have done with HOI!, using the same old formulae, but to sit down with all those interested and debate the failings of all that has gone before, and based around a programme of practical work and support, form a strategy that will at last truly begin to mobilise first the Irish and then the British working class in Britain".

In issue 58 (Spring 1991), RA having identified the problem, believed we had identified the solution and laid down this



Marseilles anti-fascists identify with the Red Action brand of rento-kill anti-fascism.

might have had about the benign nature of the ruling establishment were often banished by the end of a single weekend.

Another eminently practical benefit in accepting the use and need for armed struggle meant that any ethical reservations about our own use of violence for political ends, ie militant anti-fascism, was automatically legitimised.

It also gave RA the chance to establish personal contacts amongst members of the most militant and politically advanced working class in Western Europe. Again, it was against

from their failures as well as their successes, vital lessons that we are now applying to our own struggles outside of the Irish six counties.

It also meant that RA was one of the few publications on the British Left to give a clear analysis of the INLA 'feud' in 1987, that went beyond the blanket condemnations offered by most groups. Obviously RA's close relationship with sections of the RSM at the time allowed us to give a unique insight into the origins of the 'feud' to our readers. RA continued to provide a unique look into the world of

Anti-Fascism

Copies of RA regularly carried articles on anti-fascism and RA's involvement at the 'cutting edge' (see page 7). In 1985 following a much-publicised attack on a family festival in Central London, RA acknowledged in issue 19 that "there's still a significant number of people who are ready, willing and eager to oppose fascism, and need some sort of organising body to give their efforts maximum effect".

Anti-Fascist Action (a name since used by militant anti-fascist groups throughout Europe) was born at a conference in Conway Hall on Sunday 28th July 1985. In the following issue RA reported that the conference accepted a resolution stating that "We see the need to oppose racism and fascism physically on the streets and ideologically. This grouping should be organised on non-sectarian and democratic lines".

Subsequent issues of RA chartered the steady rise of AFA as the leading anti-fascist organisation in Britain and has remained to this day (alongside AFA's own *Fighting Talk* magazine) the authoritative voice of genuine militant anti-fascism.

With hindsight the development of RA politically can be charted from our recognition that the emergence of fascism represents

Hold the Back Page!

The back page of any RA paper has often been amongst the most popular feature amongst RA members. Issue two of RA saw the emergence of *Red Action in Action*, which was the first of a number of columns which would report on RA activities, often with a good dose of humour and usually at the expense of the fascists. This was joined later in issue 16 by the *Flying Column* which used quotes and snippets to sharply demonstrate a wider point. This was later changed to *News From Nowhere* as AP/RN had nicked our original. *The Voice of Reason* first appeared in issue 31 named after the bigoted Andrew Wyatt's own *VOR* column in the *News of the World*. The infamous logo (which has adorned t-shirts) did not appear until issue 36.

Later the *VOR* column changed form, moving from just using quotes to forming mini-articles of its own and was eventually joined by *Is It Something We Said?* which reproduced quotes from Red Action from the Left, Right and Establishment press. The following are a few selected highlights...

Traffic Jam

Three swaggering boneheads who demanded to know where the commies were - to their dismay actually found some in the shape of four RA supporters. After an intense discussion one of the skinheads lost all sympathy from the motorists of West Kensington by lying in the middle of the road, blocking all the traffic and generally making a perfect nuisance of himself.

RA in Action - Issue 10.

Debs Delight

Now then, the 1st March was obviously a date every right minded English person had in their diaries. Yes darlings, it was the Ware and Hounds Ball at the Grosvenor Hotel in London's exclusive Park Lane. As Henrietta and I parked the Rolls outside the Hotel, we were met by a horrendous gathering of ruffians, who jostled us and made scandalous remarks implying we were born out of wedlock. Honestly! Shaken, but with true upper-class dignity, we ran for our lives into the foyer, only to be informed by young Barrington-Smythe that some of the red ruffians had sneaked round the back and "put the boot in" - a most distasteful expression I've heard the servants use at home. I ask you, is nowhere safe anymore?

RA in Action - Issue 11

Harvey Car Banger

Recently a RA member in Coventry went to the local college to hear the views of Harvey Proctor MP(Con), who has connections with known nazis. He was shocked by the intolerance displayed by the students who barricaded the hall and shouted slogans. Trying to disassociate himself from their antics he became involved in an unfortunate scuffle with one of Mr Proctor's party. He

chased the MP to his car to explain and kicked the door repeatedly in an effort to attract his attention. He totally refutes suggestions that it was these incidents that stimulated the near-riot that the local paper described. We accept his explanation.

RA in Action - Issue 16

United We Stand

The opening scene. A pub in Kings Cross. Enter from the left some jubilant 'cockney reds'. Exit a disgruntled bonehead minus fascist insignia.

Half hour later he reappears with a dozen mates. Three go into the pub too sort it out. Two emerge almost immediately, one stooped and crooked-toed, the other unnerved having interrupted with his head the flight of a greasy kebab cunningly camouflaged by a pint glass. The final unfortunate miscreant underwent oral lobotomy (a medical term for having your brain bitten out) without the benefit of an anaesthetic. The curtain drops.

RA in Action - Issue 16.

Open Letter to the Federation of Conservative Students

The picture adjoining this article is from a pamphlet published by a couple of members of your federation, some of whom we are told sport 'Hang Nelson Mandela' badges, encourage links with UDA supporters and were responsible for an attack on a CND float at Brighton this year.

Amid accusations of neo-fascism from the press you say that you only say in public what other members of the Tory party say in private. This we can well believe, we have no illusions about the wets in the Tory party. Your vocal support for various far-right causes had attracted our attention and we can assure you that having learned the historical lessons of Germany in the 30's we do not waste our time in theoretical debate with fascists. The methods that we employ are both practical and effective, as your fellow travellers in the National Front could testify.

We can assure you that if your future behaviour does not improve dramatically then sooner or later some of you will discover what a good spanking means in the rougher end of the political market, if you get our drift.

RA in Action - Issue 16

Loss of Memory

A number of rather large Red Action supporters were delighted to be of assistance, in the complete recovery of a building sub-contractor from a sudden loss of memory, a sadly all too common complaint amongst members of his profession, especially on non-union sites. Apparently the poor man had completely forgotten that he owed one of our colleagues a fairly large sum of money in wages, and as he was approached on site was heard to confidently proclaim to this former employee "I owe you no fucking money, you're trespassing, get off the site or I'll call the police". He stared in menacing fashion to

see if anyone fainted. No-one did. Instead as they say in the Bible, the walls came tumbling down. The response to this cure was immediate, and the recovery remarkable. You will not find this particular type of activity recommended in the TUC handbook on how to handle trade disputes, but at least this particular creditor was paid in full.

RA in Action - Issue 24

Evil People

It's not often that Red Action members find themselves at the theatre, however with Christian Action Research and Education holding an abortion rally at the Albert Hall one of our finest detachments were instructed to support the pro-abortion picket.

Frustrated with being denied access to this ticketed event, some of our members entered the foyer and used the opportunity created by the pro-choice pickets twice marching into one door and out through the other, to twice launch sections of the bookstalls into the nearby sink.

Now, bored and watching what appeared to be 'judging' their placards, about 150 members of the same revolutionary organisation all crowding with some difficulty behind a single crash barrier, we tried a side door.

Hey presto, security was breached and within 15 rather large gentlemen crunched into one of the private boxes, while 5 female members kept the whole security firm at bay. Naturally we handled this end of the opportunity for protest with the dignity of a first class occasion.

After all this was nothing if not a family occasion, opening with "Who the fuck are hell are you" the all male chant ran through many of the old favourites, concluding with a chorus of "We are the Reds".

To his credit Sir Bernard Braine rose to the challenge splendidly. He pointed a quivering finger in our direction covering the first three rows in split he screamed "There are evil people amongst us". I never doubted it for a second.

Incidentally, just in case you're wondering whether our appearance had any connection with Sir Bernard, who according to the tabloids ended up later in the evening in a West End gutter clutching his privates - No it didn't.

Voice of Reason - Issue 56

Shut Up Yer Face

Given the renewed controversy over the 'right to silence' surrounding the Winchester Three and the fit-up of Winston Silcott by the police, Red Action is proud to present dramatic evidence of the value of our own counter-interrogation techniques.

The interview in question which was tape recorded happened last year after a five a side game of 'get your retaliation in first' between members of neo-nazi Blood and Honour and Red Action supporters. Apparently the bones were quite *cut-up* about the result so our hero was invited by the local plod to help with their inquiries.

From the thrilling opening moments the tension never flags as every probing question of the interrogator is brilliantly parried by the heroically dogged, monotonous repetition from the defendant "I wish to remain silent". Highly recommended for beginners and an absolute must for any serious poll tax rioter.

The title, 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing' available on album, cassette or CD. 45 minutes of edited highlights cost £9.99 from 'Shut up yer face productions'.

Voice of Reason - Issue 56

IS IT SOMETHING WE SAID?

Most groups on the Left didn't want to discuss them. What frightens many people on the Left about Red Action is not that they are big boys who are going to come around and break a few heads. It's the damage they feel that-RA can do to the whole left-wing 'cause'. Critics see them as the National Front with a few left-wing credentials tagged on.

The NF were not too keen to discuss them either but Ian Stewart, the lead singer of Skrewriver told us: "The only real street battles the NF have been involved in have been with Red Action."

Blitz magazine interview 1988

(Grampian Red Action) describe the Orange Order as a 'natural constituency for fascism', but fail to elaborate on how they arrive at that conclusion, but attempt to justify their statement by describing the actions of Combat 18. We are also aware that 'Red Action' banners were prominent in a Connolly Association Parade in Edinburgh indicating their support for the terrorist organisation, the Provisional IRA. It would therefore appear that Grampian Red Action is indeed a 'natural constituency' for terrorists.

Jack Ramsay, Grand Secretary, Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland. *Big Issue* (Scotland) August 95.

"It appears that the main Red Action mob has not turned up yet. Keep an eye out for the ones without placards and not shouting slogans".

TSG commanding officer in aside to underling. Saoirse picket, Royal Tournament, Earls Court. 28.7.95.

The conventional wisdom, in the words of Peter Wright, author of *Spycatcher*, is that the far left in Britain is about as threatening as "a pond full of ducks", but in Red Action's case there seems to be some substance to the claim that the rest of the left are imposters.

A Scotland Yard source says that the police expectation of Red Action is two-fold: first, that "there may be some forging of closer links with revolutionary groups on the Continent, particularly where those groups are involved in violent clashes with Fascists"; and secondly, that RA will "associate themselves with causes (other than Ireland) where they see potential opportunity for the overthrow of the British Government".

The Independent On Sunday. 29.1.95.

Red Action are another Left group intent on establishing a separate identity. "They're very into being mysterious and underground", Tom (Socialist Organiser) warns. "They're like the people in the French Connection film who keep jumping on and off trains and making phone calls". I meet four burly Red Action members outside an Islington pub, from here I'm quickly escorted to another pub, probably the only one in North London that's completely empty.

Big Issue Nov '94.

The vigilance of MI5 and the security services in relation to the far-right appears to allow an organisation calling itself Red Action: in effect, a criminal conspiracy which has a policy of employing physical violence against those whose politics it disagrees and which has two members currently serving jail sentences for an IRA bombing campaign in London. The total failure of the authorities to take any measures against this group, or others involved in attacks on BNP members during the May election campaign, suggests that the state security agencies which are supposed to act in defence of democracy are not doing their job very effectively.

BNP leader John Tyndall.

British Nationalist No305 July 1994.

Most people who have been involved in the struggle for a few years will be aware of this tiny group of mugs, misfits and cowards who call themselves Red Action. We at C18 who have monitored this bunch of no good fucking queers just regard them as one big joke which gets funnier everytime we hear it. The image they try and put over is that of a mob who've had enough and just want it with the fascists at every opportunity. In reality they are a bunch of 40-50 wankers who would never make it in any football firm in this country. Their 'claim to fame' is that they've beaten up a few skinheads, pensioners and women on their way to right-wing events. Anytime they have ventured near a large number of racists they always bring a bigger mob of police who they can stand behind and call us names...So there you have it lads, Red Action, the left's so-called hardmen have bottled it on every occasion they've had to prove themselves, but have shown themselves to be a bunch of tossers. They give it the big one when they're being protected by the Old Bill but wouldn't dare venture near our mob and stand!

Part of a five page 'morale booster' in Issue No.1 of *Combat 18*

Last Sunday's so-called quality press launched a crude witch-hunt against the supposed involvement of Trotskyists in the recent bombings of the IRA...Red Action is charged with being "an extremist Trotskyist organisation". In fact this group has never claimed to be Trotskyists.

The Trotskyist Workers Press, 3 April 1993

Red Action uses violence, or the threat of it, not just against the neo-nazi right, but against those it disagrees with on the Left *Concerned Citizens Against Terrorism* 1993.

France 1997... Fascist hegemony cut-and-dried, the Left ready to cut and run, time for Plan B

In these uncertain political times it is rare that a single occurrence can be recognised as a pivotal moment. An occurrence that represents the spirit of a certain period which in the supplements of some Sunday papers might be referred to as a zeitgeist: 'the spirit of the age'. Unfortunately this example is not however about spirit but rather lack of it.

Neither is it a succinct summary of the Left's overall strategy to contain the march of the FN though it could be: "neither humanitarian nor anti-fascist activists have been able to stop it. They have refused to confront the FN physically but have not proposed any political alternatives."

The quote was lifted from an article by the anti-racist magazine Reflex which refers in passing to the inability of the entire liberal/Left establishment to close down a single Paris soup kitchen run by the Front National. It might be argued that the continued existence of the soup kitchen invalidates not only the Left's strategy, but its very existence.

On Easter Saturday the liberal/Left called for an international demonstration against the FN conference in Strasbourg. This was the day we were told that the European Left would rise from the dead. Nothing happened.

The march of about 40,000 took place alright but so did the FN conference. This wasn't designed as confrontation more as a cultural event. The Observer described a 'festive air' in the week leading up to the march. Film shows were organised, with

Charlie Chaplin's Great Dictator being especially popular. Writers produced books calling for religious and political tolerance. Accordingly, some like Salman Rushdie made an honorary citizen of Strasbourg and epitomising the mood, felt this tolerance should extend to the FN. Salman thought the FN conference should go ahead so that people could hear how 'ridiculous' its policies were. This disconcerted the 'radicals' who insisted that the mayor ought to ban it. Nevertheless there was a feeling of excitement reminiscent, some thought, of the political events of 1968. The difference now is that it is the far-Right rather than the student Left that is setting the agenda.

This observation would be stridently denied by the 200 members of the Anti-Nazi League from Britain who travelled to offer their experience and support. They had high hopes for the march though they have some concerns about the overall strategy. Their concerns result from the recognition that the approach of the ANL is not fundamentally different from their French counterparts. That is to say it embodies the same feel good factor and is as equally effective. This too would be stridently denied. However as they returned home to play their part in the electoral campaign for a Labour victory the soup kitchen and the fascist strategy underpinning it remains very much intact.

Of course it is precisely the call for a Labour vote or for its Socialist Party equivalent that lies at the heart of the failure of nerve and the absence of vision that has allowed Le Pen to establish his

party firmly in the political mainstream in little over ten years. This is the fundamental flaw in the overall design that is nothing more than a series of missed chances and blunders.

This fact could not have received greater emphasis that in the recent campaign for control of the French town of Vitrolles. Here was a situation where not only did the liberal Left rally behind the Socialist candidate but the conservative Gaullist stood down to maximise the return for the anti-

now has eyes on Nice and Cannes. Though essentially a political campaign without any of the traditional rough stuff normally associated with the growth in fascist influence it nevertheless has taken on the appearance of a military offensive. "Another town falls to fascism" was a typical headline.

The opposition camp is in total disarray. Recrimination, bluff and bluster and clutching at straws are prominent features of an army ready to cut and run. Parties in the

prefer the original to the copy."

When the Front has been stridently denounced by left and right its preoccupations with race and national identity have been placed centre stage and its influence has tended to grow. Unwilling to come to terms with the Front's infinite potential, their opponents are left clutching at straws. The SWP's theoretical magazine believes that the wide support for the FN among the working class is exaggerated and points an unconvincing finger at the support for the Communist and Trotskyist candidates in the presidential elections. They also take solace from the number of strikes and so on suggesting as syndicalists tend to, that striking for higher wages is intrinsically progressive. Other commentators like Searchlight and the liberal press search for signs of splits and acrimony or a power struggle within the Front. A familiar 'hawk and dove' scenario emerges. The power struggle is presented as being between "the cunning strategist Bruno Megret; the de facto number two, and the racist and loud mouth Le Pen." As the Guardian commented "At the moment, Megret slick and able to win votes without being explicitly racist - seems to be winning. But if the far less subtle Le Pen hangs on to the leadership, the party could increasingly begin to look old and anachronistic. The next sentence acknowledges that this is "slim hope".

This mixture of resignation and futile prophecies is typical, and demonstrates graphically that the situation is if anything worse than even the merchants of gloom imagine. First of all we see in the



ANL contingent: involved in "useless lamentations" on Strasbourg demo

Front candidate in the second count. The right wing Prime minister called for "common sense to prevail and voters should face up to their responsibilities". That is to say vote Socialist. The Socialist candidate who attracted this unique cross party endorsement was a "a classic chattering classes lefty with gray bouffant hairdo and eternal white scarf". Not only that, the elections were only being held because the same candidate had himself been found guilty of abusing municipal funds after previously being elected to the town hall in 1995. So the Front added Vitrolles to the three other towns it now controls. It

'republican pact' blame each other. Some seek to play down the significance citing local factors while others believe in seeking some form of accommodation with the 'enemy'. All know the room for manoeuvre is limited. The options available (a) ignoring the fascists (b) cooperating with them (c) opposing them are all tried and tested. When the Front has been ignored in the past 15 years its, its influence unopposed has tended to grow. When the centre right has cooperated with the FN, hoping to draw its sting and take over its support the opposite has happened. As Le Pen commented at the time "people

statement the middle class, middle of the road instinct that explicit racism (or explicit anything) is vulgar and must eventually prove a vote loser. Second, the inability to recognise that FN success with race and immigration can be replicated in other political areas. Third, the admission that unless the FN implodes their destiny is in their own hands. Fourth, the absence of a plan B that does not involve capitulation. Fifth, the inference that the Front could still be 'tamed by power' and partial accommodation may be the best way to avoid outright disaster. And finally the dawning recognition that it is not the FN but the liberal establishment and particularly the Left parties who appear old and anachronistic. It is the acceptance of the final point that paves the way for compromise and point five.

[As a complimentary symptom, particularly from those whose anti-racism is inextricably linked to social snobbery (the belief that racism is unsophisticated and indicative of the lower orders) - will come the realisation that fascism might not be so bad after all - for them anyway. Similarly, the elements who currently express their concern by taking to the streets but when asked what motivates them reply: "Its a very nice day for a sunny walk and it is really good that the traffic has gone etc" will find something more diverting.]

Even as this happens Trotskyite martinets will doubtless continue to offer reassurances that there are 'special conditions' over there. Then France much like Vitrolles today, will be presented as an exception.

The chances of the BNP ever directly taking power in Britain are nil. The situation in France is very different. The FN are not a margins of political influence but at its very core. According to a former Gaullist minister "Political life has become a theatre in the middle of which the president o the National Front is enthroned ...surrounded by the useless lamentations of those who wish to get rid of him." Even more significantly it is the most popular single party among the working class. The explanation of how this happened also provide the

answers as to how they can be stopped.

The Front National was founded in 1972. Hard liners on the far-right who saw a need to "get out of the far-right ghetto" were the driving force behind the initiative. In 1974 Le Pen got less than 1% in the presidential elections and it was not until the early 1980's that the FN got its first elected councillor. So far so indifferent. Two things changed the fascist fortunes. First the Socialists were elected amid scenes of wild jubilation. They then attacked the people who had elected them. The FN were the main beneficiaries of the backlash.

At first the general assumption was that this was a protest vote and as such would of its own accord peak and ebb. When events did not happen as confidently forecast, the Left decided that what they needed was a counter protest movement and SOS Racisme with personal blessing of Socialist President Mitterand was born. As a protest movement SOS Racisme was a success bringing hundreds of thousands on to the streets. Capturing the imagination of both the media and student youth while doing so. The problem was that the students were not the people voting FN, and a protest movement was the precise opposite to what was required. It proved an alternative to self critical analysis and an alternative to a serious strategy.

Lacking the insight and motivation to come to terms with the rightward drift, the Left sought solace in the erroneous belief that if they could not come up with a effective strategy then one was not needed. Instead they made the assumption that the FN did not have one either. The Left also assumed that had the same lack of ambition as themselves. So far wrong on all counts.

In 1995 1075 FN councillors were elected. Four towns are now under FN control. Yet the Left still continue to believe in futile protest. When the FN picked Strasbourg for its annual rally the Left responded with an international counter demonstration. 50,000 answered the call. "Saturdays march was a marvelous demonstration of the

potential that now exists to turn the tide against the Le Pen" Socialist Worker gushed. "To break Le Pen will mean ensuring that whenever he and his Nazis appear they are confronted. This does not mean small groups of people clashing with police or Nazis but mass confrontations. This is important to demoralise the Nazis so that they can only meet behind police lines." 'Mass confrontation', decoded, means non-violent confrontation. That is to say a tactic that can cause no collateral damage to the core organisation, and makes as much impact on its electoral base.

An unwillingness and inability to come to terms with the fact that they have been hopelessly outflanked is why the language appears as arcane as the cunning plan. It is no longer taboo to admit voting FN, so infantile name calling and the like has no resonance which reduces anti-fascism or at least their understanding of it to a whinge from the fringe.

In addition the FN has more supporters in Strasbourg alone than the Left mustered internationally; and even worse, working class support. So even if the ANL/SWP plan was implemented why do they think the largest working class party in France would be forced to hide behind police lines? Hide from who precisely?

Even more shocking is that the SWP's feeble and superficial solution is rejected by the majority of the French Left, for--being too militant! Little wonder that the FN are confident. Confident not only of growing in influence and continuing to set the agenda but of - ruling France.

Politics is all about setting the agenda; then dictating the terms of reference for the subsequent debate. Once Communist mayors began bulldozing immigrant centres and the Socialists began chartering planes to deport illegal immigrants there was little doubt who was in the driving seat. That was almost 10 years ago. Earlier this year the government introduced a Bill requiring citizens to notify the authorities when an immigrant arrived and when he or she left their home again. As the Observer commented "it is no coincidence that the new bill followed the Front National



Bruno Megret, number 2 in the FN and de facto Major of Vitrolles. His stated ambition is 'to govern, not protest'.

victory at Vitrolles".

In essence the reason for being for fascist groups like the BNP is not to take power themselves but that their actions and propaganda become the impetus or pretext that drives the centre to the right. Fascists are the pioneers for reaction. They prowl society's edges looking for vulnerable points in its defences. Their function is to open up new political frontiers and break new ground. In political terms they form a wedge designed to breach the opposition defences through which the more politically timorous then pour through. (The function of militant anti-fascism is to blunt that wedge with one) Or at least that is usually the extent of their practical ambition. Not so in France. The FN have outgrown their role. Certainly leading member Bruno Megret believes so. "Ever since I joined the FN my aim has been this: to help it progress from something that was, in a sense, a protest movement, an expression of anger and frustration, and help it become a great movement capable of governing France. We must aim not just to protest but to 'gagner' and governor."

One of the features of the last 16 years and the rise of Le Pennism is the consensus and co habitation between left and centre right. This marriage of convenience has led to the situation where either the left or the right once elected are able to abandon their promises in favour of a different but mutual agenda. Disgruntlement with the charade has led to disgruntlement with the entire political elite, something Le Pen is happy to exploit. This stance distinguishes the FN from all other parties and provides it in doing so with a radically robust complexion. As a recent convert in Vitrolles pointed out: "The National Front makes sense. Margianne schools serve

pork to Muslims now. it might seem nasty to inflict politics on children, but the National Front had to do it or people would have said they are just they are just like the others. They are not. They are a party of action." Such is the alienation with the old political order; 'a party of action' simply by keeping its facile promises, instantly appear more radical and democratic than their constitutional opponents.

Even more importantly the Front has been watering its grass roots just as the conventional parties have been neglecting theirs. It is a common refrain in France as elsewhere in Europe that political activity at a community level is dying. "People are coming to us because we go to them" says one activist "we are there on the streets on the landings of the tower blocks. People see we don't have horns. They see our ideas are their ideas. And they don't see the other parties at all."

The fascists are talking to people while their opponents and the left talk at them. They are employing Marxist methods to fascist objectives and its working. Not only are they winning, but their destiny is in their own hands inasmuch as their no coherent opposition. Even the parliamentary right are divided. Sensing that the FN are set on the sole possession of power, some like Charles Pasqua a former hardline Gaullist minister have argued publicly that the FN should be brought fully on board. That is to say a coalition of the right and the far-right against the centre and the parliamentary left at government and local level. This remember is precisely the same dilemma faced by the parliamentary parties under political challenge from the National Socialists in the Weimar Republic in 1931. When the time comes the proposed collaboration will be presented to the pious, the



FN - biggest working class party in France

conscience stricken, and the faint hearted as a devious plot to 'tame' the FN through power. To compromise or not that will be the question. The significance is not in the answer, but in the question posed. That will be the signal that the velvet counter-revolution has begun in earnest.

It might be termed the velvet counter revolution because the FN are making substantial progress with little evidence of the traditional rough stuff. This is not because the FN are not fascists, or because they have abandoned violence as a tactic. On the contrary, it is the Left which has lost the stomach for the fight. Similarly it might be argued that the FN rarely shows its face on the streets. But, then, there is no need to control the streets if the streets are not being contested. On May 1 every year for instance thousands of their supporters march through the streets of Paris unmolested.

Impressive though their progress has been on traditional fascist themes; immigration/law and order/national sovereignty and so on, they are also eager to move on, to evolve. An analysis by the respected IPOS polling organisation suggests that the FN is now winning votes more because of its remorseless campaign against widespread corruption in the French political establishment than because of its traditional theme of immigration. Bruno Megret concurs: "Our policies have evolved. ...We are already strong on the issue of immigration and security but we aim also to be credible on what I call the third pillar: economic and social policy."

When the FN say they are against immigration the Left counter: 'refugees are welcome here'. The FN say they are for law and order; the knee jerk response is to sympathise with anti-social elements. The FN attack corruption; the Left choose as their champion a candidate with a conviction for it. Such a mind set has nothing to do with the working class on any level; politically, strategically, historically. Instead it is an expression of liberalism extremism. The Paris Commune after all shot looters.]

A corrupt ineffective Socialist mayor supported by all the major parties and defeated by the FN is the real lesson of Vitrolles. This allows Le Pen to say with some authority that the "political system is corrupt and incapable of

governing France efficiently. It is devoting all its strength to fighting the Front." - and losing. Given the size of the challenge the "N for Nazi! F for Fascist! Smash the National Front!" type of 'jeer'-leading advocated by ANL and that ilk could hardly look less ridiculous.

The outlook is bleak but not irretrievable. It is not the situation, but anti-fascism itself which is beyond redemption. French anti-fascism has been indelibly tarnished by the antics of the left. Primarily, they allowed or encouraged the establishment to prostitute the principle for party political advantage. As a direct consequence, they have been hopelessly wrong footed by the FN to the extent that in public consciousness anti-fascism and the FN have swapped roles. Fascism which by its nature is pro-state and anti-working class is now perceived as anti-establishment and pro-working class. The French public still know what anti-fascism is against, but not why it is against it. And as importantly the maintenance of the political status quo apart, what the forces behind the anti-fascist groups are actually for. Lee Pen is more than happy to interpret events for them.

"AFA has long recognised that once the far-right is allowed to mobilise, is allowed to set the agenda and has passed a certain point, they begin to control their own destinies and the destinies of their opponents. Once that point is reached it would be pointless of possibly counter productive to rely upon a purely anti-fascist stance, primarily because people look to politics for solutions. It might be clear what you stand against, though their understanding of what you stand for will effectively determine their overall response." (AFA strategy document 1995)

France has passed that certain point. Which means that anti-fascism as an overall tactic designed to mobilise public and working class opinion, to politically isolate, physically confront and hound the hard core, is no longer an option. What would have been appropriate in 1977 or possibly even 1987 is well past its sell by date. It is too late simply to reject the radical in the FN programme now. Besides which, it is the Left which appear the

isolated minority; the half crazed zealots within society. For Trotskyism and the rest of the Left which presided over the debacle the dustbin of history beckons.

AFA again: "...we are not blind to the fact that the fight is political and accept that a resurgence of support for the far-right is a symptom of a deeper malaise...It is not AFA's role to argue that change is not needed. The ambition of militant anti-fascism is not simply to see the far-right defeated and removed from working class areas: the ultimate solution is to see them replaced there. Our primary role is to guarantee that a successful challenge to Labour comes only from the Left."

But who are the Left? If the Left does not exist then the Left must be re-invented. And in the knowledge that there are no instant solutions, working class militants must start from scratch.

Ultimately the only guarantee against the FN taking power is not a strong anti-fascist movement but a strong politically independent working class movement. Consequently it is absolutely vital that working class independence be reinforced at every opportunity. Those who eulogise events like Strasbourg ("Jean Marie Le Pen ...looked like a rat scurrying into a sewer behind a protective ring of thousands of FN thugs and helmeted CRS police") will instinctively condemn the notion of working class independence as divisive. Such a stance does the anti-fascism a disservice on both counts.

First, they insist that the fight against fascism is apolitical and pure, in that it is fought by the whole of society including the state against 'evil'. In other words a moral crusade demanding cross class unity. Yet the groups proclaiming this ideal also invoke by their violent rhetoric the notion of biblical wrath, yet they themselves do no fighting and denounce all who do as 'squadists' and individual terrorists. This dual connivance allows the state to isolate the militants without criticism. While the establishment support for 'anti-fascism' merely serves to alienate the working class people from the working class principles underwriting it. The cross class alliance also helps provide the fascists with an invaluable radical veneer.

Should such elements have any future in the anti-fascist arena it will not be as allies but as adversaries. Militant anti-fascism needs to take the implications on board. Otherwise it will be like some middle class imbecile being in charge of a runaway train while the working class passengers and crew discuss whether these facts might be related. With an imbecile in the drivers cab it is self evident that when the train jumps the track, the driver will be at fault, but equally, he cannot in truth be held responsible.

Instead the entire responsibility lies with those who wish to prevent disaster taking charge at the first available opportunity.

The fascists have captured the public imagination.



PLAN B

The analysis of the FN's rise also provides the blue print; the basic outline of what is required to stop them.

1. First what is needed is a political vehicle capable of getting beyond the reaches of the 'far-left ghetto'. The task is not simply to make propaganda but to make a difference.

2. First an analysis of contemporary working class problems is required. This means talking to the working class about what interests them rather than what currently preoccupies the Left. (To be able to do this means the jettisoning of all dogma.)

3. Only by attempting to put the whole rightward drive into reverse can the progress of the FN be halted. Militants must mimic their ambition.

To govern not to protest must be the aim of the progressive working class.

4. The organisation must be based in the working class. An organisation that makes things happen or prevent them happening. 'a party of action'.

5. Working class communities abandoned by the mainstream parties, must be nurtured not neglected.

6. Not only to crush, but supplant the FN influence in working class areas must be the guiding objective.

7. Exploiting Socialist Party corruption is something working class militants should not be shy about. Endemic corruption must be recognised as an opportunity rather than a cause for regret.

8. In dealing with the FN, the anti-fascist militants may have to out-violence them, but also in dealing directly with both the working class and the political establishment, will also have to out-radicalise them.



Students, who in '68 would have been on the barricades, today march with the FN

Newtown

Continued from Page 4

following week to air their grievances, which was news to NIRA!

The residents spokesperson responded appropriately, "There's only one group of people who represent the community of Newtown, and that's the Newtown Independent Residents Association".

The council, like the police no longer figured in the equation. If the police and council hadn't already done enough to fan the flames of Newtown Independence, the committee were informed later that day that a woman police sergeant, well known locally, had been deployed outside the gates to Yellow Park, where the march had met, helpfully informing people that the march had been cancelled.

The next couple of weeks saw a noticeable shift in people's attitude on the estate. Pensioners were walking out in the open again, handbags and all. Committee members were greeted wherever they went. All over Newtown, people were talking about the campaign. Word got back that the mugging gangs had begun to operate elsewhere, certainly not a victory but a step in the right direction.

The police were clearly unnerved by the "outing" of the mugging issue. Between them, over recent years, the council and police effectively conspired to allow young hoods the run of the area, thereby keeping them out of the more respectable surrounding areas. The police appeared to be containing and simultaneously ignoring the damage inflicted on the community of Newtown for the greater good, in

this case a quiet life and the subjugation of a potentially troublesome community, with people too scared to leave their homes, let alone getting organised and demanding answers to exacting questions. Arguably, the final upshot is that the gangs themselves have been used as a form of social control, and like rats to a trap the hoods and muggers fell for it.

It's ironic that 3 days before the "Reclaim our Streets" march, a source revealed to committee members that the police were to launch a high profile "shop-a-robber" hotline the following week, and to compliment this an extra 30 police officers were to be assigned to street patrols and undercover operations on the estate, with a further 30 being promised for the Autumn. Note, the weekend before the public launch of "shop-a-robber" there were no reported street robberies throughout Newtown: compared to an average of 14 cases per weekend, plus those that are not reported. Obviously the NIRA initiative was beginning to take effect, yet the police ignored their own statistics, publicly at least, and chose to proceed with the launch.

Unlike the Council the police were now trying to box clever. Their strategy was and remains twofold. Firstly, by way of zero tolerance policing, the community as a whole would effectively be punished. "People would be stopped but the innocent have nothing to fear." In an area where a householder might have a choice between 6 months car

tax or a fortnights food, innocence in the eyes of the law is a rare virtue. For its audacity and outspoken attacks on the authorities, for its steadfast refusal to acknowledge a police or council role in community matters, for its uncompromising initiatives Newtown would be singled out for an unofficial zero tolerance pilot scheme in the West

presence. A case of treating the symptoms rather than the disease. However, no-one could argue that the attitude of the police to Newtown is at best indifferent, and more often than not hostile. A heavier police presence, given their current attitude, will only further the notion that Newtown is an undesirable ghetto, where the whole community

deemed unsafe. The wall lies opposite a row of derelict council houses, thousands of shards of broken glass and crumbling masonry that make a mockery of the councils safety concerns. The media looked on again as brick by brick the wall came down, committee members vowed to the Council and press that the wall would be up again the next Friday unless the council didn't do something themselves. That very afternoon residents on the street were canvassed by council representatives asking if they would prefer the alley bricked up, gates with residents having keys, or wooden fences. Residents told them to brick it up. The committee chairman has since received several visits from more senior council officials begging for talks with NIRA. Needless to say, all requests have been rejected. The single ingredient in the NIRA launch period that has insured its political integrity so far has been its refusal to share a platform with the council or police. Despite numerous attempts at compromise and coercion and even trying to outlaw the organisation, NIRA



Reclaim the Streets March, Newtown

Midlands. This came one week after the chief constable had publicly denounced the very idea of the zero tolerance strategy being deployed on the streets of the West Midlands. Yet the very same was being announced for Newtown in all but name, in a way making the NIRA a victim of its own success. NIRA anticipated police saturation very early on:

"Some sections of the community have called for a higher police

becomes the problem, as happened in many poor areas in the eighties. Building a wall of riot police around us will do nothing to help our community."

On the 24th May the council knocked down the first concrete wall, that had caused so much controversy at the beginning of the month. Each committee member was notified that the wall would be knocked down as it had been

has stood firm, this has done a lot to command credibility in the eyes of the community.

The problems have not gone away, what has changed though is that the community as a whole are confident enough to stand up and return fire. Newtown is united and fighting back.

15 Years On

Continued From Page 7

a chemical change in the body politic and because of this can never be ignored.

In hindsight, this instinct saw us unwittingly depart from the theory and practice of the orthodox Left from the very first step.

Similarly as our theory followed practice their practice was based on theory. In order to define and defend our own politics we ended up demolishing theirs. This extract from 1992 was typical of that period.

"In its continuing flight from reality the orthodox Left doggedly insists militant anti-fascism, which in its purest form is spelt out in physical violence, is merely a cowardly distraction, a side show, from the real business of confronting racist legislation by the state. The motive behind this line of argument is as obvious as it is perverse. If nothing else, the current events in Germany show that institutionalised racism is not the cause of far-right violence. The relationship is precisely the reverse. The well organised attacks against refugees at Rostock and elsewhere were the spark which set in motion the manoeuvres by the social democratic parliamentarians to support right wing calls to amend Germany's 'liberal' post war constitution.

The success of these forms of direct action caused them to be legitimised in the eyes of the public. This in turn emboldens fascist supporters toward more ambitious political demands, inevitably followed by further paramilitary excesses.

In this year's Newham Monitoring Project's annual report AFA is condemned for the use of "intensely paranoid almost paramilitary tactics". To follow this line of argument is to accept that not only is confronting the fascists an alternative to

confronting the state, but in addition it is to pretend that in the battle for the streets the state remains neutral.

This is precisely the argument the state uses itself. But in rejecting physical confrontation they (NMP) also eschew any long term goals or short term political solutions that genuinely reflect the interests of the working class - black and white - as another adulteration of the anti-racist struggle.

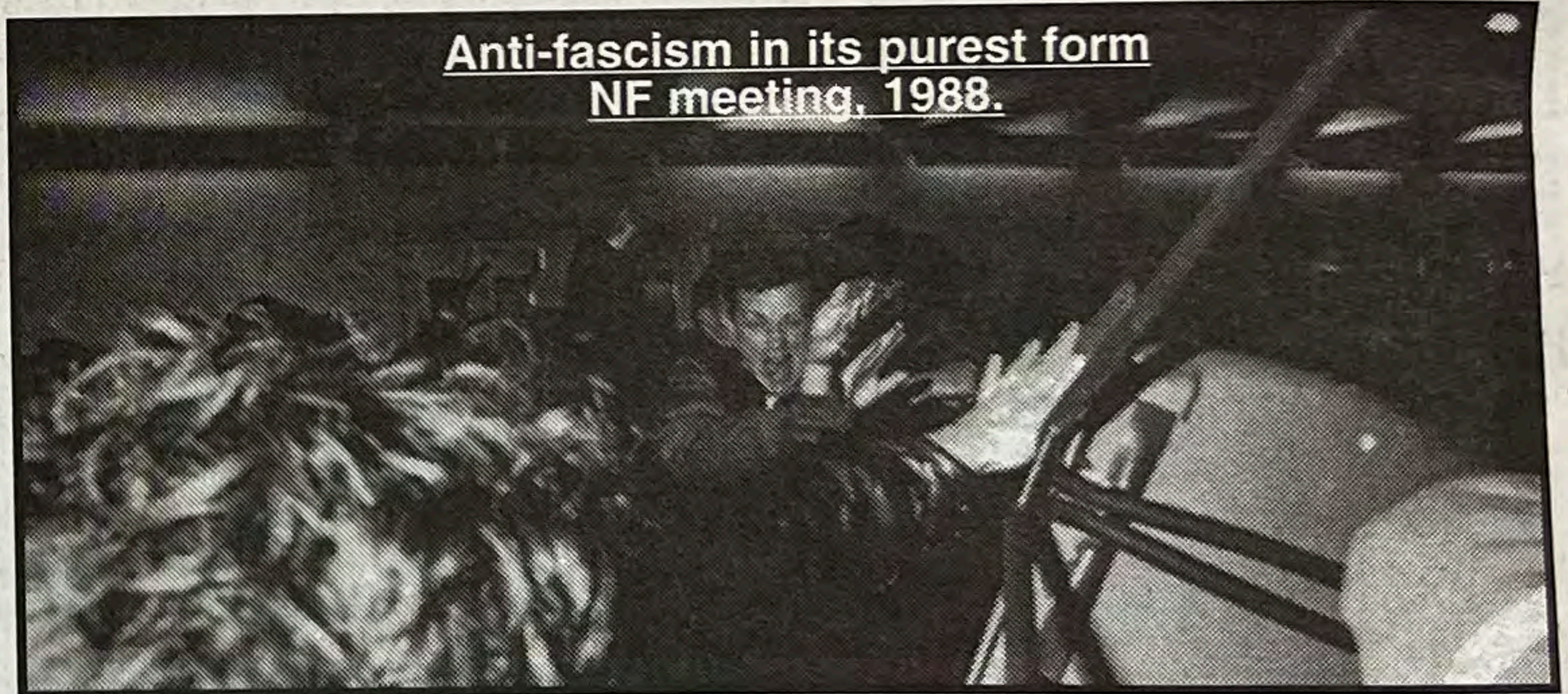
Instead they insist the anti-fascist movement should devote its whole strength and energy to those middle class patchwork reforms which could provide the political establishment with new supports and hence perhaps transform potential catastrophe into a gradual piecemeal and hopefully peaceful process of dissolution.

Groups like the Newham Monitoring Project follow this strategy because they are paid to; 'revolutionary' groups like the Socialist Workers Party or the Revolutionary Communist Party follow a similar strategy by choice.

Rather than concern themselves with resolving the practical problems faced by the working class, their reason for being is to suggest abstract solutions to the problems faced by the state. For once you accept the state is the cause of the problem, it is logical to deduce that the state can, indeed must, provide the solution.

So while the objective of the hard right is to strengthen the state through the use of force, the parallel function of the soft Left is to strengthen the state through the use of reform. The purpose of the mission is an attempt to save the state from itself. Adding to the attraction of approaching the issue arse-about-face is the promise that 'one's' relationship with anti-fascism remains purely platonic".

Anti-fascism in its purest form
NF meeting, 1988.



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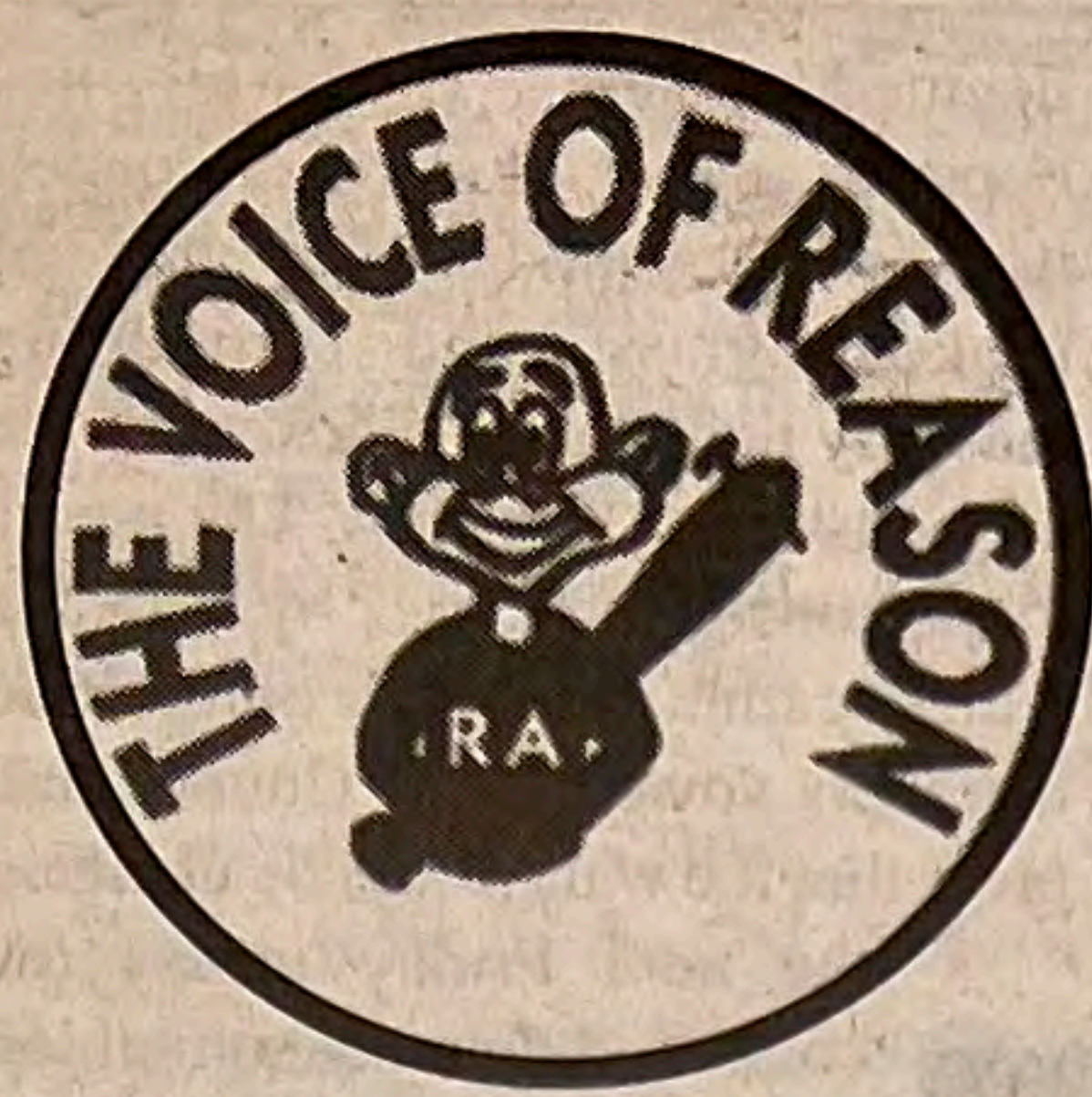
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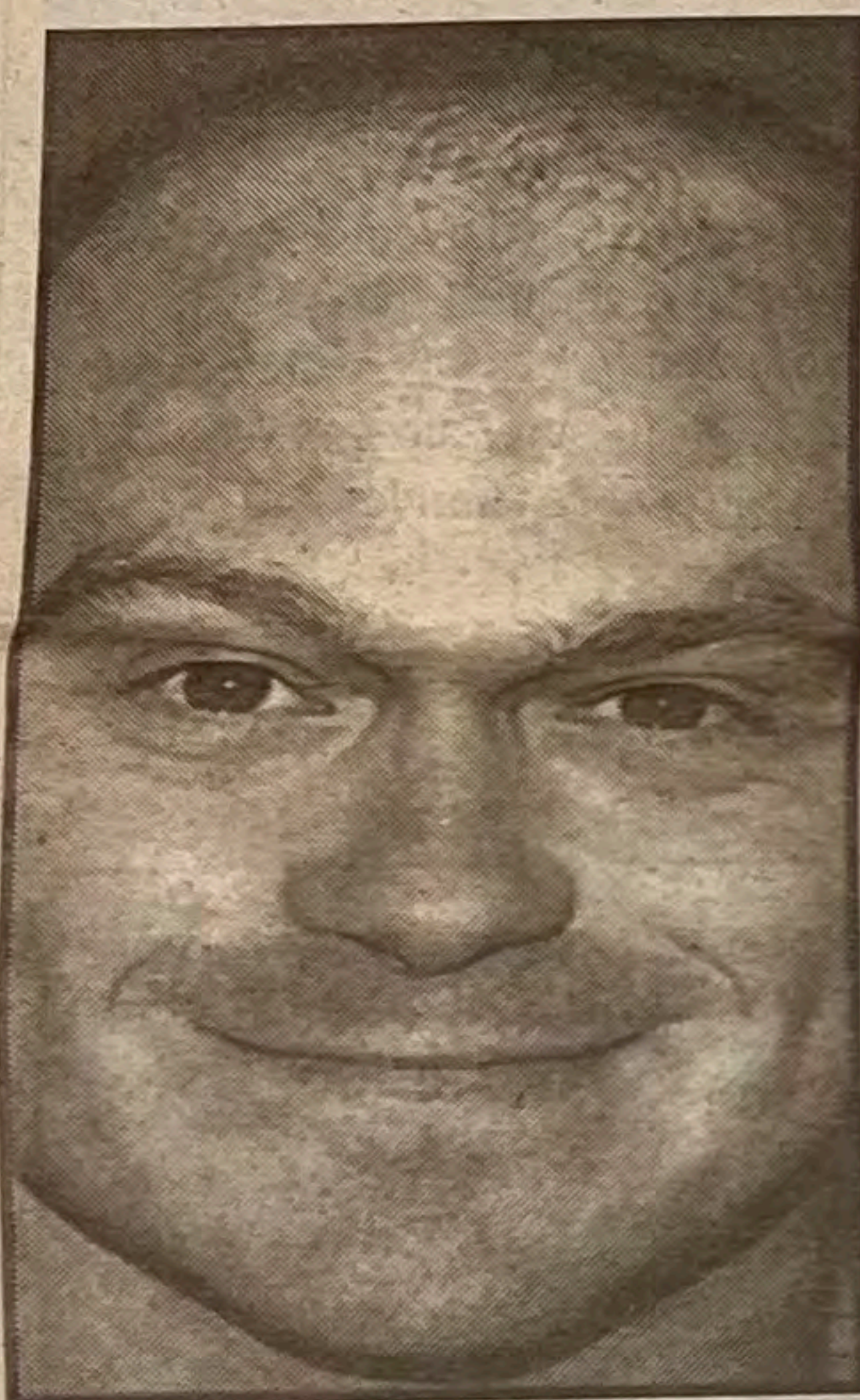


IS IT SOMETHING WE SAID?

Grant Mitchel Look-a-likes

The attraction of this lot is that they kick fascists, though why that should give them an appeal around here we don't know - East Oxford is not the East End of London. RA seem to have got their theories a bit mixed up.

According to them, fascists only get popular because socialism isn't being sold hard enough. (Sorry to use the S word but they are getting all this from Trotsky and he wrote it half a century ago) So anti-fascism is a rearguard action, not the basis of positive politics. So basing your popular appeal around anti-fascism is as ridiculous nationally as it is locally - there aren't enough for it to make a difference so their opponents will be reduced to 'chicken little' bullshit



Infamous soap-opera thug or just your typical RA organiser!?!

about a minimal peripheral threat when most racists are unorganised or in the Tory Party, neither group being a target for RA's forceful tactics.

When you look at their manifesto - apart from the anti-fascist, pro - prole bit, there's fuck all in it. The usual apple-pie and motherhood stuff about defend the NHS (way revolutionary...!) but that's just padding to sucker more in. Sounds like the same shite the fascists pull - offer everyone everything and when you've got 'em in impose your will.

This inability to (even tolerate) debate points to the highly authoritarian way Red Action actually runs. It's a hive organisation with a couple of queen bees laying down the line in the middle and a bunch of muscle going yeah, anything you say around them as their tribe/fan club/gang, the muscle [Grant Mitchell look-a-likes] ensures they don't even have to think about it so they come across as even more intolerant, moronic and absurd than most Trot cults.

A manifestation of this mindless stupidity is RA's way of dealing with criticism. You say something and they'll say: "Nah, that's all lies that is!" But why argue when they can resort to brute force eh? They'll deny they're Trots but what they say they are varies from month to month depending on what label best suits

them politically (ie it doesn't matter to them only Power does). Whatever the label its usually a good 70 years out of date - even the WRP now admit Trotskyism is a corpse. Our view is that if it something walks like a duck... *Oxfiend, Green Anarchist newsletter Jan 1997*

All We Need to Win

Nowadays, however the Communist threat has evaporated, so street corner punch-ups with a few dozen leftists, students and drunken Red Fenians will win us no friends and only give the police more excuses to arrest and bring trumped charges against key nationalists...

The public does not have the slightest reason to worry about Red Action. Immediately after their crushing defeat in Southwark, the papers of the main Marxist proponents of physical confrontation with nationalists were full of alarm over the way in which the BNP had been able to mobilise popular working class anger against immigration and those who support it.

More recently a different problem has been exercising their strategists in papers such as Fighting Talk and even more so, in the internal Position Papers of Anti-Fascist Action. Their complaint is that having driven the fascists off the streets and onto the estates the resulting lack of exciting punch ups is leading their supporters to drift away and their organisation to atrophy.

Their solution to this is to plan to form a political wing to contest seats in council elections so as to provide disillusioned Labour voters with a 'socialist alternative' and so stop them voting BNP. While they are dreaming their pipe dream, nationalists will note that such a move will expose their key personnel, making it very easy for small groups of dedicated patriots to contact them personally and, through intensive discussions, persuade them to leave our candidates, canvassers, and leafletters in peace - which is all we will need to win. *Nick Griffin, Spearhead, Issue 333.*

A Big Issue

A brutal turf war between football hooligans linked to political extremists is set to rock Scotland. Members of Celtic Soccer Crew - a team of violent football casuals - claim they have joined forces with a militant left-wing group and plan to launch a series of attacks on rival hooligans linked to the far-right. One CSC member...claims the politicisation of soccer casuals is a new development in the on going violence between Celtic and Rangers hooligans. Red Action who advocate direct action against fascism, are believed to be recruiting outside Celtic Park on a regular basis. The CSC member said: "We are united with Red Action on a political front over Ireland and over the destruction of fascist groups in Scotland." *The Big Issue, Scotland 6.3.97.*

England My England

There are of course other extremist groups in this country who tried to drive us away from football, groups such as Anti-Fascist Action, Red Action, etc.

The game should be wary of them. If these people had their way then every club would have a black man, a

woman and a homosexual playing for them. Anyone but a white Englishman.

They believe that setting up Asian only Leagues, gay-only sides in London, the flying of the Irish flag at Celtic park is fine. Yet they would burn down the clubhouse of a team with a white-only policy, target fans that carry our flag and will brand everyone that stands up and sings God Save the Queen at Wembley a racist Nazi. They have a pathological hatred of people singing 'No surrender to the IRA'. Why? Are they for an organisation that blows people up. Woe betide you if you don't agree with them...

It is said that both AFA and RA have strong connections with both MI5 and Special Branch - something which is backed up by the shall we say 'lean' sentences given out to their street fighters when attacking people showing pride in their country. **Supposed fascist spokesman, England my England by Dougie and Eddy Brimson authors of the best seller Everywhere We Go.**

Anarcho Communists

One clearly identifiable anarcho communist digression, which claims that its theory has its roots in Marxism, is nevertheless totally opposed to the leadership of the proletariat being undertaken by politically advanced workers that are self-organised into a communist party. It asserts that the party thereby substitutes itself for the class and this is particularly the case when the party's leading role is constitutionally inter-related with the political power of the workers state. The anarcho-communist digression is most recognisable in the views, often put forward by Red Action. *Open Polemic, No 6 January 1997*

Yobbos

The protest march that sparked violent disturbances in Downing Street and Trafalgar Square was hijacked by anarchist and Left-wing hooligans, its organisers claimed yesterday...A Reclaim The Streets spokesman said: "I saw some of our people actually trying to stop yobbos who had got tanked up on beer and were mindlessly throwing bottles and rocks. A few of our contingent actually put themselves in the firing line and one was beaten up by someone who said he was from 'Red Action.'" *Daily Telegraph 14.4.97*

Going Gets Tough

Founded in 1985 this [AFA] is a small (usually) well organised street-oriented group who believe in ideologically and physically confronting fascists. Their strong point is dedication and a keen sense of security. A possible drawback is that they have a tendency to want to work with others only on their own terms. That said, if the going gets tough, you'd be far better standing next to these characters (many of whom are in Red Action) than the Anti Nazi League. **Green Party Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Network Spring 1997**

A Pleasant Change

One of the most interesting publications on the revolutionary left is the irregular Red Action. The group

of the same name which is committed to a form of libertarian or anti-Leninist communism usually manages to provoke controversy and stimulate debate - for whatever reason. So it is always worth a read, and as an added bonus it can sometimes be quite amusing.

Makes a pleasant change it has to be said. Red Action's editorial reminds us, quite pertinently that fascist parties, groups and movements are growing, particularly in continental Europe. It points to the unfortunate fact that Le Pen's Front National "is now the largest working class party in France. In the 1995 presidential elections 27% of blue collar workers voted for Le Pen...The same trend is applicable throughout Europe" (Spring 1997)

This brings RA to its fundamental point, which is a cutting dig at its bete noire 'orthodox' Trotskyism: "The long cherished belief that fascism's constituency was exclusively drawn from petty bourgeois elements has been shattered. In fact the reverse has happened. It is not only primarily but exclusively from this strata that the conservative Left (ie, the revolutionary left DPJ) recruits."

Now, while you do not necessarily have to agree with RA's overall analysis or its terminology it is still a point worth making. Certain schools of Trotskyism have rigidly maintained that fascism can only come from a movement of the despairing petty bourgeois. In other words, any 'right/reactionary' movement which does not conform 100% to the analysis laid out by Leon Trotsky - primarily in his writings on Germany - cannot 'on principle' be fascist.

From this dogmatic perspective, some organisations, most notably the Revolutionary Communist Party, steadfastly maintained that the Argentinian junta could not be possibly classified as fascist because it was not drawn from or composed of, the petty bourgeoisie. Such ideas need to be punctured. In quite a good turn of phrase, Red Action concludes from all this that, "this situation has arisen not because the conservative left have proved to be bad anti-fascists, but because they are bad revolutionaries" - an argument that has some power and force to it.

However, one of RA's fatal flaws is its localism and complete inability to grasp the necessity of revolutionary organisation, in the all round sense. Thus, in an otherwise cogent and insightful critique of the SWP's Marxism '96 it ends up telling us:

"In the struggle to create the conditions for socialist transcendence it is clearly better to have a much smaller organisation rooted in, an orientated toward, local working class communities, and which can earn the respect of the people it is attempting to attract." While it is hardly astonishing that an explicitly anti-Leninist group has no grasp of what we call 'Partyism', it is a tad regrettable that energetic and committed comrades like these have such an eyes-down attitude. Immersing yourself in community politics is obvious not the answer. *Weekly Worker, January 1997*

Double Standards

In 1981-82 a number of working class members of the SWP left, or were expelled, to set up a new group, Red Action. The pamphlet they produced explaining why they left an dwhat the new group would be is an important one in the relationship of the Left to the working class. It documents clearly the failings of the SWP, especially how it alienates the majority of working class people who come into its orbit. Red Action portrays itself (very convincingly) as being a non-sectarian, non-dogmatic organisation well aware of the failings of the authoritarian left.

However, Red Action has also proved itself to be very much a bastard child of the SWP when it comes to how it relates to other left groups. It is also an excellent example of the double standards that much of the Left have. When it comes to this group the advice should be to ignore what they say, and look very closely at what they do.

We have already mentioned the idea of the 'siege mentality'. With Red Action the siege mentality reaches a new height which they articulate with headlines like 'No-one likes us we don't care'. This may well be true, but since every edition of it is obsessed with slugging of the Left and anarchists it can hardly be surprising.

This siege mentality is not confined to its paper: Years of 'squadist' organising (they have spent the last 15 years in a never-ending battle with the far-right) have not made for an open and democratic structure. This is fine if you are a 'crew' fighting fascists, but different rules apply when it comes to organising openly and working with other groups.

Violence is a strong part of their culture, both internally and externally. A typical example of this is the Glasgow organiser who threatened a Class War Celtic supporter with a knife for the heinous crime of selling a Celtic fanzine on what he considered his turf. The organisers violent sectarian behaviour has been the subject of at least one document circulating the Left and he has recently tried to explain this by referring to a dispute within anti-fascist groups, but his sectarian behaviour goes back years before this and remains a problem.

This example is far from unique within Red Action, which is logical when you consider the contents of their paper - when it comes to anarchists in particular, it has taken sectarianism to absurd and obsessive levels. To be fair to Red Action members some have been embarrassed by their paper's attitude, but the best they can come up with is to explain that 'London' produce the paper and it's not their views. But what sort of organisation has a membership so witlessly unable to influence what its paper says? One that is closer to the SWP in organisation and practice than they like to think, particularly when it comes to the matter of leaders and followers.

Perhaps when Counter Information described them as 'Leninist boot-boys' they weren't a million miles from the truth.

Another feature of Red Action is that they are unable to accept, in any circumstances, that they may be wrong. They will argue they are right, and everyone else isn't till the cows come home. Their favourite quote is how the Left is about as dangerous as a pond full of ducks. True, but for the 'Left' read 'everyone but Red Action' - their breathtaking arrogant attitude is 'if only everyone else were like us...'

Red Action also do a nice turn in hypocrisy. They've been slinging lies, smears and disinformation toward everyone else for years, but they get hot under the collar when the finger's pointed at them (see the editorial in RA 73 for details). We could go on and on, but there's little point: Most people who've come into contact with this group know what they're like. Red Action no doubt, will do their usual hatchet job in reply. Red Action have made their bed, now they must lie in it...almost certainly alone.

Class War Summer 1997