

We are Red Action

A SHORT HISTORY OF RED ACTION. WHERE DID IT COME FROM, AND WHY?

INTRODUCTION

This document is an attempt to briefly explain how the organisation Red Action came into existence, and to try and explain some of the ideas and motivations behind it. To this end, many references will be made to the organisation that its founders were formerly members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). However this should not be seen as an attempt to attack one particular organisation. Most of the criticisms made are general to most left groups, and in many cases apply far more to others, but our experiences occurred in the SWP and it is to them that we must relate our story. For our part we are quite aware of the fact that without the SWP, there would have been no Red Action at this time, and so we could be fairly said, to be in their debt.

As to the document itself, it will be immediately noticeable to anyone with any knowledge of the history of the left in this country, that the parts of it that deal with this subject, contain many over simplifications and omissions. This was done consciously, and was the result of a wish to not bog down any reader that may not be familiar with this subject, with tangled and repetitive references to all of the various workers/socialist/revolutionary parties that have come and gone, or are still around

The technical quality of this document is not of a very high level. This is not because we prefer it that way, but is simply the result of the fact that we are an organisation that is constantly having to divide no finance by no resources. In this case production was achieved by what could only be described as a particularly laborious home made method.

The writing was done by one person, and so the views expressed are not necessarily held by everyone in Red Action. It can be safely assumed however, that most of the members would endorse most of what is said. The spelling mistakes are the sole responsibility of the writer.

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THE LEFT

Who or what is Red Action then. You are probably aware that it is a socialist organisation, and you may well be of the opinion that the last thing the already fragmented and divided British left needs, is yet another of the endless number of tiny breakaway groups. If you are, you may be forgiven for an understandable apprehension. What we hope to explain in this document, is why we think Red Action is necessary, and why we believe it can be different from the rest. To do that we must explain how it came into existence.

All of the founder members of Red Action were formerly members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). It must be true therefore that the roots of Red Action are in the SWP. Why was it that we were in the SWP and not one of the many other left wing groups. What was it about them that brought us together, and why did we end up leaving them to form another organisation. To find the answers to these questions, we have to look back to some of the recent history of the British left.

In the years immediately after the second world war, the revolutionary left in this country (we do not include the Labour party or Communist party in this category) was represented by a small group of Trotskyists, and neo-Trotskyists, in an organisation called the Revolutionary Communist Party (not the same group as the organisation of that name in existence today). It was a small group of mostly intellectual members.

Being so small their direct political activity was minimal, and much of their activity consisted in debating and theorising on what was the best way for the revolutionary movement to progress. One of these debates was about the relationship of the revolutionary left and the Labour Party. Some maintained that it was wrong to remain in such a small group isolated from the majority of people, and said that they should join the Labour Party, and work as a group within it. Others disagreed and said that it was impossible to be effective in a party that was committed to merely gaining a few reforms for the working class, and not to complete change of society.

So the debates raged, but the biggest of all of them, and the one which was to eventually split the RCP in two, was the argument over Russia. It was basically an argument over the nature of the Russian state, and what the attitude of socialists should be towards it.

Both sides in the argument agreed that there had been a socialist revolution in Russia in 1917 but now, argued one side, after all of the many wrongs committed by the Russian communists both inside and outside of Russia, it could no longer be considered as a truly socialist state. The rulers in Russia may describe themselves as socialists, but they act in a way that is little different to those that rule in the capitalist west. The state in Russia they argued, had become one that was not socialist, but was in fact one that they described as being state capitalist, and this whilst not exactly the same as western capitalism, was no more worthy of the support of socialists.

This was a significant step away from the line of thinking that had guided the revolutionary left until then, which was usually described as Trotskyism. Trotskyists used as the starting point for most of their political theories, the ideas and theories that had been worked out by the socialist philosopher Leon Trotsky, before his death in 1940. Trotskyists, while agreeing that many violations of socialist principle had occurred in Russia, believed that these had only happened as the result of certain uncontrollable events, and most importantly, that the effects of them were not irreversible.

For Trotsky, and his political descendants, the actions of the Russian Communist Party in the years after the revolution, are explained by the situation that they found themselves in. They pointed out that when the communists had come to power, the whole country was in a state of economic ruin due to the effects of the First World War. Straight away they were faced with a long and bloody civil war, as the pro royalist forces tried to regain power (with the assistance of troops from nearly every European country plus the USA). This decimated the meagre resources of the country even further and no sooner was it over, than Russia was hit by one of the worst droughts and famines in memory.

All of these things had led the Russian state to be on many occasions, literally on the brink of collapse, and this could only have led to the restoration of a capitalist government, and the massacre of the communists. Faced with these circumstances, the communist government had been forced to use more force and repression than would be normal, simply to maintain the existence of the state. This was the first step on the road away from socialist principles, and the process had been accelerated by the fact that so many of the most committed and idealistic communists had perished in the civil war. Their places had been filled by those who were far less committed to the ideals of socialism, and in time this had led to the party changing its outlook, and being far more willing to compromise on its principles.

For Trotsky and Trotskyists however, all of these things did not alter the fact that Russia was still a socialist, or workers state. It was in fact a workers state that had gone a bit wrong, a degenerated workers state, that would in time be put right and should, in the meantime, be supported in any clash or argument with the west.

Eventually the Revolutionary Communist Party split over this issue during the 1950's with the leading intellectuals on each side forming their own new organisations. Those that followed the state capitalist theory, formed the International Socialists (later the SWP) and those that followed the workers state line, formed the Socialist Labour League (later to become the Workers Revolutionary Party).

Both of these groups began to slowly recruit new members but still remained largely unknown to the majority of people, as did the other small left wing groups that were beginning to emerge on the political scene.

THE SIXTIES

Anyone who was around in the sixties will be able to remember a number of political upheavals that occurred in that decade. Ban the bomb, anti Vietnam war, student protests etc, all of these immediately spring to mind. Around all of these issues, all of the various left wing groups were able to agitate, and slowly bring themselves to the attention of the public. The International Socialists in particular, campaigned very successfully around the ban the bomb movement under the slogan, neither Washington nor Moscow. Their anti Russian line made it possible for them to do this, while most of the other left groups, who supported the pro Russian workers state line, found it very difficult to support a movement that condemned the USSR as much as the USA. This would not be the last time that some of them would find that their political line made it impossible for them to involve themselves in a mass left wing movement.

So by the end of the sixties the left had at least made themselves known to the majority of people. But if we were to ask what their involvement with, or influence on the working class was, we would have to say very little. Why should this be? After all, one thing that all the left groups would agree on, is on the importance of the working class to any aspiring socialist organisation, and no class has more to gain from socialist ideas than them, so why should the working class involvement in the socialist movement have been so small.

Well firstly it has to be admitted that the working class then, were even less receptive to the ideas of revolutionary socialism than they are now. The twenty years or so since the end of the second world war had seen a continuous rise in the living standards of just about everyone. The younger generation (traditionally the most radical) had known nothing but this all of their lives. Not surprisingly most of them had great confidence in the ability of the system to maintain these rising standards, with a Labour or Tory government making only a minimal difference. It is also probably true that after all of the massive events of the first part of the century, two wars, depression, general strike in the twenties and so on, a period of quiet and inactivity was only to be expected.

So we can say that the gap between the socialist movement and the working class was at least partly the fault of the workers themselves, but this can only be part of the answer. Even in an

apathetic and disinterested class there must have been a small percentage (but running into thousands in actual numbers) who were enlightened enough, or at least cynical enough, to have been receptive to the ideas of the left. Why did the left find it so difficult to communicate with these people.

Most of the later founders of Red Action have some of their first memories from this era. We can remember the very cynical view that most working class people had of the left. According to popular image they were nothing more than a bunch of students having their little fling before starting their careers. It is an image that the left has not completely conquered to this day, so how did it come about.

Well firstly it is certainly true that all of the left groups of this time had proportionately far more student members than they had of the working class. This is perhaps not really surprising. We have already noted that during this time, the working class were largely apathetic politically, whilst at the same time thousands of students were involved in the political campaigns of the day. Faced with this situation the leadership of more than one left group turned deliberately to the student world to boost their ranks, reasoning that this would give them more resources and members, and this in turn, would make it easier in time, to attract more working class members.

Other groups admitted quite frankly, that in their view the working class were politically backward at this time, and the thing to do was gather all the best brains together to give a lead to the class when they finally turned to them for leadership. Many would perhaps argue against the orthodoxy of assuming that the best brains are automatically found in the student world,

So different groups turned to the students for different reasons, but it is also probably true that all of them found the academic world much more accommodating and easier to relate to, than the disinterested and occasionally hostile working class. Most of their members were ex graduates themselves, and this alone would have meant that the atmosphere of the campus was far more familiar to them than that of the factory floor or the public bar. Many of them had spent years discussing and debating Marxist philosophy at the very highest level, and had an intellectual range far broader than most peoples. This would not have been appreciated by many working class people, most of whom are far more concerned with their day to day affairs than they are with abstract philosophy. This problem did not arise in the academic world where people are far more used to and appreciative of intellectual talents. The left gravitated towards them, as they gravitated towards the left. They comforted and complemented each other.

Although this steady influx of student members was good for numbers, the reverse edge of the coin was the fact that lefty student image could have an alienating effect on potential sympathisers from the working class, who were, and still are notoriously suspicious of, and cynical about students. A fact hardly surprising when one considers the overwhelming middle and upper class dominance in the student world.

No left group at this time appeared to have any idea of how to overcome this problem. For that we would have to wait until the next decade.

THE SEVENTIES

Of all the various left groups, it was the International Socialists that made the first real efforts to break down the great gap between the left and the working class. They encouraged their members to sell their newspapers outside workplaces, and some of them left the academic world, to go and work on the shop floor. They began to have some small successes attracting some of the more militant shop stewards to their politics, but still did not have anything like a mass working class base.

Then came the big industrial upheavals of the early seventies. Five London dockers were jailed for defiance of the Industrial Relations Act, and were quickly released when support for them threatened to turn into mass strike action. The miners' flying pickets flew up and down the country,

forcing Ted Heath into the three day week and eventually, the general election that toppled the Tory government.

Throughout all of this, the members of the International Socialists were in the thick of things, at every dispute, and picket line they could get to. Through this activity they gained the membership of a significant number of working class militants. Their impact on the class as a whole was still small, but the number of workers within their sphere or influence was growing.

Things were beginning to change in the country as a whole, also. The post war boom was giving way to the economic recession, and Harold Wilson began the cuts in living standards with the social contract. A whole generation that had known nothing but rising standards, were being made to realise that the good times might not last for ever, and the word unemployment came back into the English language. The social face of the country was changing, and as it did more people began to look for the explanations. More "non political" people were looking for political answers.

At first it was the far right that gained most from this. Throughout the fifties and sixties small fascist groups had been in existence. They had occasionally surfaced to try and exploit events such as the Notting Hill race riots in the late fifties, but had never been able to gain the membership or support of large numbers of people.

This they were now beginning to do, most prominently the National Front. There were a number of reasons for this. We live in a society where reaction and racism are always present, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly. In this situation there will always be many people who will originally find it far easier to believe that which is closest to what they are used to. In a racist society, it is far easier to convince a politically naive person that the reason they are out of work, is because the wog around the corner has got their job, than it is to explain the Marxist theory of surplus value leading to falling demand and overproduction.

The establishment must also take their share of the blame, for helping to create a climate that racist organisations find easy to exploit. Enoch Powell with his speeches about rivers of blood, the Tory candidate in the midlands, who campaigned under the slogan "vote for Labour get a wog for a neighbour" and other M.P.s with their talk of being swamped by alien cultures. All of these things are an encouragement to the racists, and the out and out nazis, to come out of the closet and try and organise. This they were now doing. The leadership of the National Front had quietly dropped their Hitlerite traditions, and there is no doubt that at this time they had managed to get their finger on the pulse of considerable sections of the working class. It began to seem a real possibility that they would become a political force in the country.

The only organisation in the country with the ability to do anything positive about this were the International Socialists (now in the process of becoming the SWP). They commenced a campaign of all out opposition to the Front which was to ultimately involve physical, as well as ideological opposition.

Things were changing culturally in the country as well. The new generation were voicing their disillusionment in song, and punk rock was sweeping the country. The whole punk scene had definite political undertones. While the Clash called for a white riot, in solidarity with the young blacks of Notting Hill, the Sex Pistols remarkably got to number one in the week of the silver jubilee, with an anti royalist song.

The fascists at first made efforts to infiltrate the punk movement, encouraged no doubt by the habit of some punks of wearing swastikas (in fact a practice done to shock rather than one of political affiliation). This effort failed for at least two main reasons. One was the very principled anti racist stand taken by the majority of leading punk artists, and the other was the growth of Rock against Racism. This was a movement that grew up in the music world, in response to alleged racist statements, made by leading rock stars. It provided a platform for black and white artists to perform together, and state their opposition to racialism. RAR was to go from strength to strength. At last it seemed that there was something to check the march of the far right.

SWP were the main influence in RAR from its very beginning. Their constant and unbending opposition to all forms of racism was beginning to win them many peoples respect, and

the anti racist awareness that they were chiefly responsible for instigating was gaining ground It was to reach dramatic heights in the August of 1977.

In the weeks previous to this, there had been a series of incidents in the area of Lewisham, which had been sparked off by the arrest of 18 black youths on conspiracy charges. A defence campaign formed, and the National Front had tried to intimidate them off of the streets. Eventually, after several clashes, the Front announced their intention of holding a national demonstration in Lewisham high street.

The SWP immediately called a counter demonstration with the aim of stopping them being able to march. This was ultimately, a massive success. After many violent clashes between the anti racists, and the police trying to clear a path, the Front were forced to abandon their march far short of what they had intended.

The whole thing was a massive boost for the anti fascist movement in general, and the SWP in particular. The events of Lewisham were headlines in all of the national press. Suddenly the whole country was discussing the SWP, the NF, and the rights and wrongs of racism. The firm and principled efforts of one small organisation had raised the level of discussion on a national scale.

Lewisham confirmed the emergence of the SWP as a live street movement, that was breaking out of the narrow restraints of traditional left wing politics, and taking them into new areas, particularly the young working class. Another good example of this was the activities of the Right to Work Campaign.

This had been launched by the SWP in the mid seventies. Its aims were to give a political platform for the growing number of unemployed, and to attempt to link up their struggle with the organised workplace. It was very much a propaganda movement, that relied heavily on publicity stunts such as the occupation of job centres. The highlight of the campaign was the annual Right to Work March. This consisted of several hundred people marching for several days across the country, to the venue of the Trades Union Congress, to protest against the inaction, and occasional complicity of the union leaders, in the face of ever rising unemployment figures.

The Right to Work Campaign proved to be a success without precedent when it came to involving young working class kids in political activity. The march itself could quite fairly be described as acting as a mobile school in revolutionary socialist politics. All of those that attended any of the half dozen or so marches, were simultaneously exhilarated and educated by the experience. The excitement of the various stunts and the marvellous feeling of comradeship and solidarity that was forged on them made them a fantastic introduction to political activity, that few who experienced it would ever forget, For many people a Right to Work March was their first political activity but the experience of it ensured that for most of them it would not be the last. This was the campaigns greatest success and vindication. Its ability to involve the "non political" in its activities, and keep them involved. One Right to Work March was truly more effective than a thousand speeches.

THE PARTY

By the time of Lewisham, most of the future founders of Red Action had joined, or were soon to join the SWP (along with quite a few others). We were from that part of the working class that was sympathetic to revolutionary ideas but had never been sufficiently impressed by any one organisation enough to consider joining it. However everything about the SWP at this time, was forcing many cynical people to reconsider their attitude to the "middle class" left. Now it seemed that there was a revolutionary socialist organisation that was capable of relating to ordinary working class people. The SWP, through activities such as the Right to Work, and Rock against Racism, had taken politics out of the college debating hall and onto the streets and estates.

Some still harboured doubts. They pointed out, quite correctly, that the SWP still had far more students than miners, more lecturers and teachers than building workers. However, even for

those that did feel totally at home in the party culturally, it was an obvious and undeniable fact that nothing of the SWP's level of organisation, theoretical clarity, and political impact, would ever have arisen from the apathetic working class that we had grown up in, and it was difficult to be in any way critical of those that had created it.

We were probably to a certain extent, overawed by this new and exciting world that we had discovered. We were at the very beginning of the process that takes someone from a confused anti-establishment outlook, through to a revolutionary Marxist one. Our whole outlook on life was literally changing daily, and the SWP intellectuals seemed to have the answer to all of our many questions. We were conscious of how much we owed to them for our increased level of awareness, and we were happy to trust their judgement in all political matters.

At this time the politics of the organisation seemed far more important than the social background of its members. It seemed to be a fair assumption that as long as the politics were right, and to us they most certainly were, then in time, more and more workers would join and the party would become overwhelmingly working class in content. Those that pointed to the cultural character of the party as the reason for their own unwillingness to join it were to us, just finding any excuse for their basic lack of commitment.

Most of the other left groups were very critical of the tactics that had brought the SWP the success that they were now enjoying, and accused them of being revisionist or opportunist. This meant that they believed that the SWP had compromised and watered down their politics, in order to gain the support of people who couldn't really understand what it was all about.

In arguing this, they reflected a view that is often found amongst revolutionary socialists, which is that only those with the highest level of political awareness, and an almost religious commitment, are the sort of people that should be in a socialist organisation. Not surprisingly those that believe this, are usually to be found in tiny obscure groups, that have absolutely no contact with the working class. When on the odd occasion that they do manage to make contact with someone from the class, they are usually very quickly driven off, by the incessant and unrealistic demands that they make on them.

These groups soldier on, year in and year out, never getting anywhere, happy to content themselves with the thought that it's not their fault if the ignorant masses are unable to appreciate their wonderful ideas. The thought that perhaps it might be something to do with the way that they present their ideas, never occurs to them. They just carry on with their set ideas and ways, becoming more and more removed from real people and reality.

The opposite approach to this, and the one that the SWP were employing at this time, can be described as being populist. With this approach, an organisation attempts to involve people in its activities on specific issues without demanding that they give total and immediate commitment to everything that the party says on every issue. This enables the party to establish a working relationship with the individual, and hopefully in time, that person will begin to look more deeply into other areas of the party's politics.

A good example of how this worked can be seen in the Rank and File groups, that the SWP were operating at this time. In these, all of the party members in each particular trade union, would regularly meet and work together, on issues that related specifically to that union. By doing this, they would drag into their activity many other trade unionists that were not in the party, but agreed with its position on the issue in question (wage claim or action against redundancies etc).

Some of these people may have disagreed with the party on other questions, For example they may not have agreed with the banning of all immigration controls, but having struck up a relationship with them round the activity over the wage claim, it was possible to argue about the implication of immigration controls, and all the other areas of the party politics, and slowly begin to win people over to the party's position.

The non populist "orthodox" groups would have demanded that anyone involved in any of their activities, would have to immediately accept every word of the party line as gospel and anyone that could not agree with it all straight away, would have soon been made aware that they were not up to standard. Even if your politics are correct, they are not a lot of use if you can't relate them to

people. The tactics of the SWP showed a much more realistic view of how to relate to the working class, and its steady growth in the seventies suggested that populism bore quick fruit. Its greatest success was, however, yet to come.

To capitalise on the higher level of anti racist awareness, the SWP launched in 1978, the Anti Nazi League. This was to be the broadest of broad based movements, uniting various shades of political opinion, with the specific aim of sabotaging the National Front's electoral plans by exposing the nazi traditions of its leadership. This fact was unknown to many of their potential supporters.

The ANL grew to be a success beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Fusing with RAR it turned into a massive street movement, pulling tens of thousands out, in emotional displays of anti racist solidarity. For the SWP, it was a fitting and deserved crowning to the consistent and principled efforts that they had put into the anti racist struggle. On their own, and originally, against the tide of popular ideas, they had stuck to their guns, and had ultimately managed to initiate what might well be described as an anti racist renaissance.

For those that had joined the SWP during the populist era, the success of the ANL was a massive vindication of the belief that they were a party apart from the rest. It seemed a real possibility that they were on the brink of becoming a mass movement. Our love affair with the SWP was at its peak.

THE FIRST MURMURS

For many of those that joined the SWP in the seventies, it was the first political affiliation of their lives. For these people, the party had added a whole new dimension to their lives, and they entered into it's activities with all the passion and zeal of some kind of political born again christian. The level of activity in and around the party was extremely high, and there seemed to be some sort of demonstration or political event nearly every day. On all of these, there always seemed to be more SWP members than all of the other left groups put together. To the newer slightly naive member, the party seemed to have an almost revolutionary air about it.

Those that had been drawn into the party through it's populist activities were especially energetic and enthusiastic. Looking back it is easy to see that this level of enthusiasm could not be expected to last permanently, but would have its edge dulled by time and routine. However this would be offset hopefully, by the individual gaining a deeper, if not quite so exuberant, commitment and understanding. For those in the SWP that were the political children of populism, a deeper understanding became an awareness, that not all of the party were in full agreement with this approach.

One of the first indications of this was in an internal dispute that arose in the party, over the newspaper (Socialist Worker). In keeping with the populist approach, this had taken on a much different identity to the traditional left wing paper, with regular articles on music, social trends, youth culture etc. Critics of it argued that it had gone too far in this direction. They referred to it as the "punk paper" and called for a return to a more traditional format.

Many of the newer members would have argued against this. For them, the paper was one of the things that set the SWP apart from other left groups, most of whose papers were written in such a dogmatic cliché ridden style, that they were practically unreadable to all but the dedicated revolutionary. However of those that disagreed, many were members of longer standing and more influence, and the paper did begin to revert to a more recognizably "lefty" style, although it did still manage to avoid most of the excesses of the others.

The next change that became apparent concerned the ANL. The amount of space that was devoted to both it, and anti-racist matters in general, in the paper became noticeably smaller, and they were soon taking a very low priority in the party's activities.

The reason given for this was as follows. The National Front are no longer a direct political threat. They have achieved nothing like the breakthrough that they were hoping for, and are now in a state of disarray. Therefore, the ANL has achieved the purpose that it was formed for, and there is no longer any need to go on investing the same amount of time and energy into it.

Among those that disagreed with this line of thought, were all of the future founders of Red Action. We supported the argument that whilst it may well have been impractical to attempt to maintain the massive carnival turnouts, the ANL should still be maintained as far as possible. It was a nationally known and respected organisation that had been responsible for introducing thousands to their first political activity. Many of these people were not in any political organisation, and to let the ANL slide, would mean losing the only contact between them and the left. We also warned against overestimating the extent of the NFs demise. Whilst it was certainly true that they had been disappointed with their election result, they were by no means finished and there were also disturbing signs that the far more overtly nazi, British Movement were beginning to make some headway. Again in this argument, it seemed to be case of the newer members against the longer standing ones who carried considerably more influence, and the ANL began its slow but definite decline.

It was becoming apparent that considerable sections of the traditional party membership, and leadership, were not at all at one with the political outlook of many of the newer members. It seemed that what we saw as the main strength of the ANL, its ability to involve the traditionally less political, they saw as a weakness, in that it involved those that were to their mind, not political enough.

We saw it as a movement that had provoked and stimulated political discussion and activity in areas in which it had never before existed. Even if much of this had not yet manifested itself in overtly revolutionary socialist form, it certainly wasn't in any way counter productive. Without any doubt, the ANL was pushing the centre of discussion to the left in many areas of the working class.

It seemed as if those that had spent some years wrapped up in the day to day affairs of the party, were no longer able to appreciate this good effect that it was having, underneath the surface as it were. They judged it on the basis of its immediate and direct benefit to the party only. They saw that it had only brought a minimal number of actual recruits to the party, and that of those, many were not of a very high level of political consciousness.

To judge the importance of the ANL in this way was for us, a classic case of the sort of traditional blinkered leftism, that the SWP had seemed to be successfully escaping from. Blinkered, because only someone who was so, could fail to appreciate how even the least politically aware person, that had been brought into or around the party by the ANL, had taken a massive step forward from the average working class person, 99 per cent of whom had never for one minute, even thought about joining a revolutionary organisation.

The ANL had been responsible for turning thousands of eyes in a leftward direction and would in time have turned many more. The SWP would eventually have been the ones to benefit but they were either too blind to see it, or too impatient to wait for it. Its premature decline left a political vacuum in certain areas. It was not empty for long.

THE SQUADISTS ?

Towards the end of the seventies, the British Movement commenced a campaign of recruiting young working class people. To assist with this they attempted to present themselves as a revolutionary anti establishment type organisation. In this they were to a certain extent, helped by the middle class image of the left that still prevailed in many places. They managed to evoke a crude form of class consciousness in those that they were attempting to influence and recruit, a

feeling that they were the voice of the dispossessed, and that the establishment was full of the hated posh lefties, who were doing their best to wreck OUR country on the orders of Moscow.

Many naive kids fell for it, especially as there was now no ANL as such to respond to this development. Many of those that were drawn into the BMs activities from the music circuit or the football terraces were not at the time of joining at least, what could be described as hard line fascists. However once they had sampled the camaraderie and sense of purpose that comes with belonging to a political organisation, many of them were easy meat for the practiced and accomplished hate stirrers, that exist in these organisation. Astutely aware of the fact that most working class kids have some black friends, the BM played down their racist propaganda, and concentrated on the anti communist anti jewish/ capitalist approach. Some indication of the success of this expediency, can be gauged by the amazing but true instances, of small numbers of black and half caste youths being involved in some of their activities.

The BM began to grow at a very alarming rate, and after a while began a campaign of physically disrupting left wing, and progressive social events. The extent that this reached can be judged by recalling an anti racist festival in Brixton attended by 8,000 people, which had to be abandoned because of the activity of young fascists that invaded it. It soon reached the point where any event that had any sort of leftist undertones at all, was as likely to be hit as not.

Many people looked to the SWP, as the traditional champions of anti fascist activity for a lead in combating this situation. It was not forthcoming.

For those that had joined the party during the anti fascist heyday this was totally bewildering. The first thing that we had learned about fascism was that you cannot ignore it and hope that it will go away. It now seemed that the leadership of the SWP, having made the mistake of allowing the fascists a clear field in which to operate, were compounding that error by trivialising the result of it. We were again reminded of the failure of the Front in the election, but this seemed to be becoming an excuse for the absence of any anti fascist activity whatsoever. The fact was that the BM and the Front (who had emerged from the electoral failure with a much more openly fascist image) seemed to be totally unaware of the fact ,that according to the SWP they were on the way out. There were quite a few Asian families with smashed up and burnt out houses that could have testified to this.

The whole fascist campaign on the music circuit was based on appealing to the macho instincts that many young working class males have. Those that organised and led it were probably all out and out fascists, but the same cannot be said of all those that they managed to involve.

Some were young rebels searching for an identity, others cowards looking for an easy target. The former needed to be opposed to make them question their role, the latter to show them that the left was not the easy target that they thought.

Eventually a small group of party members and friends got together, and on three separate occasions gave the fascists, and their friends, a taste of what they had come to believe they could hand out with impunity. These initiatives had two noticeable results. One was that fascist activity at music events ceased almost completely, and the other was that those who had brought this about, were roundly condemned by the SWP leadership. For the first time we began to hear the word "squadist" bandied about.

What was basically meant by this, was that by opting for physical action against the fascists, we had rejected Marxism, by trying to substitute terrorism for mass political action. The point that the accusers seemed to be missing was that no body was trying to suggest that blacking a few eyes was the political answer to fascism. Not one of the "squadists" would have claimed that their activities were the only tactics necessary to oppose the BM/Front.

Physical confrontation was a necessary episodic tactic for a particular situation. The fascists had been doing whatever they wanted at left events without rear of retribution. By taking them on, and beating them, on their own terms we had discouraged their activities, important enough in itself, but more importantly we had shown their growing periphery (sympathisers who are not actual members) that the left was not an easy target for safe bit of agro, It may not have cost them many

actual members, but it certainly made a few of their not so fanatical supporters think twice about getting involved.

However, this did not impress the leadership, nor large sections of the party, and as well as condemning the actions politically, they began to engage in a very exaggerated campaign of accusation against the wild antics and gratuitous violence of the "squadists".

Things were further brought to a head when several party members in the Manchester area, were arrested in connection with an incident, in which a young fascist was made to give information about a group that had been threatening a socialist schoolteacher. From the amount of venom directed at those involved, it would have been easy to have drawn the conclusion that they had gone to attack her, rather than risk their freedom to assist her. The reaction of a white collar worker in the area who, horrorstruck, demanded to know how he could explain this to his friends, was just one example. Never mind his "comrades" facing hefty jail sentences, "what will they say in the office."

With this latest incident the whole anti squadist campaign became quite ridiculous, and the party grapevine reverberated with every accusation from drunkenness to rape. It was truly amazing to see how quickly people who were considered to be serious political scientists could begin to act like playground gossips.

It was perfectly obvious by now, that there were considerable elements in the SWP that did not believe that we were the sort of people that belonged in a revolutionary socialist organisation. Whilst it had been party policy to recruit young street proletarians, these people had kept their distaste to themselves, possibly even feeling somewhat guilty about their instinctive dislike of their "comrades". Now they had a political justification for their distaste, and they clutched at it with glee, happy that they could at last show their true feelings.

Our critics would never concede (probably not even to themselves) that their criticisms were in any way based on any personal, rather political, considerations. Yet this was undoubtedly a big part of it. We were all from the working class, and most of our strongest critics were from the intellectual, or professional worker groups within the party. Each side had the correspondingly different values, and standards of behaviour, that came with their social background.

We had already faced up to this clash of culture when we had joined an organisation that was dominated and directed by those from a different social background to us. If we had not managed to overcome all of our prejudice, at least we had been willing to try.

Our critics would not admit for one minute that their opinion of us was in any way based on their own social prejudice. No doubt they would have been quite ready to concede that our social origins went a long way to explaining some of our "excesses" of behaviour, but at the same time denied that their reaction to it, was in any way due to theirs.

No, they reassured themselves. They were political scientists who would never let their political views be influenced by personal opinions. In convincing themselves of this, they displayed all the complacent arrogance that those familiar with the middle classes will know so well.

By the start of 1981 the rumours and accusations had reached the level of a witch hunt. It was obvious that things were coming to a head.

THE END

The summer of 1981 saw a wave of expulsions from the SWP which led to those expelled, and friends and supporters ultimately forming Red Action. The expulsions were based on two incidents, both of which have been fully described elsewhere (see the pamphlet *The News Socialist Worker Forgot*) so we will only give the briefest of accounts here.

The first was at an SWP Easter holiday camp. A fight broke out between one of those that had been labelled a squadist, and a roadie from one of the bands playing there. It is true that fights should not be necessary at socialist events, but they will sometimes occur and as is often the case, this one was not the exclusive fault of one side. The reaction of some party members, gives a pretty

good indication of the mood that prevailed in the party at the time. All those that were considered to be squadists, and their friends, were immediately held to be responsible, even those that were nowhere near the incident. Some members seemed determined after a few drinks, to prove that they could put the squadists in their place, and it was perhaps a good thing for the further peace of the camp, that not all of the squadists were as bloodthirsty as rumour had it, and resisted the offers of further fights that were presented to them.

As a result of this incident, the member involved was expelled along with two others who were nothing to do with it, and another non involved member was suspended.

The next incident occurred the evening before the last ANL carnival at Leeds. It had been arranged that a group of members of London and Manchester, would be staying on the stage that evening and assisting with the stewarding of the carnival the next day. Less than 24 hours before we were due to leave, and all travelling arrangements had been finalised, we were informed by the organising steward that he had been relieved of his post, because he had been intending to use "undesirable elements" in the stewarding.

In London, it was decided that as everybody made their plans (including in some cases taking the afternoon off work) and the transport had been booked and paid for, we would travel as planned, and attend the carnival as spectators.

When we arrived we were informed that not only were we no longer required as stewards, but we were also not allowed to sleep in the stage area the night before the carnival.

This seemed to us to be totally unfair as there was no way that we could possibly make other arrangements at this late stage. We repeatedly emphasised that we were quite aware that we were not wanted to take part in the stewarding, but we wanted to sleep on the stage as it was the only dry place. Eventually we all just climbed on the stage despite the protests, and although the stewards were obviously apprehensive about our presence, there was no further incident. In the morning we swept the stage and left.

By now none of us were the politically naive people that we had been when we first joined the party. We had become quite aware of the fact that there are those on the left who are not above distortion or fabrication to attain their political ends, and we were fully expecting a very exaggerated account of the incident to be given by the party stewards. However even we were pretty staggered by the document drawn up by the Leeds SWP, listing our alleged crimes.

Anyone reading it might well have come to the conclusion that we must have been a company of SAS out on a particularly wild assignment. We were supposed to have stormed the stage and wrecked the equipment, threatened people with knives, (and god knows what else), amongst numerous other accusations.

The whole thing was basically a list of complete lies. It was remarkable that someone could have actually sat down and wrote it, and even more remarkable when you knew that so many people would accept it at face value and believe it. However it is only when we look very closely at it, especially the last paragraph, that we can see that there was a definite political purpose behind what had originally seemed no more than a rabidly spiteful piece. It read

Clearly a very small minority of SWP members feel that the use of violence and individual terrorism is a preferable method to taking on the nazis. The experience of mass movements such as the carnival seems merely to offer an outlet for drunken and violent behaviour, which differs little in style from the macho loutish behaviour of the nazis. We therefore call upon the central committee to firmly state against the concept of squads as a means of opposing the nazis. We also call upon the national secretary to locate those members involved and to initiate immediately their expulsions.

It was signed "passed unanimously by Leeds district committee 6, 7, 81."

This document was written supposedly, to complain about the behaviour of a group or party members and to list their alleged "crimes". It then goes on to conclude that "clearly a minority of SWP members feel that violence and individual terrorism is a preferable method to taking on the nazis."

Nowhere is there any indication given as to how the writer arrived at this conclusion. On the evening in question, the rights and wrongs of how to tackle nazis were not even mentioned, so why bring so called squadism into it at all.

If the purpose of the document was merely to bring our behaviour to the attention of the party leadership, why go on to ask them to "firmly state against the concept of squads as a means of opposing the nazis." Why should a political view of how to oppose fascism be automatically presumed to be linked to "drunken and violent behaviour."

Clearly the movers of this attack were well aware of the prejudice that existed in the party towards the section that had been labeled as the squadists and knew that with a few distortions they could

(1) get rid of those members, who were now considered to be an embarrassment and
(2) totally discredit the concept of any sort of direct or physical action, by implying that the result of it was behaviour that "differs little in style from the loutish behaviour of the nazis."

What was possibly the most illuminating thing about the whole incident was seeing a central committee member going round various party branches, using the document as justification for the expulsions. When you see a leading member of an organisation that aspires to one day assuming political power in this country, justifying the political action of that organisation, on the basis of events that have been merely dreamed up in someones maliciously fertile imagination, you begin to have grave doubts at least, about that organisation.

Any thoughts that may have been entertained that this episode was perhaps a mistake that would be corrected, were soon dispelled with the news that a group in Manchester had been expelled for attending a leafletting that they were not supposed to. Clearly there was more to squadism than just fighting. Personal slanders featured in this purge as well, but as those involved in this case were not renowned for being heavy drinkers, the charges were slightly different and a couple of them were merely accused of burgling a party full time workers house.

So what was for most of us a brief association with the left, came to an end. For some of us it was time to admit that we had been wrong. Now we remembered how we had defended the party from the criticisms of friends, and accused them of judging it on the basis of old stereotypes that no longer applied. But now we had to admit that we with our intellectual pretensions were wrong, and our politically "backward" peers were right. They were, as far as the leadership were concerned anyway, a bunch of middle class wankers.

REFLECTIONS

Those that were responsible for our expulsions from the SWP, doubtless presumed that that was the last that that the left would ever hear of us. However our commitment to the socialist cause was perhaps greater than we had been given credit for, and a series of meetings of those that had been expelled, and sympathetic and interested parties were begun. It was these that were to lead, eventually, to the formation of Red Action.

For all of us it was a time of reflection, and attempts to analyse what had happened, and why. Although we had all joined the SWP at different times and for different specific reasons, it would be fair to say that all of us had been attracted to them basically because they had seemed to be an organisation that was unlike other left wing groups inasmuch as they had seemed genuinely capable of becoming a true working class party, both in content and in character. Now it seemed that this was not to be, but why ?

The easiest and most obvious answer would be to blame the fact that the party had too many non working class members and indeed this was partly the case. We have already noted how various social and economic factors had led to the working class taking little part in the revolutionary movement for a great many years, and how this had led to the different left groups becoming mostly all composed of intellectuals and students. They had imposed their own cultural standards and

values on these groups, and the character of them became one that was alien to most working class people. Even when the political climate changed and the left began to attract some working class recruits, the organisations still tended to reflect the outlook of their longer standing more influential members and this did pose some difficulties in trying to build up a mass working class audience.

However, the success of the SWP during the seventies, shows that with the correct tactics, this problem can be overcome, and so the questions that we are left with are firstly, why were the SWP able to achieve this success, and more importantly, why weren't they able to maintain it.

When the forerunners of the SWP, the IS were formed, they were taking a step away from the traditional orthodox Trotskyism that dominated the thinking of the left at that time. By that we mean that the left based their strategy and tactics on the theories of socialism, that were worked out by Trotsky before his death in 1940. We have already noted one of these theories, which was that Russia was a "degenerated workers state". Another constant theme of Trotsky's theory of this time, was that the capitalist system had run its historical course and the time was now ripe for its dissolution. He believed that it would soon collapse and be replaced either by socialism, or by the collapse of society as we know it.

A quick glance at the conditions of that time (the 30s) show us that this was a quite understandable conclusion to come to. The forces for a possible change to socialism certainly existed. There were massive Communist movements in both France and, until Hitler came to power, Germany. There had been a general strike in Britain, just a few years earlier, and in Spain the working class were about to take up arms in an attempt to stop the fascists taking power. For Trotsky the problem was not one of lack of militancy, but one of a lack of revolutionary leadership for it.

Similarly we can see that the prospect of a collapse of the system was also a live possibility. The economic slump that followed the Wall, Street crash, had brought poverty and despair to the western world, and the social calamity of fascism was gaining ground all over Europe. In the light of all of these circumstances, Trotsky's claim that the choice for mankind lay between socialism and barbarism does not appear at all exaggerated.

However after, and partly because of, the second world war the capitalist system stabilised, and was able to bring an increase in living standards to the working class. This had the effect of subduing the level of militancy in the workers of the countries that were enjoying the boom.

The orthodox Trotskyist groups, who were completely wrapped up in, and dogmatic about his theories, did not change their strategy to take these new factors into account. They still attempted to apply the theories of Trotsky in conditions where they no longer applied, and became progressively more and more hostile to anyone that attempted to bring any new analysis into their theories. Even to this day we see the absurd spectacle of socialist groups making the same demands that Trotskyists made in the thirties.

For example, in the thirties, Trotsky called for armed workers defence squads against the threat of fascism. At the time this was a realistic and probably correct demand. Both the socialist and fascist movements in Europe were large and well organised, with their own militias.

Then in 1978, when the SWP initiated the Anti Nazi League to combat the electoral threat of the National Front, the Trotskyist groups refused to support it, and dismissed it as a wet "liberal" front. They called for workers defence squads blindly echoing the call made by Trotsky in the thirties, completely ignoring the fact that it was a totally unrealistic demand at this time, as well as the fact that there were hardly any workers listening to them anyway. In practice, the call for workers defence squads or nothing meant exactly that they did nothing.

When years before, the IS had broken away from the Trotskyist movement, they had broken out of the strait jacket, that orthodox Trotskyist thought had become. This enabled them to become an organisation that was far more sensitive to changing circumstances and the light of new experience. While the other groups were still preparing for the collapse of capitalism next week, the IS could see that this was not going to happen, and begin to work out some of the reasons.

This ability and willingness to adapt to changing circumstances and develop new theories, was the foundation for the success of the IS in the sixties, and the SWP in the seventies. It enabled

them to develop a view of the world that was far more consistent with reality, and so they could far more successfully, begin to relate to those from that world. The orthodox Trotskyist groups, with a view of the world stuck in 1940, predicting the imminent collapse of the world, came across to most people as a kind of political version of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

With this approach the IS/SWP were able to develop new theories and tactics, that were far beyond the shallow static minds of the orthodox groups. Activities such as the Right to Work, Rock against Racism and the Rank and File groups, brought them into contact with thousands of people outside of the incestuous circle of the revolutionary left. This enabled them to become by far the largest group, and even more important, to get a foot in the camp of the mainstream working class.

And yet they were not able to maintain this success. The Right to Work and the Rank and File groups have been closed down, and the Anti Nazi League and Rock against Racism, allowed to slide into oblivion. Out of all those brought into and around the party by these activities, probably not more than a few dozen remain. The SWP today, although probably still larger than other groups, has no more significance to the working class than the rest of the "Looney left". So what happened?

The successful tactics of the SWP brought them into contact with, and enabled them to recruit, those far outside the range of other left groups, but once inside the party, they were treated in a manner exactly the same as in the others, and the reason for this is, that in the final analysis, the SWP is really no different to the others. Although they were using different methods and tactics to build their party, their model of that party was exactly the same as the model of the party, that all the other groups were using.

It was to be a party that demands a very high level of discipline and commitment from its members, and one where a supposedly working class rank and file, are led by, and totally obedient to a highly educated elitist leadership, who control the party's every move.

This sort of party is generally referred to as being a Leninist party, after the party led by Lenin in the Russian revolution. This is not the place to debate whether the concept of the Leninist party is, or was, right or wrong, or whether it has been misinterpreted today. What we can say with some confidence however, is that

- (1) the working class of today do not respond to the sort of organisations that have been created, and
- (2) the structure of those organisations had allowed weak careerist and bureaucratic minded people to rise to positions of influence in them.

The success of the SWP in the seventies ran ahead of the ability of the party leaders to respond to it. It brought into and around the party, large numbers of people that did not fit into their preconceived ideas of what a party member should be like, in terms of both political awareness, and level of discipline. However, now that the problem was inside and not outside the party, there was no room to find new ways of dealing with it. The procedures were clearly laid down. Total and immediate subordination to the party line and leaders, or political elimination.

The large semi autonomous movements that were bringing these elements into the party (RAR, ANL etc) came to be seen as a threat to party discipline, rather than as the marvellous half way houses between the party and the class that they could have been.

The SWP reached the brink of. the working class. They were the only ones that were capable of reaching it, but once there, they were found to be no more capable than all of the others at taking the plunge into it. They could not solve the fundamental problem that dogs every socialist organisation. What should be the relationship between the party and the class.

THE PARTY AND THE CLASS

It is not really surprising that none of the revolutionary groups in this country enjoy any real base of working class support, for the experience of the squadists in the SWP was by no means a unique one. The history of all the main groups is one long saga of expulsions, splits, and more expulsions.

Discipline and adherence to the party line have become fetishised to such a degree, that any form of criticism, constructive or otherwise, is seen as a potential threat to be firstly ridiculed, and if it persists, suppressed, the voicers of it to be expelled if necessary. The quality of a member is judged not on any sign of talent or initiative, but on the simple ability to regurgitate the party line, in a manner as close as possible to the original.

Having regularly eliminated the first hint of criticism, and at the same time demoralised many fairer minded members by the methods employed in doing it, the central committees of the various groups have succeeded in surrounding themselves with those that are for the most part, either mindless hacks that hang on to their every word, or are full careerists that do their best to appear as the former. If this description appears somewhat bitter or exaggerated, bear this following fact in mind. The individual that is responsible for compiling the list of blacklisted union activists for the Aims of Industry, was once on the central committee of the organisation that has been often mentioned in this document.

What sort of set up not only attracts those that have the potential for that sort of development, but actually allows them to rise to the top of the organisation. Only those with absolutely no knowledge of the character and mentality of the working class, could hope to win over large numbers of them to an organisation of this kind. The working class may often be not the most articulate people in the world but they have an instinct for spotting phonies and deviousness that is second to none. It may well be possible to attract them to the organisation by the logic of socialist arguments, but once in it they will soon discover that most of the upper rungs are occupied by those that could well be described in the manner of SWP's Leeds district committee as having an outlook and method which differs little in style from those that administer and officiate the capitalist system that we are supposed to be attempting to overthrow.

A good example of this tendency was shown at the time of the squadist expulsions. While these were in process, two of those involved were arrested in the riots that were taking place at the time, and remanded in custody with the prospect of very long prison sentences. On hearing of this an SWP central committee member was heard to say of one that that was where he belonged, and that was where "we" would have to put him.

The member in question had served previous prison sentences, and had previous arrests for amongst other things, fighting fascists, fighting police, and activity on picket lines. The central committee member was from a typical middle class university background, and had once apparently worked for six months in a factory, presumably so that he knew just what it was like to be a worker.

Now there is nothing automatically honourable about having a prison record, and even being an obvious anti establishment rebel does not necessarily make someone a good revolutionary socialist but picture yourself as a worker in a revolutionary situation, with a mind to the danger of a new bureaucracy coming to power on the back of the revolution. Who would you rather entrust with political responsibility Those that the old bureaucracy found it necessary to put in prison, or those that are already planning to do exactly the same thing to them.

This question of the importance of the social outlook of an organisation's members should not be underestimated. Sixty years ago, when the first signs of bureaucratic malpractice were becoming apparent in the Soviet Union, Lenin in or of his last addresses to his followers, spoke about the danger of a culture that was detrimental to a political movement, becoming unconsciously imposed upon that movement.

He reminded of how throughout history, whenever a civilisation had overcome another of a superior culture, the culture of the vanquished civilisation had always imposed itself upon the victorious one. He spoke of the dangers of that occurring in class warfare as well. Although the culture of the Russian ruling class had been at a "miserably low and insignificant level ... it is still higher than that of our responsible communist administrators."

The Russian working class had only been in existence in Russia for a relatively short time (it was one of the last major countries to develop modern industry) and had had no time to develop any real culture or identity of its own. Lenin's fear was that now that the communists had defeated the old ruling class, those that made up the new communist administration, with no tradition of their

own to identify with, would unknowingly start to model themselves on, and imitate the habits of, those that had ruled before them. In this way the culture of the old Tsarist bureaucracy would impose itself on the new communist one, and this would present a great danger to it retaining its working class outlook, and this in turn would be a danger to the future of the revolution. Many would say that future events in Russia suggest that Lenin showed remarkable perception.

To create an organisation that will instinctively remain true to the interests of the working class after it has gained political power, it is necessary for it to be an organisation that is of the working class in character and habits, and not just the wishful thinking of its members.

All of the revolutionary groups have bestowed upon themselves the title of representative of the working class, when in reality the character of their organisations and the manner in which the bureaucracies within them operate, makes them anything but representative of that class. They use this self appointed position to justify various violations of socialist principle, and democratic procedure, on the basis that if it serves the interest of the party, when it by definition serves the interest of the class, and is therefore justifiable.

But can we judge the capabilities of a political party to maintain a political course, merely by the fact that it proclaims itself to be committed to that course? Should we not also look for some indication as to the likelihood of it being able to maintain that proclaimed political course? If an organisation finds it necessary to violate the principles of democracy, when it is far from power, then how can we expect it to drop this habit if it does achieve power, and the pressures are that much greater? If today, it allows lies and slanders to be political tools of its members, then how will it stop this happening when the implications, and the consequences are so much greater? If it allows the opportunist and careerist to rise to positions of influence today, then how can we seriously believe that it will be able to reverse that process later, when the stakes are much higher. Are any of the left groups; even aware of the existence of this problem. It sometimes seems that those that are capable of writing volumes about bureaucratic degeneration in the past, are totally incapable of recognising it when it is under their noses.

When the SWP withdrew their support of the rank and file groups, one particularly well known and respected member continued to attend his. He was a person that had been drawn in to revolutionary politics through his union activities, and for him the rank and file group had always represented the centre of his activities, a symbol of eight years of hard work, love and devotion. He was immediately ordered by the central committee to give up attending, and when he didn't the result was predictable, summary, and in the only manner that they seem to know.

Even if they were sceptical as to the further value of the rank and file groups, what possible harm could be seen in someone continuing to attend his, even if only to keep his morale up. It wasn't as if they were saying that he should have been doing something else instead, just stop everything, because we tell you so. If ever there were a case of blind authoritarianism for its own sake, this was surely it.

Quite simply any attempt to impose that sort of petty spiteful discipline on the working class of today is doomed to failure. Of course we will be reminded that the overthrow of capitalism will be impossible without a disciplined organisation and no one would disagree with that, but we are not in a revolutionary situation today. We have already noted the absurdities of those that base their perspective on a situation long since past. It is no less incorrect to base it on one that has not yet arisen. When we are in a revolutionary situation, it will be possible to demand a correspondingly higher level of discipline and commitment and it will be willingly given. To demand it today is to effectively cut yourself off from the overwhelming majority of workers. It is the act of those that have no real positive strategy for the building of a mass working class organisation. It will just happen one day. When the class struggle reaches a certain point, the workers will all turn to the party, in rather the same way as water turns to steam when it reaches a certain temperature.

The organisation that will carry the least danger of a degeneration into bureaucratism will be one that is built not on the personnel and methods of the bureaucracies of today, but one that celebrates the style of and is built on those, that are anti bureaucratic, not just in their claims but in their actions and deeds. Those that have rejected capitalism and all of its moral and social values, in

their life and lifestyle. The dispossessed and the angry, who will have no reason to retain any part of the capitalist structure, consciously or otherwise, but will sweep it away in anger and contempt.

It will be an organisation that remembers and honours the commitment of its members, and doesn't just see them as cannon fodder to be tossed aside when their usefulness is past. One whose members will look on prisons as nightmares to be destroyed, and not as convenient legacies for the new regime. It will be a party of the workers. Their party, that is the expression of their hopes and dreams, and not one where they are tolerated, if they keep quiet and do as they are told, like good boys and girls.

WE ARE RED ACTION

Red Action was born in January 1982. There were observers that expected it to fall apart in a few weeks, as well as others who whilst not so dismissive, were still critical of the idea of yet another left group.

The advice of these people was that we should join an already existing organisation which would have far greater experience and resources to offer. An important flaw in this argument was the fact that it is very doubtful whether any existing groups would have welcomed our attentions. It was not only the SWP that made known their distaste for drunken raucous squadists. However the question did not really arise because it was, and is the belief of all of us, that there is a need and a justification for the existence of a group like Red Action, in its own right. We believe that the existing revolutionary groups have failed in the task of introducing revolutionary ideas to the working class, and that we are right to attempt to create one that will be capable of this.

We do not claim that we are THE PARTY. One of the hallmarks of nearly all of the existing left groups is their constant claims that they, and only they, are the party with the correct interpretation of socialist theory. We freely admit that we do not at this time, have a programme for the overthrow of the capitalist system. In admitting this we do not consider that we are being unambitious, just realistic. There is not one Red Action member that does not have this as their life's aim, but at the same time we are conscious of the absurd spectacle of so many of the other tiny left wing groups with their massive and comprehensive plans for the political system that they intend to implement, and not a hope in hell of actually doing anything with them.

If or when, we become large enough, then we will have to consider operating as an organisation that sees itself as the instrument for the overthrow of capitalism, but the fact is, that at this time there is not one revolutionary organisation that is capable of even tickling the capitalist state, never mind rocking it. The sooner we all admit this to ourselves, the sooner we can begin to build one that is.

We believe that the key to involving working class people to political activity at this stage, is in the populist methods used so successfully by the SWP in the seventies

People do not become revolutionary socialists overnight. There are many different stages, with different levels of awareness and commitment. With these methods we will involve those of varying levels of development, and not fall into the trap of alienating potential future supporters by imposing revolutionary demands upon them, before they are ready to offer that level of commitment. We will not forget that we were not always revolutionary socialists ourselves, and that things which seem so clear today, did not always appear so. We will not reject someone because they do not immediately see everything that we do.

Always and always we will be attempting to present our ideas to the working class. If they do not respond to the ways in which we do it, then we will just have to find new ways. Any socialist organisation without a working class base, is no more than an empty shell. It doesn't matter how correct your ideas may be, if the working class is not listening to them, they are ultimately no more effective than incorrect ones. When the National Front were threatening a political breakthrough in the seventies, all of the left groups could have told you in just as much, and perhaps even more

detail than the SWP, why they were a danger that had to be stopped. But it was only the SWP who were able to actually do anything about it, because only they had learnt how to begin to communicate with the masses and so be able to put ideas into practice. The other groups, for all of their theoretical clarity about the threat of fascism were, because of their lack of contact with the working class, powerless to actually do anything about it.

In creating Red Action we are aware that we are up against many difficulties. Predictably the one that other revolutionary groups usually point out first, is our lack of theoretical experience. It is certainly true that we do not count among our numbers anyone, that those who like to consider themselves as intellectuals, would normally look upon as one of their own. We do not attempt to deny that a socialist organisation needs theoretical guidance, but we do reject the idea that only university educated intellectuals are capable of supplying that leadership.

The whole manner in which so many on the left seem to glorify and idolise their supposed mental superiors has for us a macabre effect. In fact so called intellectuals have both in the past and the present, shown themselves capable of the most appalling blunders and mental absurdities. Every blatantly criminal regime in modern history, from the Stalinist one in Russia, to the Hitlerite one in Germany has never had any trouble finding supposedly intellectual minds, to glorify and defend it. Those that claim to be intellectuals are no more, or less, fallible than anyone else. We do not deny the benefits that have been rendered by them, to the workers movement, but neither do we forget their part in the fiascos.

We are fully aware that we have much to learn about political theory and organisation, and we are very willing learners. Those that would reject us on the basis of our supposed intellectual deficiencies will not overconcern us anyway.

It is not our intention to set up our stall in the Marxist bazaar, where the various groups compete for the allegiance of the few committed revolutionaries. For us, the theory that matters, is the theory of taking Marxist ideas to the non Marxist working class. We are not out to impress socialists, we are out to create them. If in attempting this, we do draw some of the already committed around us, then this is a welcome bonus, but the measure of our success or failure will always be on the basis of how many "non political" people we involve in socialist activities.

It has been said that Red Action can not be considered as a serious political organisation, because it is in reality nothing more than a glorified drinking club. It could perhaps be phrased differently and presented as Red Action is not a serious socialist group, because its members enjoy each others company, and try to enjoy life. This would perhaps tell us more about the outlook of those that voice this criticism, and the nature of the organisations that they belong to. For our part, we make absolutely no apologies for the fact that we attempt to make our political activities as enjoyable as possible. When you are born into the working class, you are born to eat shit, and we are going to squeeze as much enjoyment out of our one life as we possibly can. Perhaps the assumption is that as we are enjoying our political activities, then we can not possibly be taking them seriously. That can be answered quite simply by the fact that since Red Action was formed its record of attendance at political events, has been as good as any of the "serious" groups, and better than most of them.

We look forward to the future with confidence and optimism. We know that Red Action can work because it is already starting to do so. Even in the short while that we have existed, we have managed to gather around us a few people of exactly the type we have spoken of. Who are aware of, and sympathetic to socialist ideas, but who had been successfully alienated by the antics of the existing revolutionary groups.

This small success hardly puts us in the position to give international capitalism sleepless nights, but it does at least prove to us that our ideas are sound. For all its lack of resources, experience and numbers, Red Action has kept together and grown, at a time when many other left groups in far better circumstances, have been losing numbers and even folding.

Red Action has passed its first test. It is impossible to bring together a group of people as a political organisation, and keep them together, unless there is some basis for that group's existence.

Every month that goes by proves that we have both political foundation and future. Those that do not like our manners or style, will just have to get used to the idea, that Red Action is here to stay.

WE ARE RED ACTION