

Give this to a soldier

Wildcat Inside Story

1974

1974 has already seen the lowest recruitment figures for the Services since the Army was sent into Northern Ireland in 1969 and speeches by Labour MPs calling for the withdrawal of troops, Public opinion polls demand 'bring our boys home', while the Left continues to say 'end British imperialism in Ireland'. The rhetoric is different, the effect would be the same. The trickle of deserters has continued; there have been reports of disaffection inside the army leading to 'breaches of discipline'; some local authorities have opposed recruitment.

1974 has also seen the Mick McGahey fiasco in which the Communist Vice-President of the miners' union said that, if troops were ordered down the mines, the NUM would appeal to them to disobey their orders — and then, under pressure from the Right (and presumably the Party) said he hadn't meant that at all. But at least the possible use of troops against the British people was discussed as a result. 1974 has seen the display of armed might at Heathrow Airport and army manoeuvres in towns like Hull.

In this situation it is not surprising that radicals have tried to encourage soldiers to desert. Pat Arrowsmith of the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign has been jailed for 18 months under the 1934 Incitement to Disaffection Act, while in 1972 Michael Tobin — with less publicity and more unequivocal support for the Republican cause — got the maximum sentence of two years under the same act. What is slightly surprising is the moderate language of the BWNIC, compared to the stirring appeals to soldiers of the past (a criticism which could not be levelled at Michael Tobin's material). And the language is getting more moderate. Compare these two passages, the first from the leaflet Pat Arrowsmith gave out

'We are aware that there are British soldiers who are leaving the army, or who want to because of British policy in N. Ireland. We are glad about this and hope many more will do so...' and the second from the BWNIC's new leaflet:

'We are not recommending any particular course of action. There is no easy way out of the Army...'

Even the title of the leaflet has changed — from 'Some' Information for British Soldiers' to 'Some Information for Discontented Soldiers'. Two years ago *Freedom's* 'An Appeal to British Soldiers in Ireland' — though it included the dramatic sentence 'We too can be punished for addressing this appeal to you' — wasn't really 'incitement to disaffection'.

Most of this supplement is on disaffecting the troops in the past, in particular the case of the *War Commentary* editors jailed in 1945 [see Revived 45: Anarchists Against the Army in this collection]. On this page we reproduce some of the factual information contained in the latest BWNIC leaflet. Naturally we associate ourselves with it — as we do with the more explicit and robust appeals to soldiers that others have made before us.

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1. If you are a conscientious objector, that is, if since joining up you have developed a religious or moral objection to taking part in any war, you have a legal right to be discharged on these grounds. You are advised to contact:

The Central Board for Conscientious Objectors, c/o 6 Endsleigh St., London WC1, Tel: 01-352 7906.

2. If you have decided to go absent without leave — to Sweden, you will be pleased to know that special arrangements have been made to welcome British servicemen who go AWOL to Sweden by:

The British Deserters Support Group, c/o Bok-Cafe Morianen, Box 16037, Drattninggatan 19, 103 21 Stockholm 16, Sweden. Tel: Stockholm 106063.

If you go to Sweden, you will need your passport, your military ID card and about £30 cash (you need this to get through passport control as a tourist). You are advised to enter via Stockholm and avoid Malmo and Goteborg, and to enter as a tourist.

You will need to wait three weeks before going to register with the police as an applicant for political asylum. If you contact the British Deserters Support Group, they will put you in touch with a good Swedish lawyer, advise you on registration procedure, offer you accommodation with sympathetic Swedish people during the difficult three-week waiting period, and accompany you when you go to register with the police.

It is important to make it clear to the Swedish police that you were going to have to serve in Northern Ireland, otherwise you will not be considered for asylum. After you have registered, you can then go to the Swedish Social Bureau which will get you a place to stay, give you money to live on and help you to enroll in Swedish language classes.

A British AWOL soldier can apply for the type of asylum that has been granted to American and Portuguese AWOL soldiers. It amounts to the Swedish Government giving a man permission to stay on the basis of special circumstances — a type of humanitarian asylum. However, when you go to the police, you are advised to ask for political asylum so as to make sure that the Aliens Commission and not the police makes the final decision on your case.

3. If you Intend to apply for a discharge on other grounds, the following organisations may be able to help:

At Ease, c/o Release, 1 Elgin Ave., London W9. Tel: 01-837 9794. Counsellors (who Include ex-service men) are available at this address every Thursday evening from 7.30 to 9.30 pm. The help of sympathetic lawyers and social workers can be obtained if necessary. Advice is confidential. No representations will be made to anyone without your permission. No pressure will be applied, whatever you decide to do. 'At Ease' also deals with enquiries by post. If it is impossible for you to call in person, 'At Ease' can sometimes arrange for preliminary counselling to be given near to where you are based.

The National Council for Civil Liberties, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1, Tel: 01-278 4574. Open daily — office hours.

This organisation has considerable experience in giving legal advice to servicemen and representing them to military authorities.

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Note in original 1974 publication: The Wildcat 'inside story' is a four-page supplement to the paper. It is produced in consultation with libertarian groups and individuals and available to them at cost price for distribution with their own papers and other material (£3 a 100 from: Wildcat, Box 999, 197 Kings Cross Road, London WC1). We are planning supplements on the Election, transport and squatting: please send us suggestions for the future — and your comments on this first supplement.

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