

# 1960s Politics at home and abroad

Personal reminiscences

*“Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven.”*

*William Wordsworth, The Prelude.*

He was writing in 1799 after the French Revolution, but certainly towards the end of the 1960s there was that same sense of excitement and imminent change – however illusory that turned out to be.

As part of the **“Talking about my generation”** project I took on to inquire into people’s involvement with and memories of politics and world affairs during the period of the 1960s. Several people filled in a questionnaire on this topic, and this presentation reflects some of the reminiscences people shared.

I was always interested in politics from childhood. My grandfather was a prominent trade unionist and Labour Party member in Liverpool and he brought me up to be politically active by teaching me the history of the labour movement and how to argue points and so on. I think he wanted me to become an MP! In our family there were endless discussions about current affairs, the news and politics. Half the extended family were socialists and half were Conservatives so there were many lively debates and rows! One of the great uncles was a communist shop steward in a hosiery factory and one of my cousins became a prominent member of the Co-operative Movement.

*Wendy*

New promise was heralded when **Harold Wilson** narrowly won the general election for Labour in **1964**.  
Angela's father, Alan Day, stood in that election in Howden constituency in the East Riding.  
She shared a leaflet from the time and the letter informing her father of acceptance as a candidate.

8107/80/27  
27/08/2018

# THE LABOUR PARTY

TRANSPORT HOUSE, SMITH SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.1.

25th July, 1962.

Mr. A. Day,  
69 Circular Drive,  
Denishaw,  
Nr. Sheffield  
Yorkshire.

Dear Colleague,

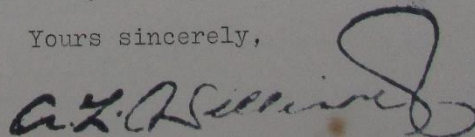
On behalf of the National Executive Committee I send you warm wishes for a happy and useful time as a prospective Parliamentary Labour Candidate and for a successful campaign when the General Election comes.

The National Executive Committee wishes to help our candidates as much as possible and, wherever practicable, to place the services of Head Office at their disposal. Attached you will find a note with information which I trust you will find useful.

Please do not hesitate to consult Head Office on any matter on which you think we may be of assistance to you.

With every good wish for your success.

Yours sincerely,



General Secretary

Enc.

810Z/80/LZ

HOWDEN CONSTITUENCY - GENERAL ELECTION : THURS. 15th OCT.

## Alan Day

Age: 37. Married, with three children.  
Lives at 6, Highbury Crescent, Bessacar,  
Doncaster. Lectures in Social Studies  
and Economics at Doncaster Technical  
College. Son of a Yorkshire Steel  
worker; awarded a two-year scholar-  
ship to Ruskin College, Oxford.



## Labour Candidate

Founder Member of The East Riding  
Public Transport Development Council.  
Member of Association of Teachers in  
Technical Institutes. Labour Party mem-  
ber since 1948; past Secretary and  
Chairman of local Labour Parties.  
Chairman of Bessacar Labour Party.

Alan

**DAY**

**For a BETTER Britain**



**Let's GO with**

**Labour**

THANK YOU FOR HELPING. DISPLAY THIS SIDE CLEARLY IN YOUR WINDOW

I would say that politics was the dominant aspect of life in my grandparents' house in the 1960s. My grandfather was a Labour Party activist who had joined the party as a 14 year old Clarion Socialist just after the LP was formed. His heroes were Keir Hardie and Clem Attlee and he was very excited by Wilson's Labour Government. The front room of his terraced house was used mainly for meetings of his LP and trade union mates. My sister and I used to get taken to the local LP Committee Rooms, which were in a dingy old house, because my grandmother had the job of cleaning it and providing refreshments for the meetings! She hated politics and used to say "The more you get into the backroom of politics, the more it stinks!"

*Wendy*

**1965** saw the death of **Winston Churchill** and it seemed that the age of deference and entitlement was ending. But there was still much respect for the old war horse and one respondent remembered the dockers lowering the heads of their cranes as a mark of respect. Three years later many of those same dockers were marching through London in support of Enoch Powell – more of him later.



Churchill's funeral was memorable. I think that  
with the cockiness of youth I had rather  
dismissed him as a dinosaur relic,  
but when I saw the hard-bitten dock workers  
bowing their cranes in such a sentimental  
gesture of respect  
I realised how much he had meant to ordinary  
people.

*Lyn*



The biggest event in most people's memories was the **Cuban missile crisis** in **1962**. Many people described the fear they felt as children and young people living through that period. A cartoon of the time showed two men hell bent on ending civilisation. The Soviet Union was building up its nuclear bases in Cuba, just miles from the USA, while American bases were building their own capacity in Turkey and Persia.

I remember when I was 9 the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 as we all thought we were going to die. I recall the headline of the Daily Mail on one of those days which had a massive front page headline about 5 inches high saying "K meets K" ie Kennedy meets Khrushchev. I remember in primary school one morning in assembly the headmaster telling us how grave the situation was and by 12 noon we would know if there was going to be a nuclear weapons launch or not. It was very scary waiting for the time to be reached and then the relief that we weren't all going to perish in a nuclear holocaust.

*Wendy*

**"...TWO MEN...END CIVILIZATION."**





The **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament** and the **Aldermaston March** had already been in operation since **1958**, but the crisis made it far more visible and well supported. Joanna had saved her Aldermaston Scrapbook and her ticket for luggage, moved from school hall and other accommodation to the next stop, as the march moved towards London from Berkshire. There was also a headline in the Communist Daily Worker about the march.



**C.N.D.**

SCRAP BOOK



Hi!

SOUTHERN APPROX  
Kangaroo

PROFIT



THE CHINA  
'SCOOPS'  
first page here

# Daily Worker

BOYCOTT  
SOUTH AFRICAN  
GOODS

LESSON IN  
KILLING  
see page three

## Britain's 'splendid youth' in greatest post-war demonstration **NO ROOM IN THE SQUARE** One hundred thousand demand 'ban the bomb'



### Marchers confident at end of 4-day trek CALL TO TAKE END-BOMB MESSAGE INTO EVERY TRADE UNION

By **JOHN CRUTCH** and **BOB BERRY**  
**J**ohn and Jean Collins and family yesterday took part in the night-long demonstration to end the use of the atomic bomb.

They were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country. The demonstrators, who had been on a four-day trek from London to London, were met by a large crowd of supporters in the square. The demonstrators were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country.

**THE ENDY BANNERS**  
The demonstrators carried banners that read 'Ban the Bomb' and 'No Room in the Square'. The banners were carried by a large crowd of demonstrators who had been on a four-day trek from London to London.

The demonstrators were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country. They were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country.

**MARCH'S LAST LAP**  
The demonstrators were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country. They were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country.

**CLIPPING CHORDS**  
The demonstrators were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country. They were confident that their message would be taken up by every trade union in the country.

**AT THE CENOTAPH**  
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0046

RED

1

Good Friday Caversham Junior School,  
April 15 Reading

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Easter Sat. Methodist Central Hall,  
April 16 Slough

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Easter Sun. Staveley Road School,  
April 17 Chiswick

Meanwhile the **Cold War** was well underway, symbolised by the construction of the **Berlin Wall** in **1961** and the Berlin airlift to help those trapped in the east. This remained in place until 1989.

Throughout the 60s and until 1989 the Berlin Wall blighted Europe



(c) Sammlung Heiko Burkhardt, dailysoft.com

Berlin, 1961. Berlin Wall at Zimmerstrasse. West Berliners watching over the Wall to the East.

Another huge impact on many people during the decade was the rise of **Civil Rights** and **Black Power** in America. The famous Black Power salute by American black athletes **Tommie Smith and John Carlos** at the **Olympics** had a huge effect. Their gesture was roundly criticised and condemned by the International Olympic Committee.

In 1968 at the Olympics in Mexico City black athletes gave the black power salute.

I can remember buying a copy of Newsweek in 1969 which had a picture of Stokely Carmichael on the cover and telling my then-boyfriend I wanted to go and fight with the Black Panthers in America!

*Jane*



In 1968 at the Olympics in Mexico City black athletes gave the black power salute.

Still in the USA, **1963** and the **assassination of John F Kennedy** was one of those moments when everyone knew where they were when they heard the news.



I was living in California and my first daughter was born there in 1963, shortly before President Kennedy was assassinated. It confirmed the decision already made that I was not going to stay in the USA and have my children grow up there. My main criticisms were the deep social divide, greed, guns, lack of universal health care and racism.

*John*



1963 and the assassination of Kennedy was particularly resonant in our house as my father had died earlier that year. After all the fear of the cold war shadowing my childhood there had seemed such a new air of optimism with Khrushchev and JFK. Now I felt frightened again and also so appalled at the gunning down of such a young man with small children.

*Lyn*

A TV programme was interrupted for a news flash, which she had never seen happen before. TV made the whole world much more accessible and although presidents had been shot before, this was the first time it was such a world event. He was also the first catholic president, and good looking and with a young wife. He was really the first “celebrity” president.

*Jan*

And many other assassinations followed – JFK’s brother Bobby, Malcolm X, and in **1968** Civil Rights icon **Martin Luther King**. Since the latter’s **I have a Dream** speech in **1963**, and the huge demonstration in Washington, many of us were transfixed by the changes that were happening for African Americans. The message was not lost on other groups who began to question their oppression or inferior status in society. Women, nationalists and Catholics in Northern Ireland, gay people all began to see the Civil Rights struggle as a beacon.

# DR. KING FATALLY SHOT BY ASSASSIN IN MEMPHIS

## U.S. Shocked, Saddened by Slaying, Johnson Says

Message Is Given Nation  
After Assassination

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Johnson spoke Thursday night of an "America shocked and saddened" by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King as he condemned violence, lawlessness and divisiveness.

In a brief message to the nation via television and radio, Johnson disclosed that he is postponing a trip to Hawaii for a Vietnam strategy conference. He had been scheduled to leave around midnight. He said he will leave sometime Friday.

The President appeared in the doorway of the White House offices, stern-faced and spoke on all television and radio networks.

"I ask every American citizen," he said, "to reject the blind violence that has struck down Dr. King, who lived by nonviolence."

The President urged prayers for peace and understanding in the land and said:

"We can achieve nothing by lawlessness and divisiveness among the American people."

He said he hopes all Americans will search their hearts. At that point he said he was cancelling all plans for the evening and postponing until Friday his planned take-off for Hawaii and conferences there on problems of war and peace in Vietnam.

### DINNER PLANNED

He was to have attended a

## ANGUISH VOICED BY U.S. LEADERS

Shock, Grief, Is Reaction;  
Violence Feared

NEW YORK (AP) — The nation's civil rights and political leaders reacted with anguish, shock and grief Thursday night at the slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

There also was fear that the slaying could lead to more violence.

"We have been saddened," President Johnson told the nation on radio and television. "I ask every citizen to reject the blind violence that has struck Dr. King who lived in nonviolence."

### TRIP PUT OFF

The President said he was postponing his trip to Hawaii, for a Vietnam strategy conference, until Friday. He had been scheduled to leave about midnight Thursday.

Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey said the slaying "brings shame to our country. An apostle of nonviolence has been the victim of violence."

The vice-president said, however, that his death will bring new strength to the cause he fought for.

A spokesman for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People said, "I am shocked and grieved by this



DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING  
Rifle Bullet Fells Rights Crusader

## King: Been to Mountaintop No Matter What Happens

## NEGROES SMASH AUTO WINDOWS

Jackson Scene of Disorder at News of Death

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) —

## Non-Violence Advocate Dead Day Later

By JAY BOWLES  
MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—"It really doesn't matter what happens now. I've been to the mountaintop."

The speaker was Martin Luther King Jr. His audience was

## Dies Hour After Injury; Troops Recalled

By DOUG STONE

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—Nobel Laureate Martin Luther King Jr., father of non-violence in the American civil rights movement, was killed by an assassin's bullet Thursday night.

King, 39, was hit in the neck by a bullet as he stood on the balcony of a motel here. He died less than an hour later in St. Joseph Hospital.

Gov. Buford Ellington immediately ordered 4,000 National Guard troops back into the city. A curfew, which was clamped on Memphis after a King-led march turned into a riot a week ago, was reimposed.

Police said incidents of violence, including several fire bombings were reported following King's death.

The 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner was standing on the balcony of his motel here, where he had come to lead protests in behalf of the city's 1,300 striking garbage workers, most of them Negroes, when he was shot.

### PAIR ARRESTED

Two unidentified men who were arrested were released several hours later.

As word of King's death spread through the stunned city.

I was most struck by a World In Action programme on the television about the black civil rights movement in the United States, watching the demonstrations and the brutal treatment of the people by the police. She saw Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech on TV.

*Jane*

**1968** was perhaps the most explosive year of the decade politically. In France workers and students were on the march together, and it looked like they were on course for a revolution. Teach-ins, street theatre, the **Situationists** with their provocative posters – such as “It is forbidden to forbid” – these were all new ways of fighting the system.



The student protests in France in May 1968 made a big impact on me because I had been on an exchange visit to France the previous year and I was very interested in French life and culture. I can remember Danny le Rouge being on TV. I also remember TV coverage of the anti-Vietnam war protests at the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square in London and hearing/seeing Tariq Ali speak. It seemed in those days that idealistic young people could achieve anything and that everyone was anti-establishment.

*Wendy*

# **INTERDIT D'INTERDIRE!**

slogans  
et affiches  
de la révolution

**MAI 68**

Paris 1968



1968 was a very important year. In May French revolutionary students took to the streets, supporting workers who were striking at the same time. People really thought there was going to be a revolution in France. I was desperate to go to Paris, which I finally did in July 1968, by which time there was no sign that anything had happened, except that previously cobbled streets were now covered over with asphalt to prevent protestors pulling up cobbles and using them as missiles.

*Sue*

We had our demos in Britain as well. The Vietnam War was the major preoccupation of the peace movement now. In **1968** there was a huge demonstration in **Grosvenor Square**, outside the American Embassy. Slogans were “Hey, hey LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” and “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh”. Police attacked people, driving into the crowd on horseback. Starts of the left, like **Tariq Ali and Vanessa Redgrave** marched in the front line.

*Sue*





Vanessa Redgrave and Tariq Ali in Grosvenor Square  
2 60s left wing icons.

And students here were taking in the lessons of Paris, with teach-ins and sit-ins at **Hornsey School of Art** during a 3 day siege and sleep in in **1968**. **London School of Economics** students also demonstrated, and when the authorities locked them out, the students tore down the gates in **1969**. Not everyone was involved or approved of left wing students protests though.



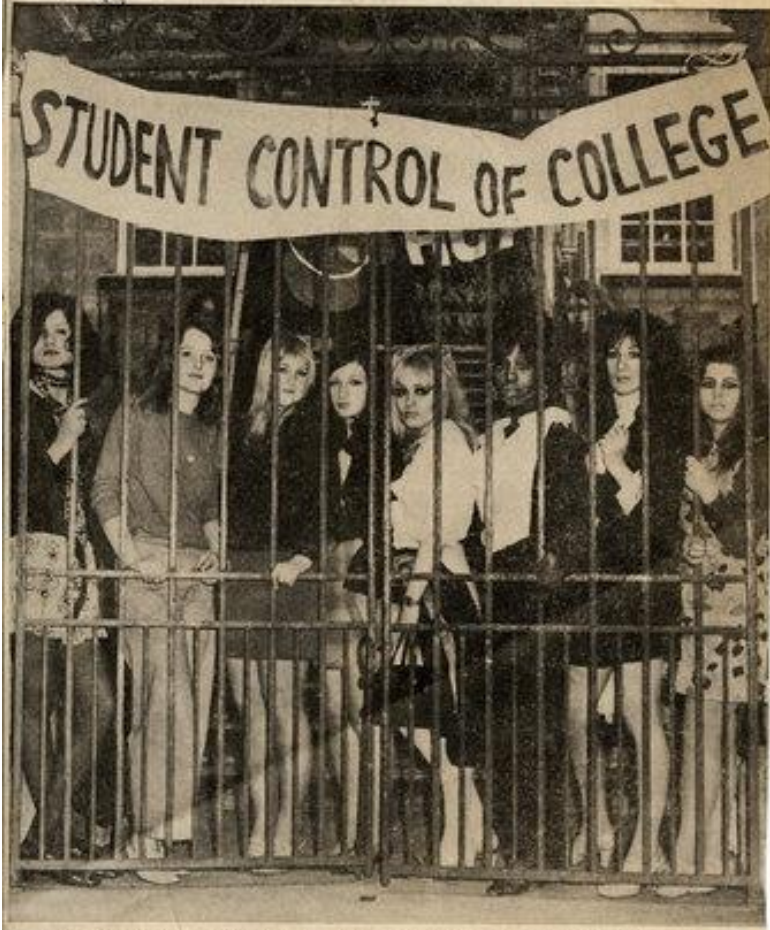
At university, we had a number of sit-ins, particularly engineered by the left wing, who would come to Union meetings, usually held at lunchtime and filibuster until the more reasonable students would go away either bored or because they felt they had to go to lectures.

*Kate*

Express  
Nov. 28

200811/31/4

# Gates close as students start big sleep-in



Hornsey students last night ready for a three-day siege behind locked gates



I was a student in London 1965-68, but was at a science college which was very inward looking and conservative. (In contrast to my ex-husband's experience at a red-brick uni which was a hotbed of student unrest.) I was aware of apartheid, civil rights, protests in France etc being in the news, but never did anything about it other than applaud protest songs I'm rather ashamed to say.

*Lyn*

Famine, war and oppression were nothing new, but the now ubiquitous television beamed pictures of starving victims of war into our living rooms. Through **1967to 1970** the shocking pictures of **Biafran** children stunned many of us as war raged in Nigeria and the province of Biafra.



I remember the famine following the Biafran war and how humanitarian aid was withheld and journalists were not allowed in to see what was happening, and how shocking it was. It was the first time I encountered starving people.

Elsewhere in Africa the decade saw the rise of **anti-Apartheid**, especially after the **Sharpeville massacre** in **1960**. In the early 60s the racism which characterised post British Empire life was still alive and well. But all that was going to change in the next couple of decades.



# 1960 Sharpeville Massacre

- In 1960, during a peaceful protest in the city of Sharpeville, 69 people were killed
- This massacre ignited additional demonstrations and protests against the unfair treatment of non-whites



I remember the headmaster at my grammar school inviting a speaker from the South African Embassy to justify apartheid, and some friends and myself mounted a protest. This was just after the Sharpeville massacre. We were called up to the head's study the following day and lectured on how the bible justified the separation of the races.

*Sue*

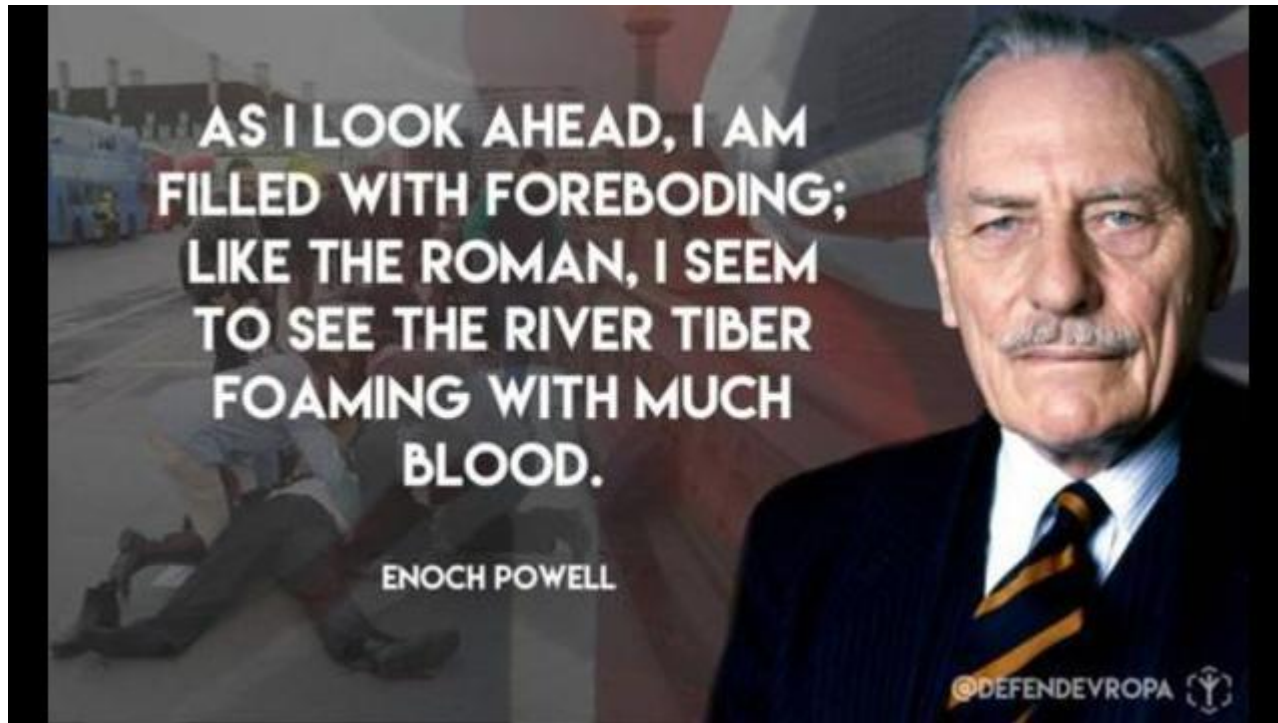


And **Rhodesia** (now Zimbabwe) was also remembered by some of our respondents – Ian Smith declaring Unilateral Declaration of Independence for his apartheid state in **1965**.

I remember Rhodesia declaring independence in November, 1965 and being shocked to think there was such an attitude towards black people – although in my childhood it had been the poor black people who I collected money for to send missionaries overseas. The issues of apartheid and the black segregation in the USA were part of what we discussed at home and University.

*Kate*

Here in Britain in **1968** the apotheosis of racism – **Enoch Powell** - made his now infamous speech – “The black man will have the whip hand over the white man” –shockingly calling to mind the imagery of slavery.



...and we had our own home-grown racism

Behind the so-called iron curtain **1968** was also a momentous year. Many of us remembered the **Prague spring** and the Russian invasion of **Czechoslovakia** as a result.



The other big event was the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Russians after the Prague spring and the coming to power of Dubcek, who was a liberal. A friend of my mother's, Marian Slingova, was married to Czech Otto Sling who was imprisoned and executed for being a dissident in the 1950s. Their son Jan was imprisoned after the events of 1968, but they got out and not long afterwards she and her son came to live in London. My mother had always been an apologist for the Soviet Union until that point, but this was the thing that changed her view.

*Sue*



Russian tanks in Prague

**1967** saw another world changing event – the 6 day war in **Israel/Palestine**. Israel took over the West Bank of the River Jordan, Gaza and the Golan Heights from Jordan, Egypt and Syria respectively, and also entered the Old City of Jerusalem. A triumphant Moishe Dayan marched his troops through the city.

I remember in Finchley where I lived, which had a large Jewish population, shops putting up posters of Moshe Dayan with his famous eye patch.

*Sue*



Jerusalem 1967 – Israelis enter the old city

My family were invited to a Jewish wedding of a cousin in 1967, just after the 6 day war, and when the Israeli anthem was played my father refused to stand up.

*Sue*

**Northern Ireland** began its own struggle for civil rights in the late 60s. Catholics were barred from many of the best jobs and suffered intimidation from Ulstermen, especially during the marching season. The Bogside in Derry, the Catholic area outside the walled town where Bloody Sunday shocked the world some years later, still boasts large murals reminding us of those days.

Talking politics with my parents usually led to rows and bad feelings – they were Ulster Unionists,

Tories and illiberal whereas I was a supporter of the United Ireland cause, left wing and liberal minded.

*Gordon*





British soldiers in Belfast



And finally .....

To finish on what many women felt was the most positive note of the decade, we have the most vibrant, far reaching and arguably successful civil rights movements of the post 1960s world – the women's movement. The starting gun was fired at the **Miss World contest** in **1970** – I hear soon to be part of a feature film.

WE'RE NOT  
BEAUTIFUL  
WE'RE NOT  
UGLY.  
WE'RE  
ANGRY

WHY MISS WORLD?  
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One thing is clear, as the 1960s came to a close, we knew the world was never going to be the same.