

COMMUNISM
THE LABOUR PARTY
AND THE LEFT

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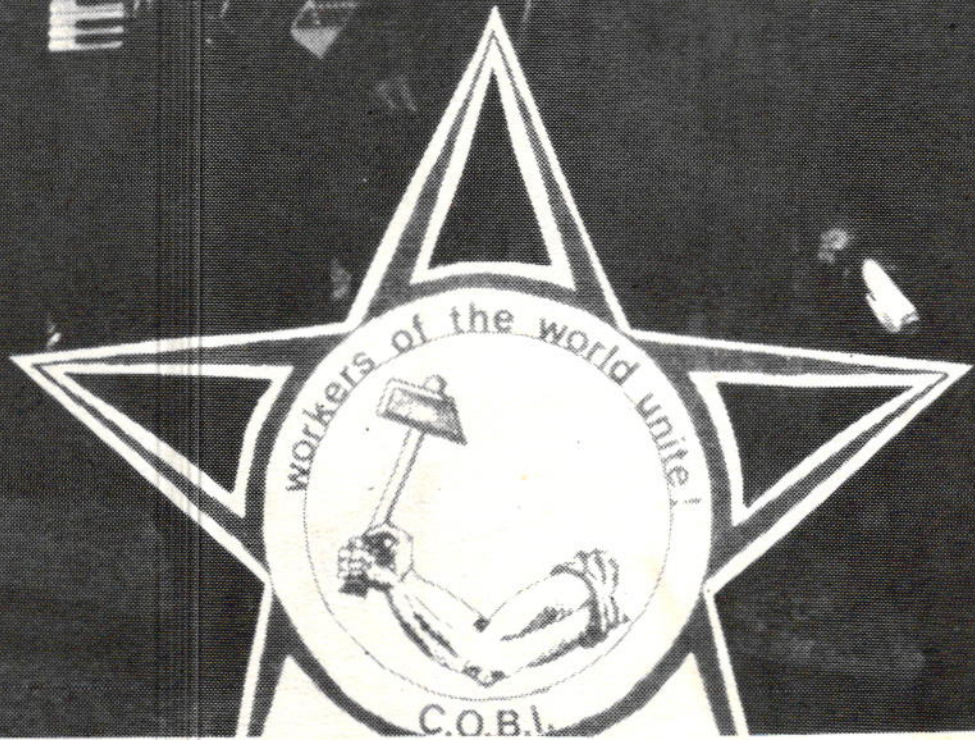
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WHAT IS THE COMMUNIST ORGANISATION IN THE BRITISH ISLES?

- 1) COBI is a Marxist-Leninist collective, formed on 1st January, 1974, in secession from the British and Irish Communist Organisation, now become revisionist. Its purpose is to integrate Marxist-Leninist theory with the concrete conditions prevailing in the British Isles, and, guided by this concrete development of Marxism-Leninism, to promote the development of communist politics among the working class of the British Isles. It aims, through its activities, to help bring about political and ideological conditions in which the formation of a new communist party in the British Isles will be a meaningful step in the development of communist politics as a link in the chain of proletarian internationalism.
- 2) We take the natural economic unit of the British Isles as the area of our organisation and oppose any attempts by bourgeois or populist nationalism to fragment working-class organisation within the above economic unit. We resolutely base ourselves on the proletariat of the whole British Isles without exception. As a European state develops, we shall extend ourselves accordingly.
- 3) In terms of the development and strength of its economic organisation, the working-class of the British Isles is second to none in the capitalist world; its political and ideological development is, however, much less advanced. In particular it lacks its own political party. Without such a party, a real communist party, it will be unable to decisively defeat the capitalist class, build socialism and advance to communism.
- 4) The history of the struggle to build such a party in the British Isles has largely been one of failure. The conspicuous exception to this was the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain, whose emblem COBI has adopted, and whose valuable experience we intend to assimilate.
- 5) A major reason for this failure has been the inability of revolutionaries in Britain to make a complete break with capitalist ideology; their failure to break with the pragmatist outlook of the British capitalist class has led them to underestimate the importance of the Marxist-Leninist theory of scientific socialism. Without the guidance of this theory there can be no communist politics.
- 6) For these reasons COBI takes as its immediate tasks: the application of communist theory to the conditions of the British Isles, and ideological struggles against opportunist distortions of communism, such as modern revisionism and Trotskyism.
- 7) COBI demands the maximum ideological unity amongst its members. All members, in addition to engaging in practical work, must improve their understanding of scientific socialism and contribute to the ideological struggle. Nobody will be admitted to full membership of the organisation unless they have demonstrated their commitment to the class struggle and their understanding of scientific socialism.
- 8) To supplement the efforts of its full membership, COBI encourages a wider group of associate members to work in cooperation with it.

For full elucidation of these premises see Proletarian No.1, and if you wish to know more about COBI contact:

J. Maisels,
3/8, May Court,
Edinburgh EH4 4SD.

COMMUNISM AND ELECTIONS

Parliamentary elections are the high point of the political process in a democratic capitalist state. The election of February 1974 was thus significant not because of the repercussions which its result produced within the bourgeois political system, but also for the light that the advent of the election shed upon the politics of the various political groups to the left of the Labour Party. These groups were forced to respond to the election, and in so doing, to clarify and justify their attitude towards parliamentary politics in general and the Labour Party in particular.

From these groups there emerged two main lines on the question. The main body of the Left, the CPGB and the Trotskyist groups called on workers to vote for the Labour Party. In opposition to this the much smaller Marxist-Leninist groups and the anarchists denounced the election as a diversion from the class struggle, and advocated a boycott. On this issue COBI definitely supports the latter line. It considers that currently a call to support the Labour Party is an opportunist distortion of communist politics.

For communists the question of what line to take over bourgeois elections is not one of principle but one of tactics. There are certain circumstances in which communists would be justified in participating in parliamentary elections themselves, or in calling for support for reformist candidates.

1) Under conditions in which a large, but not yet predominant, section of the working class have been won to the support of communist politics, the communist party might enter a united front with the reformists. The objective in this would be to unite the working masses in defence of their immediate interests and, by demonstrating the duplicity of the reformists, to wean the more backward sectors of the masses away from reformist politics. It is evident that none of the preconditions for such a front hold in Britain today; no genuine communist party even exists, nor do substantial sections of workers support communist politics.

2) If the proletariat's basic democratic rights were being threatened by a growing fascist movement, then the need to use all forms of struggle to defend the workers' right to organise themselves freely could justify support for all consistent anti-fascist parties. This situation does not presently exist, nor did it at the time of the election.

3) Communists do not hesitate to use any tactics which increase the combativity and political consciousness of the masses, and shift the balance of class forces in favour of the working class. If the election of a reformist government would extend and intensify the class struggle to the benefit of the working class, would unite the masses and would weaken the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, then communists would be bound to support its election. For this to be the case, however, the programme of the reformists must amount to a prolongation of popular struggles and aspirations, and the reformists must be consistent in their support for workers' struggles. This is seldom the case. Under most circumstances the Social Democrats and their ilk are the firemen of capitalism.

If, on the other hand, far from being an extension of popular aspiration and struggle, the reformist programme is an instrument for their reintegration into the existing order; if, as usual, the reformists constantly equivocate and shy away from supporting the masses in their struggle; if they seek to divide the masses whilst uniting the 'nation', then their election does not promise any significant development of the class struggle in favour of the proletariat, and communists have no business supporting them. At best, communists can enable the working class to avoid the negative experience of relying on the reformists and subsequently being betrayed by them. If communists are too weak to achieve this, then at least they can give a clear warning of the futility of relying on the election of a reformist government to deliver the goods.

On the terms outlined above, it is clear that the Labour Party did not meet the conditions for communist support in the election. In any general election it is the duty of communists to denounce parliament as a sham. Such a denunciation, however, is futile if it takes place in the abstract. It is futile if it is not related to the main form of parliamentarism prevalent among those sections of the masses accessible to communist propaganda or agitation. The attack on parliamentarism must be closely linked to the way in which belief in parliament currently sabotages the interests of the workers. During a general election the chief way in which this occurs is through the entraining of the energy, militancy, and emotions of sections of advanced workers into support for the Labour Party. Under these circumstances the general attack on the bourgeoisie must be closely linked to an attack upon the Labour Party in particular.

We will now examine the justifications used by those who supported the Labour Party in the election.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The CPGB's 1974 election manifesto argued that 3 aims needed to be achieved: "A Tory defeat, the winning of a Labour Government, and the return of communist MPs". The way to do this, they argued, was to vote for their policies which "would cope with today's problems and at the same time open the way to socialism which alone can provide a lasting solution to the crisis". In the event the CP achieved only those aims which it shared with the Labour Party; even the much-vaunted Jimmy Reid did disappointingly badly. In the general elections of the 1950s and 1960s, it could generally be said that if Labour did well, so did the CP. Why the difference now? The answer is to be found partly in the particular reformist parliamentary policies that the CP adopted in February.

An examination of what the CP was offering the working class suggests that it had totally failed to distinguish what it claimed were communist policies from those of the Labour Party. It had also failed to take into account the leftward moves made by the Labour Party during its period in opposition. The CP's 1974 policy is strikingly similar to what it offered in 1970 and thus, even in parliamentary terms, inappropriate.

Because the CP posits no effective communist policy for moving forward, it presents the Tories as "wreckers, the enemies of democracy, parading their red bogey as a screen to hide their vicious attacks on democratic rights". By contrast, the CP can thus present itself, having distorted the Tory position, as the champions of standing still. "Communist MPs and a big communist vote are needed", we are told, in order to "extend and defend our democratic rights". This is a further deliberate confusion. The Industrial Relations Act and Phase III did not represent fundamental breaches of orthodox bourgeois policy, and hence creeping authoritarianism. The adoption of similar measures by the other bourgeois democratic party in 1964-70 shows this -- (a party which the CP was now asking workers to support). These measures represent tactics used in the struggle between wages and profits, rather than a fundamental shift in the form of Bourgeois class rule. And because they represent this, the trade union ideology of the majority of the working class has shown itself quite capable of defending itself against the IRAct and In Place Of Strife. The Labour Party recognised in the 1970-74 period that such industrial legislation is counterproductive, since it antagonises the very supporters on whom a successful prices and incomes policy depends. So instead, it has gone for the Social Contract with the unions.

A communist analysis would have spelt this out, and more, at the time of the election. But the CP was more interested in fighting previous battles, battles which the industrial strength of the dockers and the miners and other trade unionists had shown could be won without any help from Communist or left-Labour MPs.

The CP's attitude to the Tories' anti-communist propaganda during the election campaign amounts to more deliberate confusion. For the CP the red scare was not something to respond aggressively to -- instead the accusation "reds" is something they deny; and they then try to turn the tables on the Tories, by saying that it is the Tories who are making attacks on democracy. They would of course involve very real restrictions of the rights of the bourgeoisie. But the CP tries to evade this nasty issue, since it does not fit in very nicely with their peaceful road to socialism. They avoid the issue in two ways.

Firstly, they construct, just as the Tory and Labour parties do, a "national interest". Then like the Labour Party they define this as the vast majority of the nation. This for the CP conveniently avoids the necessity for spelling out the essential conflict of long term interests between the working class and the bourgeoisie. (The Tories' use of the term National Interest is in fact much more accurate. All the while that you have a system of national capitalism, there is a genuine national interest in the short run, which binds both workers and capitalists in ensuring that the system is as productive and united as possible. Class conflict is permitted at the economic level, so long as it does not threaten the system politically. The way to undermine the ideology of the national interest is, of course, to attack it politically, but this the CP refuses to do, preferring to redefine terms in a schoolboys' game.)

Secondly, it prevents any understanding of the "national interest", by identifying the wreckers of the national interest with the Tories and "the profits and power of the big businessmen, bankers and property speculators they represent." They thus extract the economic class which has an interest in keeping the capitalist system going, and substitute for it a small group of politically motivated men. And on the other side, representing apparently the real "national interest", are arranged (following the indiscriminate class alliance spelt out in *The British Road To Socialism*) "workers, pensioners, students, professional people, small shopkeepers, farmers and manufacturers; all are victims of the Tories' disastrous policies" (emphasis added!) But this economic class (whatever the current differences between Lord Stokes and the property speculators) is a bourgeoisie with common interests, which in general have been furthered by successive governments, both Labour and Tory. So the CP gets itself into the position of pretending that the Tories represent only big business and not the maintenance of the capitalist system itself. Today the Tories are merely mainly the representatives of big business; they are also representatives of other categories and strata of the capitalist class: strata which the CP would pretend are somehow anti-capitalist.

Because the CP likes to "explain" things by constructing the Tories as the devil outside the system, rather than the espousers of the system itself, they are led to misrepresent entirely the fundamental facts of the current system.

The most significant of these misrepresentations is the lie about profits -- the motive force of capitalism. On the one hand we are told that the Tories are making "bigger and bigger profits"; on the other, that the Tories have made a bad situation worse by stopping investment and modernisation in British industry. The latter is true, the former false, mere propaganda to get you onto the populist anti-Tory bandwagon. The missing link is the fact that investment has been poor because the rate of profit has been unacceptably low of late. The CP's solution to this is really remarkable, and once again reveals the ideology of national interest and national capitalism with which it is infected.

The answer is: 1) that bigger wage claims must be made and a Labour government elected to "operate policies that will begin to bite into the profits of big business"; and 2) that "private investment overseas which is today running at over £1200m a year should be halted." So on the one hand the CP is actively, through its trade union wage struggle, advocating policies which will bite into profits, whilst on the other hand advocating measures to stabilise profits through a retrenched national capitalism. But the bourgeoisie and the social-democrats simply do not need such contradictory advice from the CP. The TUC has in fact had for years a policy which far more realistically takes account

of the realities of international capitalism and the EEC in particular, advocating temporary restraint and less counterproductive measures to reduce capital outflow, greater control of investment in return for certain restrictions of wage demands; the whole being conditional on various political concessions on the part of the government. Once again the CP ignores the fact that the Labour Party have a viable short term policy for capitalism. So when the CP advocates its extreme version of the Labour policy it merely appears (1) contradictory; (2) deceitful in dressing up its wages policy which is designed to cause economic collapse, as a policy to help investment; and (3) merely to have an irrational feeling of envy about profits. (An openly Luddite policy, while no more successful, would at least be more honest.) These economic policies, far from "opening the way to socialism", would simply throw a spanner in the working of capitalism (were they ever acted upon), without enabling a proletarian machine to be built. Such dishonesty will never work and never has in the past.

The CP's abysmal failure to explain how capitalism works -- let alone how to get rid of it -- is emphasised again here: "The economic crisis, the attack on wages, the three-day week, poverty, bad housing, and all the other problems of our society are caused by capitalism. So long as 5% of the population own most of the nation's wealth and use it to become richer still at the expense of the majority these problems will get worse." This condemns capitalism not for the Marxist reason that production is for profit not use value, and that because it is a commodity producing society, the distribution of resources depends upon the anarchy of the market rather than being consciously planned in the interests of the working class, but simply for its unequal distribution of wealth. It is in fact quite possible for modern capitalism to use fiscal measures to produce greater equality, yet still remain a commodity producing society with all its inevitable problems. The Labour Party have at least latched onto this, even if the CP has not. Similarly with its attitude to nationalisation the CP makes in the main the same demands as the Labour Party and yet falsely concludes that production for use will somehow inevitably develop. Quite contrary, however, are its claims that the miners' "claim should be met in full", because the commodity they produce happens to be in demand, which is an argument rooted in the premises of the market system. (The miners should of course have been supported but not on these grounds). Nor does the CP envisage there would be any breaking point with regard to nationalisation, preferring to suggest that profitable industry could be taken away from the private owners without resistance. The CP's device is to take over the Labour Party's "shopping list" and then to add a few items onto the end: "Other industries where a monopoly situation prevails should be early candidates for public ownership. Motors, key sectors of engineering, including electrical engineering, chemicals, food, and detergents are obvious examples." Their case for nationalisation is not based on the Marxist case of production for use throughout an economy controlled by and for the working class. It is a mish-mash of complaints against "monopolies" which are not, and against "industries in receipt of large sums of public money" (which is a moral not a Marxist point). Nowhere is a distinction made between those industries which the bourgeoisie would be prepared to see subsidised or taken off its hands altogether, and those which really are crucial to continued bourgeois power and which history shows they will struggle to keep. Once again the Labour Party shows itself to be more in touch with reality in identifying the current nationalisation measures necessary for the economic reorganisation and rationalisation of British capitalism. Neither has the Labour Party avoided the question, as the CP has, of how it is going to effect the transition -- through Parliament, the NEB and the vacillating desires of the floating voter. The CP has characteristically avoided the thorny problem of the political means of putting through a thoroughgoing programme for an economy based upon the socially planned production of use values. They do not see the mass of the working class as being involved, since they confine its role to the maintenance of free collective bargaining in the wages struggle. And if they propose no means of effecting their programme, the CP can hardly be surprised when the workers vote for the more realistic programme of the Labour Party, and the reliance upon MPs to do the job. For workers have been asked by the CP to

"make your vote tell", not to "make your organised power tell".

After giving the political job to the MPs, left Labour and communist, the CP gives the working class the task of maintaining collective bargaining. Thus they say: "there should be no incomes policy voluntary or otherwise. Experience shows that under capitalism incomes policy means cuts in real wages and increased profits." This last assertion is false for two reasons. First, it assumes that if the mass of profits is to be increased, then the capitalist class must necessarily force down the level of real wages. In fact, as Marx showed in part IV of the first volume of Capital, the development of the forces of production enables the capitalist class to increase the proportion of national income that goes as profits, without real wages falling, or even while real wages are rising. Second, it suggests that without making a fetish of free collective bargaining the working class is unable to defend its living standards. But recent history shows that the working class has the power to resist the erosion of living standards by exercising its might in the economic struggle, whether or not the government imposes an incomes policy. For this, the trade union response has always proved adequate. The greater danger to workers' living standards comes from the Labour Party, whom the CP told us to vote for, and their 'social contract'. It is the political arguments, put forward by the CP and others, for supporting Labour that have given a boost to the chances of the 'social contract' working. In return for phoney concessions on property speculators, taxing the rich, and repeal of the IRAct, (concessions which in no way defend or improve working class living or cultural standards or the possibilities of raising political consciousness) workers are now being asked to restrain their wage demands. The concessions are now being asked for by that very sort of Labour Government, the "new sort of Labour Government" full of Benms and Foots, which the CP was calling for at the last election.

The CP's disagreements with the Labour Party stem partly from tradition, and partly from its industrial basis. But it will not be able to undermine "social contracts" and social democracy if it has no positive political perspective, in which working class economic power can be used. The demand for independent trades unions cannot be compromised upon from a communist point of view, but this is by no means the same as confining the economic struggle to free collective bargaining, as the CP does. (And not the least damaging is the CP's refusal to come clean on what has been happening to profits in the UK economy).

More important is the light which this sheds on the CP's perspective for socialism. It offers nothing but "free collective bargaining", an extension of public ownership and a parliament of Left-Labour and communist MPs. Strikingly absent is the Marxist perspective of organised workers' strength in industry and society for proletarian political objectives, against both social democratic state capitalism and laissez faire.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

In view of the fact that in the pages of the Socialist Worker the Tories had long ago replaced capitalism itself as the number one enemy of the workers, the response of IS to the election was predictable well in advance. After having set up the Tories as the principal villain, their election reflex could only be to cry out for their ejection. The IS were caught on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand their theory tells them that the Labourites are just as much agents of capitalism as are the Tories; the IS, to be fair, know that both will follow anti-working class policies. On the other hand, anti-Toryism remains the spontaneous form of political consciousness of much of the British working class; so, good tailists that they are, the IS are not willing to go against any spontaneous response, even though this 'spontaneous response' is no more than an expression of the spontaneous domination of the working class by capitalist (populist) ideology. IN ANY CLASS SOCIETY THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY IS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE RULING CLASS. The political consciousness of the oppressed class always spontaneously expresses itself in a form that is limited by this ideology of

the ruling class. This ideology can only be expelled from its dominant position by class struggle, in particular ideological struggle. Until this occurs, there is a genuine contradiction between the political interests of the working class and its political consciousness. The contradiction will only be resolved when the working class ceases to support the Labour Party. The IS, however, in an opportunist manner typical of them, tried to have it both ways. They called for a Labour vote: so taking advantage of the anti-Tory bandwagon. At the same time they recognised that "A Labour government elected in 2 weeks time would be forced to act in very much the same way as the Tories" (SW Feb 16), and so were able to salve their theoretical consciences. The opposition between the theory and the practical prescription was apparently quite acceptable.

Their position was explained in more detail in the Feb 23 issue of Socialist Worker:

"A Labour victory does not mean socialism or even social reform, it does mean a government which in the short run at least, will find it harder to impose Tory policies and it means testing in practice yet again the claims of the Labour Party leaders. There is no other real choice. Vote Labour in spite of Wilson! Vote Labour in spite of its policies! Kick out the Tories carry on the fight!"

We will leave aside the suggestion that the Labourites will find it "harder to impose Tory policies". They do not intend to impose Tory policies, but they will impose ruling class policies; and because ruling class policies imposed by the "workers' own party" are less obvious than ruling class policies imposed by the Tories, they may even have slightly more chance of succeeding. Here, not for the first time in their history, the IS confuse a political party with an economic class, in this case the Tory party is substituted for the capitalist class.

Of more significance than this is what they have to say about testing in practice the claims of the Labour leaders. This is the traditional Trotskyist justification for voting Labour: voting Labour to expose Labour, voting Labour to expose Labour leaders. This of course is a parody of the position Lenin put forward in 1920. It ignores the fact that the most politically conscious workers have now been taught by successive Labour governments to put little faith in such governments as the defenders of the workers' interest. Post-war experience suggests to many workers that, judged by economic criteria alone, Tory governments have been able to deliver higher living standards to sections of the working class than have Labour. The justification for voting Labour has disappeared among these workers, especially after Barbara Castle's 'In Place Of Strife' of 1969, and the fall in living standards in the 1966-70 period. The memories of these workers is not that short.

The lesson to be drawn from the period is exactly the opposite to the one that IS draws. The lesson is: that a Labour government, because it is supposed to be the government of the workers' own party, has a much better chance than have the Tories of getting away with anti-working class measures. In 1970 the healthy anti-Labour sentiments of the trades unionists who had resisted 'In Place Of Strife' led to the return of the Tories. Labour, coming into power after a period of Tory confrontation with the unions, may find it that much easier, not harder, to impose policies in the interests of the ruling class, given the level of consciousness of the majority of the working class. BUT IT IS THE MILITANT MINORITY OF THE WORKING CLASS WHOSE CONSCIOUSNESS IS IMPORTANT AND TO WHICH IS AND THE REST OF THE LEFT SHOULD BE ADDRESSING THEMSELVES. Unless this minority is first brought to adopt a communist consciousness, there is no prospect of it spreading to wider sections. IS mistakes, however, the consciousness of the average worker, who will vote Labour anyway (the workers IS does not influence in any case), for the consciousness of the leading sections of the working class. It is this leading section, whose lost faith in Labour IS are now trying in effect to restore. The slogan that the IS addresses to these left wing trades unionists is therefore contemptuous of their current

political consciousness and antagonistic to its further development. These workers, who are led by their trade union activities into struggle and away from social democracy, are being directed right back towards it by the IS. On the other hand, the less politically aware majority of workers will vote Labour in any case, but not for the tactical reason that IS advocates. This majority will vote Labour because of simplistic anti-Toryism, and the belief that Labour could not do worse in the present situation than the Tories have done over the last 4 years.

A thorough examination of the Labour Party economic programme would suggest in any case that the instinct of these voters (the relatively backward sections of workers) is correct in voting for Labour's short term economic progress. Labour can, with the help of the TUC leaders run the country without the Tories' confrontation, disruption, and lost production. The return of Labour does bring with it the possibility of a voluntary incomes policy, action against property speculators, increasing nationalisation, taxing the rich. This is exactly the mood that Wilson managed to capture for the last election, the mood of the average Labour voter. Labour has learned enough from the 1964-70 experience and the 1970 defeat to do exactly this. So, even by the targets it sets itself, the IS advocacy of a Labour vote is incorrect. For an organisation such as IS in its present position, its theoretical shortcomings and lack of trenchant political analysis is epitomised by its simple economist slogan "carry on the fight".

These were not the only contradictions into which the IS got themselves through their "vote Labour" line. After pointing out that "Labour is as much committed to keeping capitalism intact as the Tories. It will be forced to take the same sort of measures to deal with capitalism's crisis." They then follow this up by saying "But one thing will hinder the Labour politicians in their efforts to copy Tory methods -- a massive Labour vote. For such a vote would mean a rejection of the argument that workers are to blame for the crisis. It will make much more difficult any attempts by a Labour government to shift the blame onto workers' organisations." This argument is so patently ridiculous, such an affront to any standard of reason or logic, that one would think that even members of a notoriously philistine organisation such as IS would begin to doubt the mental competence of their leaders. A massive Labour vote is the absolute precondition for the Labour Party to be able to imitate the Tories. Without a big Labour vote, Labour would not get a majority of MPs, without which they cannot form a stable government. Unless they are the government they cannot begin to copy Tory methods. If Labour is to get a chance of copying the Tories, a big Labour vote is just what they need. A big Labour vote would, moreover, be taken by Wilson and Company as a mandate, as a proof that they had the "confidence of the Nation" behind them. With this Clear Mandate, they would feel justified in taking any measures that they saw to be in the 'National Interest'. And from their past record it does not take much effort to imagine what they would think was in the National Interest: attacks on the working class. To say that one thing will hinder the Labour Party in its attempt to imitate the Tories, and then say the one thing is a vote for the Labour Party is the epitome of misleadership. What will in fact hinder the Labourites in their attempts to attack the working class is the same thing that hindered the Tories in their attempts to impose the Industrial Relations Act: and that is class struggle.

Not content to call on their supporters to vote Labour, IS gave Wilson a few tips on how to win the election. He should, they said, take up the Tory challenge and fight the election on clear class lines. Apparently since 70% of the population are, according to IS, working class, this would ensure a Labour victory. This assertion is nothing but pure voluntarism. IS do not specify just what 70% of the population being working class means. But however they arrived at this particular statistical artifact, it is of no use for predicting election results. At the most it means that 70% of the population belong to certain occupational categories; but since when has this been an adequate indicator of voting behaviour?

Even if 70% of the population belong to families of wage earners, it by no means follows that they are all economically proletarians, (for some are unproductive wage labourers, e.g. workers in commerce or banking), still less does it follow that they think of themselves, or act politically, as members of the working class. In a capitalist society, unlike feudal or slave society, individuals are not 'officially' assigned membership of any particular class. Slaves were recognised as slaves by the laws of slave society; their legal status was quite different from that of their masters. They were things not men in the eyes of the law. Similarly, feudal law and custom bound the serf to the land and to his lord. His class position was clearly demarcated. But capitalist law treats the wage slave as the equal of his master. The employee is subordinated to the capitalist not by the laws of the state, but by the laws of economics. He is a wage labourer because all that he has to sell is his labour power. In capitalist economics, workers do not appear as members of a subject class, but just as the sellers of a particular commodity -- labour. As the seller of a commodity he is the equal of any other commodity seller.

Capitalist political and legal ideology reflect commodity production in that they treat people as formally equals. They give rise to notions of people as free individuals, citizens equal before the law, electors, each of whose votes carry the same weight. This ideology is not only promoted by the mass media, but like any ideology has some basis in social practice which tends to lend it credence. Heath too has only one vote; Poulson when discovered must suffer the full severity of the 'Law', and, of course, his fate is well publicised. This equality before the law has its consequences. As a result, in a bourgeois society people are individualised, atomised and separated from one another. Society appears as a mass of conflicting private interests. Opposed to this, only the state and the rule of law appear to stand independent, above private contestation, acting as neutral referee between interest groups. The bourgeois democratic state, which is in fact a form of capitalist dictatorship, can in this way be made to appear as the representative of the General Will of the people, in opposition to selfish private interests. Its status as the representative of the public interest is periodically confirmed by elections in which the various political parties, as the representatives of the various sectors of the 'public opinion', compete. The winning party becomes the government, guardian of the general interest and of national unity; the bourgeois dictatorship has been legitimised by its "democratic" process.

Capitalist political and legal ideology arose on the social basis of commodity production, on the basis of contracts between private producers. With the dominance of commodity production over the whole of society, a state structure arises which is supported by, and in its turn supports, that ideology, the result of which is to generalise the outlook of the commodity producer. Capitalist law and representative democracy tends to give everybody the outlook of bourgeois individualism.

It only tends to do this, it does not always succeed. The formalities of capitalist law are confronted by the realities of the class struggle. In their struggles the working class develop values of mutuality, solidarity and collectivism in opposition to the individualism and egoism of the bourgeoisie. But the capitalist class still has great advantages: it has on its side all the dead weight of historical inertia -- the dead weight of customary beliefs and acts going back into feudalism (e.g. respect for "rank"); especially pronounced in Britain where the bourgeois revolution was fought out in the superstructure in metaphysical (religious) and not explicitly political terms; where it was not fought out to the logical conclusion of the bourgeois republic, but where traditional and new ruling class saw that, in fact, each was better off with, rather than without, the other, and so fused into a united class, which could be both dynamic and stable.

Not only the laws and official state institutions, but also capitalist forms of personal existence such as the institutions of the family, and private life in general, generate their own brand of individualism; consumerism. The

consumer of commodities, like their producer, is always an individualist. The proletarian values of collectivism and solidarity, on the other hand, need to be nourished in the class struggle, without which they wither. But at most times and for the majority of workers struggle is intermittent and occasional. In addition, most women do not participate actively in the class struggle: individuated as housewives and consumers they are easy prey to capitalist ideology.

As a result of the ideological, legal and constitutional structure of capitalist society, any electoral party which presents itself as a class party will do badly in the elections. The ideological system which presents the state as the representative of society as a whole, serving the interest of the nation as opposed to private individuals, results in any party which claims to represent a class, rather than the whole nation, appearing to the general public as the representative of narrow, sectional, private interests and not the proper guardians of a "public interest" supposed to embrace commonly an amorphous citizenry.

So long as political activity is constrained within the framework of parliamentary democracy, this framework exerts an immense pressure on electors, even those who are economically workers, to vote against any party which puts 'narrow, sectional interests above those of the nation as a whole'. To be able to resist this pressure electors must repudiate their loyalty to the nation in favour of loyalty to their class. But, if this degree of class consciousness existed, we would be in an immediately pre-revolutionary situation and this certainly was not the case during the last election.

For IS to tell Wilson how to win elections is like the Pope telling the Devil how to sin. A born opportunist like Wilson would have few qualms about fighting elections on class lines, if he saw some personal advantage in it. Wilson, however, has a much clearer understanding of the workings of the electoral system than the IS appear to have, so he realises that to fight on class terms would be political suicide. If he had gone along with the IS advice the swing to the Liberals would have been a landslide.

This voluntarist attitude to elections is only one aspect of the personalisation of politics that is endemic to the IS. Lacking a consistent dialectical materialist standpoint, the IS repeatedly fall back into attributing political developments to the personal characteristics of individuals. They explain the conduct of the Labour election campaign in terms of the treachery of the Labour leaders, rather than as the result of the bourgeois electoral system, which makes such conduct inevitable. This personalisation is exemplified by a series of 8 articles appearing in their paper on Feb 23rd. The cover of the issue bore the heading: "Ugly Face Of Toryism", "Eight pages inside on the Heath record", set next to a picture of Heath with his nose held up in the air. With this combination, IS managed to depoliticise Heath's own phrase: "the unpleasant and unacceptable face of capitalism". For the IS it would appear that the face is just ugly not unacceptable -- and if we are to take their symbolism at face value, what they object to is Ted Heath's face, not the capitalist system. In their propaganda, the IS have a tendency to reduce capitalism to Toryism and that party to its most visible leading members. The politics that flow from this are inevitably moralist, not Marxist. It neither helps workers understand capitalism, nor does it present workers with any course of political action other than voting Labour, and most workers would do this anyway.

Far from going all out to smash any constitutional illusions that their followers might have, IS actually support constitutional notions and secret hopes in the Labour Party. Quite independent of the IS and their ilk, the masses have become increasingly cynical of the fraudulent charade that passes for politics in this society. Politicians with their protestations, posturings and cheap false promises are coming to be regarded with contempt. Participation in voting has been declining -- in 1970, 11½ million did not even bother to vote. Insofar as the poll rose in 1974, it was only after an election called

in what the press did their best to portray as an atmosphere of high crisis, and after an unprecedented barrage of propaganda over the TV night after night for weeks. In the face of this general decay of electoral politics, what did the IS do?

Did they attempt to guide this impotent, half-formed rejection of bourgeois democracy towards the positive alternative of proletarian dictatorship?

OF COURSE NOT! Terrified by the decline in support for the Labour Party, they pulled out all the stops in a desperate effort to corral workers back into the party fold. Their national committee statement on the election is almost entirely devoted to urging support for Labour. Only in its last two paragraphs does it offer any alternative.

"But while the system is left intact, the symptoms of the crisis will recur and the pressure for workers to bear the burden will grow, prices will continue to shoot upwards and governments will keep trying to hold back wages. No amount of tampering with the system can change this. Only a complete revolutionary transformation of society can do so, with the taking of economic power away from the ruling class and organising production for need not for profit.

"But such a transformation demands more than voting Labour or militant strike action -- it demands above all the building of a mass revolutionary movement. That movement does not yet exist, but we have to build towards it. So while fighting for a Labour victory we have to build up our efforts to build a real alternative, a revolutionary workers' party, by arguing the full blooded socialist case."

The first 3 sentences of this are correct in sentiment, if imprecise, (for instance inflation is just one possible expression of capitalist contradictions). It is also true that capitalist crisis can only be solved by the revolutionary transformation of society with production for need not for profit. When the IS reduce this revolutionary transformation of society to the taking of economic power away from the ruling class, they are, however, committing a serious political error. The revolutionary transformation of society, i.e. the smashing of capitalist social relations and the building of socialist relations, requires three types of revolution: economic, political, and cultural revolutions. Of these the IS mentions only the economic -- the taking of economic power away from the ruling class. But the economic revolution cannot be the first of the three revolutions. This first revolution must be the political revolution, which involves the smashing of the capitalist state, and the establishment of a workers' dictatorship. Unless the political power of the capitalists has been smashed, the working class will be unable to take over capital's economic power. The destruction of capitalist political power requires the violent overthrow of the existing state. At no point in the IS national committee's statement is the need for revolutionary violence, and a workers' dictatorship, made clear. Instead all that they say is required is the building of a mass revolutionary movement, which they later equate with the building of a revolutionary workers' party (presumably IS). If the actions of the IS are anything to go by, this revolutionary party would have as its main activities: organising militant strike action, and persuading people to vote Labour -- apart that is, from recruiting more members. This is certainly not what the revolutionary transformation of society "demands above all". A revolutionary party is of course required, but it is not an end in itself. It is no use unless it educates the working class as to the need for the proletarian dictatorship, and organisationally prepares the working class for the seizure of state power, by formulating strategy from its theoretical work. As Lenin once said:

"To confine Marxism to the doctrine of class struggle means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what constitutes the most profound difference between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well

as big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which real understanding of and recognition of Marxism is to be tested..." (State and Revolution).

But to confine Marxism to the doctrine of class struggle is just what the IS national committee statement does. In substance all that they propose is the militant prosecution of existing forms of struggle, and those take place without the existence of IS anyway. So no simple change of line or tactics can liberate IS from Economism and hopeless tailism; for these derive from the (eclectic) bases upon which IS is constituted. Thus IS cannot, and will not, be able to offer the proletariat meaningful class leadership. The IS are bound to remain cheerleaders and populist moralists, as long as they remain the IS.

The IS proclaim themselves to be followers of Trotsky; whether or not this claim is justified we are not interested in disputing. However, they also claim to be Leninists. But their line on the election, which totally failed to emphasise what for Leninism is the crucial strategic question that must be presented at elections -- the dictatorship of the proletariat -- indicates that they have abandoned Leninist strategy, even if they had ever adhered to it in the past (which is doubtful). The way that they play down the strategic aim of proletarian dictatorship in favour of the more forceful prosecution of existing, spontaneous working class practice, shows that they have adopted the standpoint of the notorious revisionist Bernstein whereby: the movement is everything and the aim is nothing (c.f. his "Evolutionary Socialism", 1898).

By urging support for the Labour Party during the elections, they show that they have also abandoned the cardinal principle of Leninist strategy:

"What is the fundamental strategic rule of Leninism?

It is the recognition of the following:

- 1) the compromising parties are the most dangerous social support of the enemies of the revolution in the period of approaching revolutionary outbreak;
- 2) it is impossible to overthrow the enemy unless these parties are isolated;
- 3) the main weapons in the period of preparation for the revolution must therefore be directed at isolating these parties, towards winning the broad masses of the people away from them.

"In the period of the struggle against tsarism, in the period of preparation for the bourgeois democratic revolution (1905-6), the most dangerous social support of tsarism was the liberal monarchist party, the Cadet Party. Why? Because it was the compromising party, the party of compromise between tsarism and the majority of the people, i.e., the peasantry as a whole. Naturally, the Party at that time directed its main blows against the Cadets, for unless the Cadets could be isolated there was no hope of a rupture between the peasantry and tsarism, and unless this rupture was ensured there could be no hope of the victory of the revolution. Many people at that time did not understand this specific feature of Bolshevik strategy and accused the Bolsheviks of "Cadetophobia"; they asserted that with the Bolsheviks the struggle against the Cadets "overshadowed" the struggle against the principle enemy -- tsarism. But these accusations, for which there was no justification, revealed an utter failure to understand the Bolshevik strategy, which called for the isolation of the compromising party in order to facilitate, to hasten the victory over the principal enemy.

"It scarcely needs proof that without this struggle the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois democratic revolution would have been impossible.

"In the period of preparation for October the centre of gravity of the conflicting forces shifted to another plane. The tsar was gone. The Cadet Party had been transformed from a compromising force into a governing force, into the ruling force of imperialism. Now the fight was no longer between tsarism and the people, but between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this period the petty bourgeois democratic parties, the parties of the

Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, were the most dangerous social support of imperialism. Why? Because these parties were then the compromising parties, the parties of compromise between imperialism and the labouring masses. Naturally the Bolsheviks at that time directed their main blows at these parties, for unless these parties were isolated there was no hope of a rupture between the labouring masses and imperialism, and unless this rupture was ensured there could be no hope of victory in the soviet revolution. Many people at that time did not understand this specific feature of Bolshevik tactics and accused the Bolsheviks of "excessive hatred" towards the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and of "forgetting" the principal goal. But the entire period of preparation for October eloquently testifies to the fact that only by pursuing these tactics could the Bolsheviks ensure the victory of the October Revolution." (October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists, Stalin).

At the present moment and at the time of the General Election, which party was the party of compromise between the working class and the bourgeoisie? The Conservative Party or the Labour Party? Clearly it was and is the Labour Party. It was thus against the Labour Party, not the Tories, that Leninists should have directed their main blows. The failure of IS to do this emphasises the gulf which separates their politics from revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, from scientific socialism.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

The IMG line, like that of the IS, was to call on workers to vote Labour (except where Trotskyist candidates were standing).

They are in the same dilemma as the IS; for months they, along with the IS and the CP have been trying to pass off anti-Toryism as socialism. They had called for a general strike to eject the Tories, so that when the Tories resigned without such a strike, the IMG had no option but to call for a Labour vote. But at the same time, the IMG show some awareness of the difficulty of conducting a proletarian politics within the frame of capitalist constitutionalism.

They say that in the event of an election:- "workers will return to the normal routine of home and job, and the Tory lie machines of press and television will get to work on them individually. Workers in this position are far more vulnerable to all the rubbish about the 'rule of law', the 'national interest' and the 'sovereignty of parliament' -- ideas which are supported by the Labour Party leaders and union bureaucrats as well as the Tories -- than are workers united in struggle against all these institutions of capitalist class rule." In order to avoid all of the above occurring the IMG advised that: "Instead of playing into the hands of the Tories and responding to the general election call by halting the struggle, all the struggles should be stepped up. The miners must proceed with their strike. ASLEF should step up their industrial action." Then they advocate a national engineering strike, and round it off with: Other groups in struggle with the Tory government -- such as students -- should take up the opportunity of the election to step up their struggles."

Clearly the IMG are right to call for such struggles to be maintained or developed. If workers had begun such struggles before the election, the election was no reason to give up, or to cancel any new struggles. But the reason that the IMG gave for continuing the struggles was wrong. The main reason for continuing the struggles should have been the defence of workers' living standards, and more importantly, the development of working class initiative and solidarity. Instead of this, the IMG see the main justification for the continuation of the struggles as being the role that these could play in ensuring the Tories' defeat in the general election. There are two things wrong with this. First, a Tory defeat meant a Labour victory, and as we have argued above, this is not a role for communists. Second, if the reason for continuing the struggles was to defeat the Tories at the election, then if it could be shown that continuing the struggles would not help defeat the Tories

at the election, then it follows the struggles should not be stepped up, but abandoned. Thus on the basis of what they said, we would be justified in thinking that the IMG would only want struggles stepped up if that would have weakened the Tories' chances, whilst strengthening those of Labour. If, on the other hand, the escalation of the mass action would have spoilt Labour's chances and helped the Tories, then the logic of the IMG position should have led them to call for these actions to be curbed.

Were the IMG correct in thinking that mass actions help the Labour Party during elections?

We don't think so, and neither does the Labour Party nor academic political scientists at large. Extending the struggle was certainly correct from the viewpoint of the development of class unity amongst those workers who were engaged in struggles already; but its effects on the election would have been favourable to the Tories. Those actually engaged in struggle, i.e. miners and railway workers, would be very unlikely to go out and vote for the Tories even if they did return to work. Miners are hardly renowned as floating voters. On the other hand, when it came to the mass of the electorate, who were not on strike, nor likely to be, then the continuation of the strikes was one of the things that the Tories were counting on to win them the election. Strikes hurt the Labour Party's chances at elections. You can't have it both ways -- you can't use the same tactics to win elections and to develop mass struggles among the working class. Capitalist elections are based on the suppression of class struggle and, in order to develop, the class struggle must step clearly outside the limits imposed by elections and capitalist law and order. If you want to do well in elections it helps if you can suppress the class struggle and avoid public discomfiture, as the Labour Party is only too well aware. So it goes to great lengths in the run up to elections to ensure industrial peace.

In their election manifesto, "Capitalist Crisis and the Struggle for Workers' Power", section 3, the IMG quite clearly point out the impossibility of reaching socialism by using the capitalist state.

"The working class can never advance towards socialism through parliament or the law. Every great working class revolution has always booted parliament aside and moved to replace this capitalist side show with institutions of real working class democracy. The material out of which such institutions can be built already exists. In every big struggle the working class has created its own organisations to carry on the fight.

"In great upsurges like the 1926 General Strike in Britain, or the general strike which swept France in May and June of 1968 the working class actually took over the administration of all aspects of social life through such bodies. In Spain in 1936 workers in parts of the country responded to a military coup of General Franco by taking things into their own hands. They reopened factories that had been shut down and took on unemployed workers to produce for need not for profits; they set up a workers' militia to fight the fascists; and reorganised the whole transport system to move weapons and men to the front.

"This is the way forward for the working class. Instead of relying on the capitalist parliament they should extend and strengthen the organisations that arise out of their own struggle, to lay the foundations for a workers' democracy, a workers' state."

All this is excellent; it presents the working class alternative to the capitalist parliament. Despite this, they repeatedly talk of a 'left wing government' or a 'workers' government', and of what such a government would do if it was in office. But just what do they mean by a workers' government?

A government is the executive body of the state. A workers' government would be

one which governed in the interest of the working class. The question is when the IMG talk of a workers' government, of what type of state does this form the executive?

Clearly a workers' dictatorship would be headed by a workers' government. But a workers' dictatorship can't exist unless the old state machine has been smashed, unless the capitalist class have been politically and militarily defeated within the territory of that state. When the IMG, however, talk of a workers' government they do not say that the formation of such a government must be preceded by the overthrow of the existing state. If the IMG meant that a workers' government must be based on a workers' state then this omission would be inexplicable. Thus we must assume that what they mean is an elected government based upon a parliamentary majority. Despite this they say:

"A workers' government would not base itself upon parliament and the machinery of the capitalist state, but upon the struggle and organisations of the working classes. It would encourage the development of institutions of workers' democracy, only these could give it a firm foundation and permit it to take measures necessary to dismantle the capitalist system and establish a planned economy."

The IMG seemed to be advancing two distinct strategies. The first involved a revolutionary upsurge in which parliament was to be 'booted to one side' and replaced by institutions of workers' democracy. This would of course entail the overthrow of the existing state and government, and their replacement by a proletarian dictatorship. The first strategy is thus for the revolutionary overthrow of the state and its replacement by the soviet form of working class dictatorship. Their second strategy on the other hand seems to involve reliance upon parliamentary means to secure the election of a left wing government. This government would then take measures to dismantle the capitalist system. In order to help it in this task it would 'encourage the formation of institutions of workers' democracy'.

The IMG present these strategies in totally mixed up fashion, not distinguishing one from the other. Even more serious, for a revolutionary organisation, the strategies are not linked to the current situation. How is a workers' government to be formed? which political party will lead it?

No communist could possibly describe a Labour government as a 'workers' government', but in the context in which the IMG manifesto appeared, a Labour government was the only candidate for the title of a 'workers' government'. The manifesto gave the impression that they thought it possible to obtain a workers' government by means of parliamentary elections, which once in office would 'simply' dispense with the apparatuses of the capitalist state, and shift its base onto the new organisations of workers' power that it would call into being. But it is to say the least utterly improbable that the only party capable of forming such a left wing government in the present period -- Labour -- should encourage the formation of institutions of workers' state power and then relinquish its grasp on the state apparatus, in order to lead these organs of workers' power in the dismantling of capitalism. The only recent government to bear any resemblance to the IMG's workers' government was the Allende government in Chile, which was far to the left of the Labour Party, but still showed itself both unwilling and unable to base itself on the mass workers' organisations, which developed under its rule. These organisations incidentally developed spontaneously out of the struggles of the workers; they were not 'encouraged' by the government. The Allende government was both unwilling, and unable, to surrender power to the workers' organisations for fundamental reasons -- overall it was a government of left social democrats, not revolutionary communists; and social democracy is but the reforming wing of capitalism, the agency whereby things change to remain the same. The Allende government was unable to hand over power to the workers' organisations because the old state refused to surrender sovereignty to the new organisations. Further, the state military-bureaucratic caste, in alliance with the ruling class, would not

voluntarily allow itself to be displaced, even if the excrescence of the old regime was prepared to do the displacing. So the old apparatus retained power which was never allowed to fall into the hands of the working class; it was always kept out of reach by the mediation of bourgeois parliamentary procedure and a traditional military elite.

In their manifesto, the IMG could avoid posing the question of state power when they dealt with the concept of a workers' government, basing itself on "institutions of workers' democracy". In practice it is a question that can be avoided only with disastrous results. What when are we to make of this idea of a workers' government as presented by the IMG?

First, it is a strategy with no real basis in the contemporary UK situation. If this were not recognised by those reading the manifesto, it would give rise to illusions that the Labour Party was the potential workers' government -- since this is the only reading that makes any sense. Second, for the IMG to advance speculative schemes about a workers' government does not at all help the principal task of communists during elections, i.e. combat parliamentarism. The shibboleth of a workers' government detracts from what it says about the need to "boot parliament aside", since it gives rise to the impression that the constitutional government would take the initiative in booting. Third, it fails to deal explicitly with the key question of state power and state apparatus.

Whatever their ideas on workers' governments, the IMG gave the election of a Labour government high priority: "the whole election campaign and in particular polling day itself must be the occasion for a massive wave of strikes and demonstrations against the Tory Government. The best situation for an election would be a general strike -- which would pose going beyond parliamentary elections to real workers' elections."

The Trotskyists seem to have a conditional reflex: whenever something is happening politically they respond by calling for a general strike. They present the general strike not so much as a definite tactic, more as a panacea. In this case, they are obviously just engaging in a spot of wishful thinking, not making a serious proposal. There was clearly no chance of the British working class organising a general strike just because the IMG wished to 'pose going beyond parliamentary elections'. Previously, when they had called for a strike to force the government's resignation, they at least had a clear demand or objective around which the strike was to be organised. Once the Tories had resigned the call for a general strike lost what relevance it once had. Besides this a general election would be just about the worse time for a general strike. For a general strike to occur at this time would be to ensure that mass action was speedily diverted into parliamentary politics.

The IMG's final justification for their opportunism over the Labour Party is that a Labour victory "would encourage the fighting spirit and self confidence of the workers' movement", whilst "A victory for the Tories would be a defeat for the working class". This last statement holds, if you believe that there is an identity between the fortunes of social democracy and the interests of the working class. Communists certainly do not believe this to be the case. Over the last few years, the British working class has shown that it does not lack 'fighting spirit' and 'self confidence'. This spirit and self confidence has been displayed and developed in the victorious economic class struggles of recent years. The working class has not allowed itself to be dismayed by the existence of a Tory government. What has encouraged the working class has been the real victories it has won in the heat of struggle. Unlike, it seems, some of our Left, the working class has not needed the type of phoney boost to its self confidence represented by a Labour election victory.

The working class is increasingly feeling, increasingly exerting, its industrial and social power. But these struggles lack coordination and real direction -- they are partial, basically defensive, and even sectarian (as in the cases of e.g. dockers, ASLEF, and the Boilermakers) because the proletariat is still

imbued with the ethos of capitalist normality.

Only a perspective transcending these horizons can enable significant sections of the working class to assert themselves in the interests of their long-term class interests.

As such a chain reaction can only be initiated from without, communists must immediately desist peddling militant populist/constitutionalist notions, make a clean firm break from the capitalist prison of "due process" no matter how admixed, and get at once to grips with putting truly scientific socialism -- Marxism-Leninism -- into the hands of the proletariat.

So long as dabbling with the Labour Party is the core of politics of those groups described above, and their ilk, they will debarr themselves from the building of real proletarian consciousness: in fact, their superficiality will actively obstruct its development.

The following article was the speech made by C.K. Maisels in debate with Nina Stead at a semi-public meeting held at Marx House in October, 1973; i.e., before the formation of COBI.

At the last of the British-section sessions of the B&ICO, of which this debate was one, Cde Maisels proposed the publication of both speeches in the next issue of the Communist. NStead said it would be too difficult to transcribe her speech from tapes, but that she did not object to Cde Maisels' speech being published on its own.

This in fact never happened. On the contrary N Stead suddenly found it possible to transcribe her speech, and it has appeared after heavy cosmetic surgery in the first issue of the B&ICO's allegedly theoretical magazine, Problems of Communism (sic): Spring 1974. The flavour of this can be sampled from the likes of: "Socialism does not imply any particular relations of production; it implies that the working class have political control over the forces of production and develop them in their own interests... The working class must be interested in making positive gains out of the current economic and social reality; the desire for an 'industrial commonwealth' or a 'completely new social order' or for that matter 'communism' cannot be met by political force or legal enactment. They require the development of the productive forces (hallelujah!) and of the working class' skill in organising itself. Such things require time and determination; they're not subject to reform, radical change etc but are indeed the stuff of gradual evolution."

Such dialectics be it noted are no longer merely the views of NStead, but "can be taken as reflecting the attitude of the organisation to this question at the present time"; according to page 1 of the aforesaid issue.

The principal thrust of our piece is to begin examination of the reality behind declamatory statements about "state machines", "apparatuses" and kindred concepts whose substance has been eroded by the traditional empty sloganising of the British Left. It is also done in refutation of the traditional Fabian opportunism that, like the B&ICO, denies the very existence of a state machine: "The existence of a state machine means that both classes are not in the habit of exercising political force". (ibid, p.3). And since, immediately above, NStead had recognised the obvious fact that classes in Britain use political force against one another, such conflict -- she maintained -- "proved" that there could be no state machine in Britain, since an actual state machine does not allow such goings-on. With a state machine removed, it is of course safe to say that a peaceful transition is virtually inevitable; or at least you can make the quick sophistry that 'nothing stands in the way' of such a transition.

How a ruling class actually does rule and exploit without compulsive instruments of state, NS does not anywhere tell us -- but Engels certainly does, and in a nutshell: "The cohesive force of civilised society is the state, which in all typical periods is exclusively the state of the ruling class, and in all cases remains essentially a machine for keeping down the oppressed, exploited class". (Origin of Family, Private Property and the State). So until NS and her ilk can come up with substantial historical evidence for her assertions, we will continue to believe that Engels' historical materialism is more scientific than N Stead's unerudite ruminations upon the stony ground of traditional Whig history.

Communists can neither fetishise the state, nor try to wish it out of existence. It must, on the contrary, be examined in the context of its social weight amongst the balance of forces going to make up the society, of which it is the keystone. So the piece which follows makes no attempt to comprehensively catalogue all the weapons -- either hardware or institutions -- at the disposal of the state and therefore in the hands of the ruling class. If one was not familiar with the poverty of philosophy institutionalised amongst the British Left, one would indeed be amazed at the dearth of Marxist analysis of any aspect of the state. So two works deserve special mention here -- if only because they're virtually alone in the field; for the hardware side see the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science pamphlet No:2 "The New Technology of Repression", which has however grave political shortcomings thanks to its support for the IRA; for the institutional aspects see Ralph Miliband's "The State In Capitalist Society". (Both are available as paperbacks).

The masses are inadvertently and inevitably breaking with the constitutional fetishism upon which bourgeois democracy rests. Sooner or later they will become aware of the reality of state force in social affairs. It can either come to the working class as a rude but too late awakening, or they can be forewarned and forearmed in the development of consciousness. It is to promote the comprehension that elections and state power are the dialectical poles of the central contradiction that these two seemingly disparate pieces are given here in the one pamphlet.

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 * THE CENTRALITY OF STATE POWER *

The outcome of this debate -- that peaceful transition in Britain is both possible and probable -- has, as any historical materialist would expect, been already decided by events, by objective reality; and not just by the experience of the past either; also, and particularly, by the process of history proceeding under our very noses. So its lessons cannot be missed except by the blind.

Again history has proved that her laws are indeed objective processes, which reassert themselves in each and every case without exception. I refer specifically to the Chilean experience. When Allende came to power over three years ago, the revisionists and social democrats of the world rejoiced in an undisputably democratic election which had been won by popular forces -- a revisionist CP and a militant socialist party to their left, under Allende. And all avowed Marxists.

Here we were told was a thoroughly democratic, constitutionalist society, with the military not only abstaining from interference in politics or social life, but indeed firmly and traditionally under civilian control. Chile in fact was held to be a veritable Britain. In short: the most stable, literate, urbanised, industrialised and class conscious country in the whole of South or Central America -- with a population of ten million (roughly that of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales together), having armed forces of a mere 25,000, fell to military dictatorship just as the fundamental interests of the bourgeoisie became seriously threatened. That, of course, along with all real Marxists, was what we predicted in 1970 -- it didn't need any crystal ball, only a grasp of scientific socialism instead of the utopian and wilfully optimistic reformist ideology. But you didn't even have to be a Marxist to see the inevitable -- only a realist, a down-to-earth historical materialist. As the great Florentine materialist, Machiavelli, put it four and a half centuries ago, describing statecraft to the Prince: "There is no comparison whatever between an armed and a disarmed man; it is not reasonable to suppose that one who is armed will obey willingly one who is disarmed; or that any unarmed man will remain safe among armed servants".

Force, as Marx plainly said, is the midwife of every society (repeat every society) pregnant with the new; so the fact then, was that Chilean socialism was still-born for want of a midwife. What therefore was born in its place was the monster of fascism; and indeed, as history never ceases to demonstrate, this was exactly the case in Hungary after socialists and communists had been in power for four and a half months -- the country be it noted with the allegedly "most radical, most democratic" bourgeoisie according to Lenin in his speech at the closing session of the 8th Congress of RCPB (23.3.19) -- becoming under Horthy the world's very first fascist regime in 1920.

But, it will, it is always argued, whatever particular example, from whatever part of the world, is brought to bear -- one's own particular country is a special case, or rather an extra special case. The laws of historical development are fine for everywhere else, but manifest themselves quite differently in one's own particular country, we are supposed to believe. (Kun for example thought that within a few years of Soviet power, Hungary's GNP would overtake Britain and its degree of capital concentration that of the United States! Which shows that one preposterous view opens the floodgates to all sorts of fantasies.)

There are, we are told, exceptional characteristics of the national ethos. 'Our' bourgeoisie are particularly humane, practical, civilised, etc., etc.; the institutions are unusually democratic, flexible, neutral, and infinitely adaptable from here to eternity -- and such like scientific truths. In short,

grounds can always be found for special pleading on behalf of one's own particular society, which negate the laws of vulgar historical materialism, that apply only to lesser breeds without the law. This amazing edifice, or rather artifice, is built up on the simple half-truth, not to say tautology, that all states are different. It's like trying to deny the existence of classes because of the palpable fact that all individuals are different.

Now I shan't quote chapter and verse from the classics as to why there cannot be exceptions made in advance -- I have already done that in the Introduction to the Erfurt Programme -- even if it has now been ever-so-quietly dropped by the B&ICO. I will just quote Engels once here as to the reality of peculiarly British progressiveness, then proceed to examine the sharp end of bourgeois power in this country since a central thesis of the British Road is that there is little or no state force in the form of physical apparatus available to the British bourgeoisie:

"That England in general is far in advance of the continent 'in social matters' is a matter of course. England is the motherland of modern large-scale industry; the capitalist mode of production has developed here most freely and extensively of all, its consequences show themselves here most glaringly of all and therefore it is likewise here that they first produced a reaction in the sphere of legislation. The best proof of this is factory legislation. If however Herr Sax thinks that an act of Parliament only requires to become legally effective in order to be carried immediately into practice as well, he is grievously mistaken. And this is true of the Local Government Act more than of any other Act (with the exception, of course, of the Workshops Act). The administration of this law was entrusted to the urban authorities, which almost everywhere in England are recognised centres of corruption of all kinds, nepotism and jobbery." This is from The Housing Question, and rings a lot of contemporary bells does it not.

There is an inertia in social matters which is self-replicating. If a social structure is fundamentally stable, crises are met and swallowed without real disruption. Usually meeting such crises merely causes adaptation adding to the overall strength of the structure. Where the structure is unstable, on the other hand, crises are easily generated and easily cause rupture, thus generating endemic instability. But the same laws are operative in both cases. The different effects are due to the relatively different states of equilibrium achieved in balancing the forces involved. The forces bearing upon a stable society do not go away and cease to exist -- they are simply absorbed into a load-bearing structure until they become too great; then this rupture was the case in Chile -- thus far and no further -- there is always a breaking point, a quantum jump -- it is just a matter of sooner or later, and Britain can be no exception. Now the Chilean bourgeoisie's dictatorship is naked and brutal, instead of palliated and mediated by bourgeois democracy. The mass popular forces, some armed and all organised, both economically and politically (though in a disjointed fashion), were overcome by less than 25,000 troops. So what is the reality for Britain with a population five and a half times that of Chile: "at January first, 1972, the strength of UK personnel was 372,100", according to the HMSO Year Book. The proportionate number then relative to that of Chile would be military personnel of 137,500. So the British bourgeoisie have at their disposal nearly three times what the Chilean colonels have. And the area of Chile is three times greater.

But what of the general social import of these forces? To put these numbers in perspective we must compare them with Britain's biggest single industry -- agriculture. According to the official HMSO Year Book, 344.5 thousand employees including part-timers are engaged in agriculture. I haven't incidentally included part-time reservists in the military figure. Agriculture, containing 1.6% of the entire British working population has more than 30,000 employees less than the military, though agriculture accounts for 2.8% of GNP. The armed forces on the other hand consume a minimum 5.5% of GNP, the total figure for 1972-3 being £2,854 million.

In further context the capital expenditure of the nationalised -- some here say socialised -- industries, was £1,832 million; that is, more than £1,000 million less than for defending the realm: not exactly peanuts and not exactly fortuitous either. Can anyone still doubt the priorities of the unique British bourgeoisie with their outstanding social conscience and world historic progressive vanguard role that are supposed to make them hand on peacefully when the working class seriously demands it?

Well, they recently appointed the man who wrote this book -- (Low Intensity Operations, published 1971) -- and on the strength of it, one Brigadier Frank Kitson, to be Commander Of The School Of Infantry. This book was prefaced by none other than General Sir Michael Carver, Chief of the General Staff, as follows: "This book is written for the soldier of today to help him prepare for the operations of tomorrow. It will be of the greatest possible help to him, and I hope it will be read by all those concerned with training the army". It is an open secret that our prime minister regards Carver as the man to run the country, should there be a breakdown of law and order. (c.f. The Observer's edifying security review of 4.3.73). Not armed insurrection note; just social pressure getting too great for the continued tranquility of capitalist social relations; and here is their definition of that intolerable position: "Subversion, then, will be held to mean all illegal measures short of the use of armed force taken by one section of the people of a country to overthrow those governing the country at the time, or to force them to do things which they do not want to do. It can involve the use of political and economic pressure, strikes, protest marches, and propaganda..." (p.3)

And he is highly explicit as to the possible causes of such subversion, so broadly but clearly defined above. "It is difficult for the British with their traditions of stability to imagine disorders arising beyond the powers of the police to handle, but already there are indications that such a situation could arise, and this at a time of apparently unrivalled affluence." However, "If a genuinely serious grievance arose, such as might result from a significant drop in the standard of living, all those who now dissipate their protest over a wide variety of causes might concentrate their efforts and produce a situation which was beyond the power of the police to handle. Should this happen, the army would be required to restore the position rapidly". (p. 25)

If you think he's straying from the official line with those recommendations -- which include the preparation of psychological warfare operations amongst a gamut of other things -- they are in fact only part of broadscale security reinforcement throughout the state machine. And for much of that the British proletariat has Irish Republicanism to thank. Example: again from the official Year Book: "£47 million is allocated to reserve and auxiliary forces. Apart from their essential military role, these are considered to form an important link between the services and the civil community".

As for the democratic nature of the army itself and the degree of control its officers maintain -- and I don't think anyone here can deny the exclusively bourgeois derivation of the officer class -- Kitson again will disabuse you of illusions: "A factor which is related to the attitude of the population towards the troops, concerns the extent to which soldiers should be allowed to, and indeed encouraged to mix with the people, especially when off duty. This is an important matter because not only is it relevant to the respect in which the people hold the troops but it is also closely connected with the extent to which it is safe to expose the troops to possible indoctrination by subversive elements. Wolfgang Sternstein, Sir Basil Lyddel-Hart, and Adam Roberts, all touch on the danger involved, and although it need not be overstated when well disciplined troops are operating in good cause, it is certainly a subject which commanders at all levels have got to consider.... It is therefore essential that soldiers and policemen should be trained to get all the information they can by overt means and their employment and leisure activities, if any, should be planned with this in mind. Such a programme will only be effective if the officers understand through study the problems involved and are prepared to give

effective direction. Arrangements must also be made for recording and passing on everything that is received". (p.92)

But not being given to panic and used to keeping its dictatorship well hidden, the British bourgeoisie is not stampeded into the use of force. It is kept in the background as in 1919 and 1926 to be used when all else fails. And hitherto in Britain it has just not come to that. For the bourgeoisie exercise thoroughgoing social control in two ways -- first and foremost by control of the production and dissemination of ideology; of which the following is merely one facet in the full panoply which they have the means to foster and impose:

"One important development in Secret Service work as far as Britain is concerned is that of literary espionage. This can in the future be almost as important as scientific espionage. Indeed, the creation of a Director of Literary Intelligence might pay useful dividends, for in the post-war period the writings of Djilas, of Pasternak and Danielski have all had as much value in their way as military secrets. The battle of ideas is a field in which espionage in future can be usefully aggressive and win substantial victories." (The concluding paragraph of A History Of The British Secret Service by Richard Deacon).

The second and related control function is effected by comprehensive control in the daily breadth and depth of the affairs of society. Such then is the role of the 700,000 civil servants -- defined as servants of the Crown, paid out of national funds -- 270,000 of whom indeed are civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence. In addition there are no less than 864,000 Local Government servants -- this be it remembered, out of a total working population of 23,771,000. So under direct bourgeois control day-in and day-out, exercising control in their turn year-in and year-out, are 1,936,000 people; 8% of the whole working population. And that 8% is regulated by the whole paraphernalia of Official Secrets Acts, "discouragement" of political activity, Whitley Councils and ball-less Staff Associations. The actual official position as regards the police -- the first and basic physical line of bourgeois defence -- runs as follows: "No member of the police service may belong to a trade union..." (Britain 1973, p.106) And there are about 110,000 (exact figures are not given) regular policemen in Britain. But "All police forces have an attachment of special constables, who are volunteers willing to perform police duties without pay in their spare time". (ibid) These are the overt police forces and numbers are not given in full. Of the multiferous secret forces we know almost nothing and the official Year Book says precisely nothing. But we do know that "In addition to the regular police forces there are constabularies maintained by the statutory transport and other public authorities, and by the Ministry of Defence". (ibid)

Neither are these scores of thousands blundering about in the dark: "In all aspects of police work, the application of scientific aids has reached an advanced stage: nearly £14 million is spent annually (£20 million in 1973) on police equipment, including upwards of £2.5 million on radio communications; the police have 30,000 personal radio sets operational; and a police computer project is being developed for rationalising the keeping of records and speeding up the dissemination of information". (ibid, p.107) So it must come as no surprise to hear Brigadier Thompson, one of the West's top "anti-subversion" experts, state at a RUSI seminar (April '73): "I know how much the police in other parts of the UK (i.e. than Northern Ireland, where the RUC were bungling amateurs) know about people." No wonder Harold MacMillan, that notoriously rabid malcontent, could say recently and I quote: "The bureaucracy has got stronger, the House of Commons has got weaker". (26.9.73)

An indication of this general strengthening can be gauged from the following which appeared in The Times Security Review of February 26th, 1973, describing a new armoured car manufactured by GKN-Sankey. "With the changing pattern in civil disturbances throughout the world and the tendency for them

to become more militant (note, not violent but militant) security forces are looking for more suitable transport. Even the police forces in some of Britain's big cities, such as London, Birmingham, and Manchester, may have come to consider armoured security vehicles like AT100. The word security has been chosen to describe this vehicle because it has a more civil ring about it. One can imagine the outcry if it was learnt that the Metropolitan Police were contemplating buying armoured cars for riot control". Lest outsiders think the Glasgow police be more pacific through their non-inclusion in this list, (they are plentifully supplied with Land Rovers anyway) they are armed with Remington pump-action shotguns; which have been accurately described as 'hand-portable cannon'. It must always be remembered that even leaving the Special Patrol Group out of consideration, all police stations contain an armoury and all policemen receive weapons training.

So what we are left with when hard contemporary reality is examined in substance -- if recourse to peaceful transition is still insisted upon -- is resort to some vague comments made by Marx at the height of laissez faire (the economic practice and concomittant ideology of state non-intervention in economic and social affairs), when he referred in general terms to the Anglo-Saxon liberty enjoyed in Britain and America, in contrast to what then prevailed on the Continent. Well, no-one can say that Europe has not undergone great bourgeois democratic development in the last hundred years: that indeed is one of the bases upon which we (the B&ICO) support British entry into the EEC. (Note: this is also the position of COBI). Indeed thoroughgoing bourgeois democracy is the basic prerequisite for entry into the EEC, and as such is a real force upon those who wish to do so. (As subsequent Iberian developments have amply confirmed). And neither can it be denied that the reverse process has taken place -- that the British bourgeoisie do not have much more extensive, thorough and detailed control than ever before. With any minor disparities that remain, shortly to be ironed out within the EEC, it must be recognised that Western European capitalism is relatively homogeneous and increasingly so. Accordingly, they will now stand and fall together -- national peculiarities in social affairs are dwindling to insignificance as we sit here.

It will finally be argued that the bureaucracy, at least in Britain, is a sort of neutral control mechanism engendered by the objective needs of any industrialised society. But it is conveniently forgotten, though it is a fundamental tenet of Marxism, that there can be no such neutral institution because all societies are class societies -- so what they administer are the objective demands of the prevailing mode of production -- in our case bourgeois. It comes as no surprise then that our two millions of bureaucracy, (or rather government employees, since they are not merely pen-pushers), are totally administered from the top down; from the ruling class to the proletariat; popular control from the ground up is nowhere to be seen.

No British Marxist, or American one, outside the decrepit CPGB and CPUSA, would seriously claim that a peaceful transition was conceivable in the 'Anglo-Saxon' USA, where elements of the bureaucracy are even elected. And neither, in the light of the foregoing, can any real Marxist maintain that peaceful transition is either probable or possible in contemporary 'Anglo-Saxon' Britain. In conclusion, Engels again:

"English Socialism arose with Owen, a manufacturer, and proceeds therefore with great consideration toward the bourgeoisie and great injustice towards the proletariat in its methods although it culminates in demanding the abolition of class antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat... The socialists here are thoroughly tame and peaceable, accept our existing order, bad as it is, so far as to reject all other methods but that of winning public opinion. Yet they are so dogmatic that success by this method is for them, and for their principles as at present formulated, utterly hopeless."

Just as English socialism arose with Owen, a manufacturer, so British Marxism arose with Hyndman, a financier, and proceeds in quite the same fashion as hitherto. But we have the greater advantage and responsibility of hindsight.

"We believe socialism can be achieved in Britain, not without prolonged and serious effort, BUT BY PEACEFUL MEANS AND WITHOUT ARMED STRUGGLE, AND THIS IS OUR AIM. The working people and their representatives in parliament will have the strength and the means to deal with the resistance of reaction whatever form it may take."

The CPGB's Programme: The British Road To Socialism, 3rd revised edition 1968, emphasis added.

"The Chilean armed forces are professionals -- they will obey the laws and the constitution."

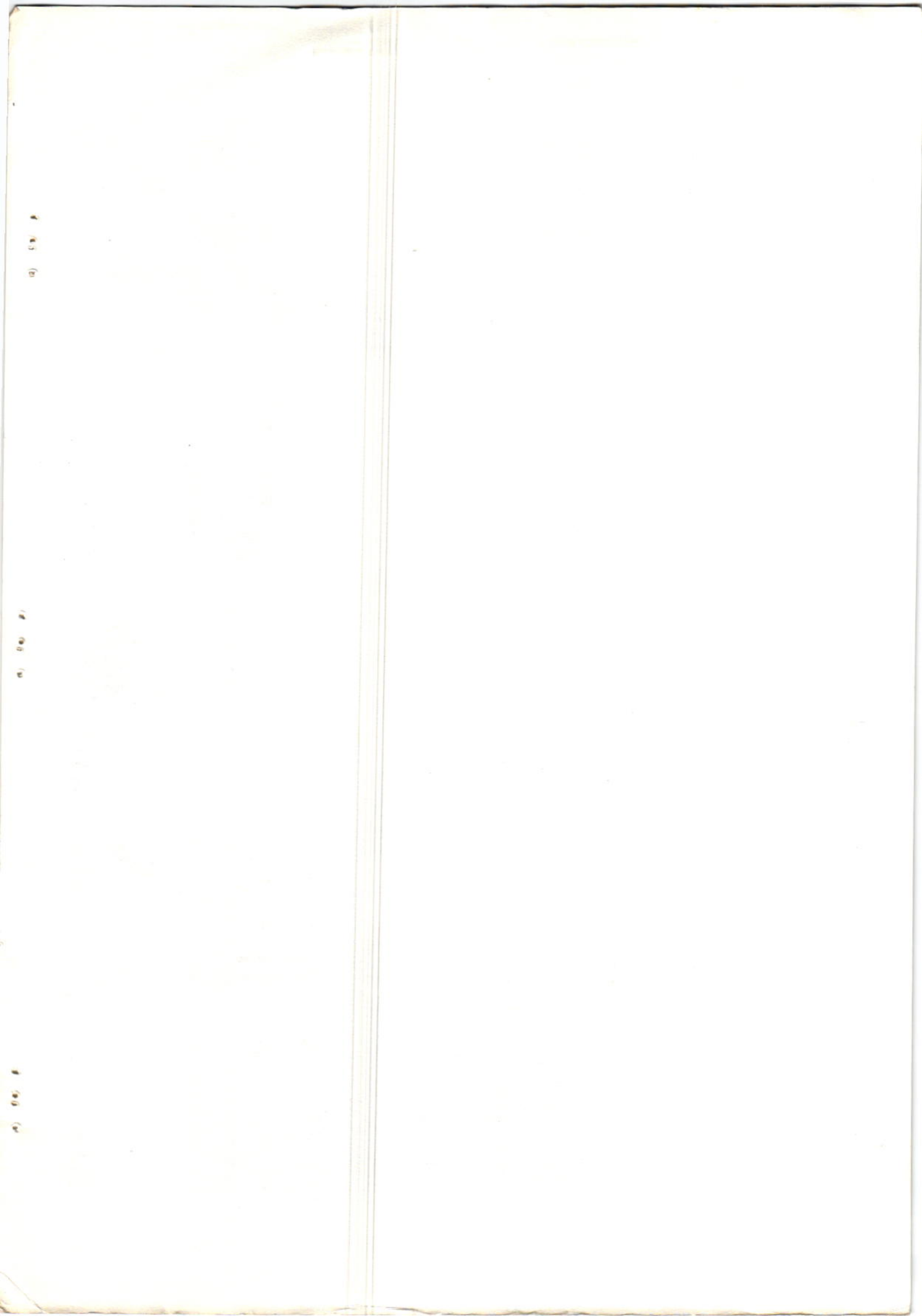
Allende interviewed on BBC - Midweek, 11 September, 1973.

The figure given for the Chilean armed forces at the time of the coup by Newsweek dated 9.7.73, was 23,000.

"Here the revolution will of necessity develop its own state and political forms for the transition, for this will take place on the background of our own political and democratic conditions, institutions and movements..."

"We are challenging the oldest ruling class in the world. The struggle will be difficult and complicated. Any attempt by big business to use force or illegal means to resist or obstruct the socialist legislation of the elected government of the people will have to be firmly rejected (sic)."

The Case for Socialism in the Sixties by John Gollan.



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