

Special Branch
Annual Report

1974



SPECIAL BRANCH ANNUAL REPORT

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PART 1

IRISH EXTREMISM

PART 2

EXTREME POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN LONDON

PART 3

NATIONAL PORTS SCHEME

PART 4

ADMINISTRATION AND STATISTICS

SUBJECT INDEX

NOMINAL INDEX

The use of violence in the pursuit of political objectives was not, of course, the prerogative of the IRA. Although our own extremist groups showed little inclination to resort to the bomb or the gun in 1974, the hard-core of dedicated, clever revolutionaries which were to be

found behind every public demonstration, 'pop festival', squat or sit-in showed themselves ever ready to exploit such situations and use the police - as the nearest and most visible form of authority - as targets for political and sometimes physical attack. The most extreme example of such behaviour was to be seen in Red Lion Square on 15 June, when the combined forces of the extreme left were mounted in opposition to the National Front and, inevitably, against the police who were trying to keep the two factions separated. The outcome of that demonstration, which is now a matter of history, underlined the value of Special Branch intelligence assessments in police preparations for demonstrations, and the major Special Branch effort in London - apart from the Irish problem - is now applied to this issue. In this respect the work done by the Special Demonstration Squad, often in difficult and even hazardous circumstances, has proved invaluable in keeping uniformed colleagues informed of the plans of demonstrators.

The ultra-left, which had mounted a campaign against the National Front in an attempt to fill the void left by the nuclear and Vietnam issues of the previous decade, extracted every ounce of propoganda from the Red Lion Square demonstration, especially at the Public Enquiry before Lord Justice Scarman when almost every anti-establishment group in the South of England paraded to give evidence of police abuses and brutality.

Trotskyists share with orthodox Communists the aim of the destruction of capitalism and the establishment of world-wide socialism. Unlike Communists, who have seen a partial realisation of their aim, Trotskyists have never come near to holding any sway and their failure has led to an almost obsessive indulgence in fine theoretical differences and sterile discussion. This in turn has resulted in a self-defeating and endemic fractionalism which proved, once again, to be the principal characteristic of the British Trotskyist groups in 1974.

The Workers Revolutionary Party, which was born out of the Socialist Labour League in November 1973, remained a predominantly working-class party concentrating on agitation and propaganda on the shop floor and among militant sections of trades unions. It was the declared aim of the new Party to become a broad-based revolutionary movement with mass appeal (in contrast to its previously austere image) and the transformation was marked by two radical changes in policy: restrictions on membership were relaxed, with a target of 10,000 members set for Whitsun 1974, and a pledge was made that the Party would in future put forward candidates at general elections. Despite a sustained and energetic recruiting drive the first objective was not achieved; membership is believed to have reached 5,000 by Whitsun and to have increased to about 7,000 by the end of the year. Nonetheless the Party doubled in size within twelve months to become easily the largest of the three main Trotskyist groups.

In line with its new policy the Party fielded nine candidates in the February general election and ten in October. The results in every case were insignificant but the Party did not, of course, expect otherwise. Its primary object was publicity and this was undoubtedly achieved through its well-organised and sophisticated campaigns. Continual emphasis was laid on the similarities between Conservative and Labour policies and warnings were given of the "preparations by the ruling class to inflict violence on the working

class". Indeed Gerry HEALY, the autocratic national secretary, became so obsessed with the belief that both the Conservative and Labour Governments were going to suppress extreme left-wing groups by force that he prepared contingency plans to "go underground", adducing as evidence for his extravagant claim the joint police/military exercises at Heathrow Airport which he saw as a first step aimed at accustoming British people to the sight of tanks on the streets.

HEALY's other main concern was to counter the "revisionist" activities of a small group of ex-Socialist Labour League members, led by Robert BLICK and Mark JENKINS, who opposed the policies of the new Party and openly tried to subvert its members. Support for the so-called Blick/Jenkins group proved so troublesome that a special delegates conference was called in June at which three amendments were made to the Party's constitution in order to consolidate the central committee's authority and enable it to deal with dissident members. The new powers were to be needed five months later to expel nearly 200 supporters of British Leyland shop steward Alan THORNETT, a central committee member and chairman of the Party's industrial wing, the All Trades Unions Alliance, whose own "revisionist" activities led to his enforced resignation from the Party in September. It was apparent that further internal splits were being contained only by the force of HEALY's extraordinary personality and, with the probability of his resignation on personal and health grounds within the next year, the WRP may have already reached its zenith.

The Party's public meetings and demonstrations, although fewer than those of its rival Trotskyist groups, were usually larger, better organised and well disciplined. Public meetings invariably concluded with politically slanted entertainment provided by the wealth of acting talent at the Party's disposal, and the extent of its influence in the entertainment world became the subject of much conjecture and comment during the year. The storm which broke out at the annual general meeting of Equity in June over a threat by Lord Olivier and others to form a breakaway union

in the event of the extreme-left taking control of Equity provided a clear indication of the resolve of the WRP members within Equity to cause as much disruption as possible.

There can be no doubt that being able to call on such famous names as Vanessa and Corin REDGRAVE and Colin WELLAND has been a great advantage in attracting recruits, especially to the Party's junior wing, the Young Socialists. Increasing emphasis was placed on the importance of the Young Socialists, who are seen by HEALY as the generation which will lead the proletariat to power, and a programme of lectures and weekend schools was initiated to educate YS members in Marxist and Trotskyist ideology. The decision by the Young Socialists at their annual conference in March to affiliate to their parent body, and thus to be treated as full members, may also account in part for the substantial increase in the Party's membership.

The Party continued to operate from a group of buildings at 180-186A Clapham High Street, SW4. Its well-produced daily newspaper, "Workers Press", has a circulation of about 20,000.

Three years of rapid growth came to an end for the International Socialism group in 1974. Beset by financial problems and internal dissension, the group experienced a marked decline in morale and a financial crisis which threatened the existence of its national weekly, the "Socialist Worker".

The 1974 registration showed an overall membership of 3,310 organised into 220 branches, 40 of which were factory or industrial branches. It was claimed at the national conference in September that over 1,000 new members had been recruited during the year, indicating a turnover of nearly one-third. The most satisfactory aspect from the group's point of view was the increase in industrial members from 538 in March 1973 to 1808 in June 1974.

Continued emphasis was placed on the need to transform the group into a "workers' organisation" but the struggle within the leadership which finally resulted in the affirmation of this policy was not achieved without casualties. David PEERS, who was appointed national secretary in January, was ousted from office in September, to be replaced by Jim NICHOL; Andreas NAGLIATTI, the national industrial organiser who rose to prominence in 1973, resigned in May and was succeeded by Steve JEFFREYS; and Roger PROTZ, controversial editor of "Socialist Worker", resigned in April in favour of Paul FOOT. The culmination of these moves was the election in September of a new national committee containing a majority of industrial members.

FOOT's appointment as editor of the "Socialist Worker" was not a happy one. On 18 October in the High Court he and the paper's printers, SW Litho Ltd, were fined £250 each and ordered to pay £5,000 costs for disclosing the identities of two witnesses in a blackmail case, and in September it was learned that the paper was to be sued for libel by Frank Chappel, general secretary of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union. One source within the group estimated that this action would cost the paper at least £15,000 and possibly put it out of business. In October the leadership was compelled to destroy 10,000 copies of the anarchist broadsheet "Up Against the Law" (which had been printed by SW Litho from its works at Corbridge Crescent, E1) for fear of further libel proceedings and for most of the year the printshop, which is now a considerable commercial concern employing 30 people and having an annual turnover of £250,000, had to channel £500 a week of its profits into the "Socialist Worker" to offset the rise in the cost of newsprint. The paper's circulation, which averaged 35,000 was showing signs of serious decline towards the end of the year and strenuous efforts were being made to increase sales.

International Socialists did not field any candidates in the general election. Instead they pledged their support for the Labour Party without actually canvassing on its behalf, taking the view

that to do so might have given the mistaken impression that the Labour Party was a mass organisation with a large number of activists. Like the Workers Revolutionary Party, the International Socialists became convinced that the Conservative Government was preparing a round-up of left-wing extremists and as a precaution the executive committee was reduced in January from 12 members to four and a 24-hour guard was placed on the Corbridge printshop. Although the status quo was resumed soon after the February election the defeat of the Conservative Government proved something of an anti-climax and deprived the group of an objective on which to concentrate.

For most of the year its activities were focussed on the campaign against the National Front. This began in earnest with the ill-fated demonstration in Red Lion Square on 15 June which attracted a sizeable IS contingent and a week later over 800 members of the group supported the demonstration in London organised by the National Union of Students to commemorate Kevin GATELY's death. Thereafter the International Socialists played a leading part in the formation of "anti-fascist committees" in various parts of the country, including several in London, and two major demonstrations designed to clash with the National Front were mounted in Leicester on 24 August and in London on 7 September. In Leicester a 600 strong National Front march was opposed by over 7,000 counter-demonstrators. [Privacy] the IS [Privacy] and two members of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) were arrested for assaulting Martin WEBSTER, the NF national activities organiser, but otherwise there were no serious confrontations. The plans by the ultra-left to provoke violent clashes with the police and the National Front in London on 7 September were partially thwarted by a last minute change of route, but some 600 IS supporters discovered the new route and 13 were arrested as a result of their attempts to harass the right-wing demonstrators.

Although a number of minor incidents occurred at the National Front's election meetings in October, the "anti-fascist" campaign began to lose its impetus and the International Socialists turned their attention to the Ulster situation. As a constituent member of the Troops Out Movement, the group played a prominent part in the demonstration in London on 27 October organised by TOM and the Communist British Peace Committee which resulted in nine arrests. By the end of the year however there were signs that the IS leadership was becoming disillusioned with the Movement, which it described as a "collection of woolly-minded liberal thinkers", and efforts were being made to recruit trade union support for a more broad-based "socialist" campaign on behalf of the minority in Northern Ireland. Elsewhere IS gave active support to the Islington Tenants Campaign, the Indian Workers Association, the May Day march, the Irish Political Hostages Committee and the campaign on behalf of the Shrewsbury 2.

Efforts by the International Socialists to extend their influence among the rank and file of the trade union movement suffered as a result of the group's overall lack of direction, and they failed to maintain the momentum which they had established in 1972/73. Local IS initiative had some effect on the course of the claim for increased London Weighting Allowances by London teachers and on the sporadic industrial action which took place over National Health Service pay by nurses and the Confederation of Health Service Employees. For the first time representation was gained on the executive committee of the National Union of Teachers, which now contains two IS members and one sympathiser. SW Litho continued to publish "rank and file" newspapers aimed at specific sections of industry such as the docks, car workers, teachers, civil servants and hospital workers, but efforts to set up a national rank and file movement to co-ordinate regional industrial activity were unsuccessful, largely because of the group's own organisational problems and the absence of any obvious target in the industrial field.

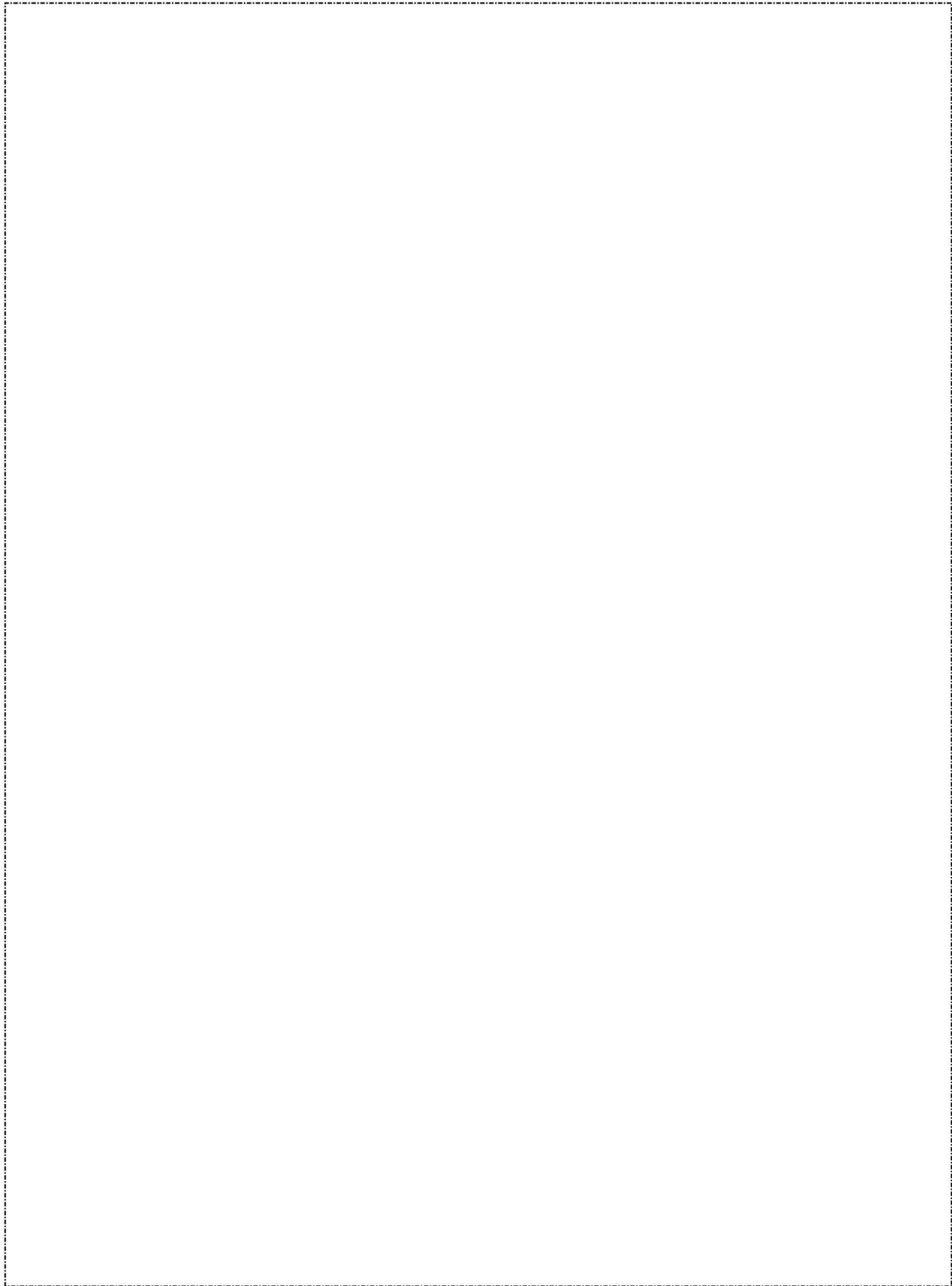
With a membership of about 650 the International Marxist Group remained the smallest of the three main Trotskyist organisations, yet it exerted an influence on the ultra-left out of all proportion to its size. In keeping with its policy of exploiting emotional issues as a means of generating revolutionary fervour the Group seized on the "anti-fascist" campaign as a welcome and much needed diversion from its own internal problems. Under the slogan "No Platform for Racists", members of the Group physically and verbally attacked the National Front at every possible opportunity; they brought pressure to bear on public and private bodies in an attempt to deny the Front any forum; and when this failed they made attempts to disrupt those meetings that were held. Apart from leading the attack on the police in Red Lion Square on 15 June the Group dominated the "anti-fascist" committees set-up to co-ordinate left-wing opposition to the Front and its supporters were present in force at the demonstration against the Front in London on 7 September. In the Irish field the Group gave unqualified support to both wings of the IRA (although it was careful to dissociate itself from the terrorist campaign in England) and played a prominent part in the activities of the Troops Out Movement and the Irish Political Hostages Campaign. On 7 June four members of the IMG's "Irish Commission" helped to carry the coffin at the IRA funeral in Kilburn of Michael GAUGHAN, who died in Parkhurst Prison after being on hunger-strike (see Part I). Dissatisfaction with the lack of action being taken by the Communist-dominated Chile Solidarity Campaign over the question of severance of relations with Chile led to the formation by IMG and IS in May of the Chile Ad Hoc Committee, and a demonstration organised by the Committee in London on 5 May attracted over 6,000 supporters.

IMG fielded three candidates in the February general election and in Newham North-East, the only constituency to be contested in London, the electorate witnessed the interesting spectacle of two Trotskyist candidates (Vanessa REDGRAVE, WRP and John ROSS, IMG) competing against each other. In the event ROSS was soundly beaten and the three IMG candidates obtained a derisory total of 716 votes. The Group's precarious financial state precluded active participation in the October election, although it issued a manifesto urging its

supporters to vote Labour on the grounds that the return of a Labour Government would create the best conditions for "continuing the class struggle".

Dissension among the various IMG "tendencies", as its dissident factions are known, became so pronounced that the leadership was reduced to a state of near collapse. Although John ROSS managed to maintain his hold on the industrially orientated "United Majority Tendency" - and thus on the entire organisation - a number of leading figures were constrained to resign and others, like "internationalists" Tariq ALI and Robin BLACKBURN, threatened to do so. These difficulties were exacerbated by a disagreement in May between the leadership and [Privacy] the major source of finance in the past, who considered that his (substantial) donations had been mishandled and withdrew his support. As a result most of the Group's full-time officials were made redundant, the printing presses were sold, and printing of all IMG publication, including "Red Weekly", was subcontracted to the International Socialists. After a long struggle sufficient funds were raised to lease a new headquarters building at 97 Caledonian Road, N1, but a fund drive aimed at raising £5,000 by Christmas fell miserably short of its target. IMG received several visits from officials of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (the international Trotskyist organisation of which it is the English branch) and John ROSS now works three days a week at the USFI headquarters in Brussels.

Lastly, mention should be made of the Revolutionary Communist Group, which was formed in March by disillusioned members of the International Socialism and International Marxist Groups under the leadership of David YAFFE. Membership of the RCG is believed to be no more than 30 and activity in London was based on two addresses - the headquarters at [Privacy] NW3 and [Privacy] [Privacy]. Although it was represented on several Trotskyist committees, including the Chile Ad Hoc Committee, the Group has so far shown itself to be more concerned with political theorising rather than direct action, and it does not at present constitute a threat to public order.



It is unusual for anarchists to be involved in industrial disputes or trade union matters but one group with a particular interest in this field established itself in the capital during the

year with branches in East and West London. Known as Big Flame, it was active in the Ford Motor Company plant at Dagenham where it was responsible for some minor public disorder, and at Charing Cross Hospital where it attempted to influence a strike by engineering maintenance workers. Although Big Flame does not owe allegiance to any particular subversive group, it is believed to have links with both the International Socialists and the Workers Revolutionary Party; it is also a constituent member of the Troops Out Movement and gave some support to the "anti-fascist" campaign. Under the guidance of Martin YARNIT, a Liverpool-based university lecturer, Big Flame has produced a mass of well informed and well reasoned literature. It has made a considerable impression on the ultra-left and showed every sign of increasing its strength and influence among disaffected anarchists.

The ultra-left organisation Fight On was finally disowned in April by its parent body in Italy, Lotta Continua, on the grounds that Fight On was not sufficiently pure in anarchist theory or revolutionary enough in practice. The move did not seem to dishearten the British group, however, and its cosmopolitan membership supported a wide variety of left-wing activities and demonstrations during the year. The movement did not produce any paper of its own, but obtained ample publicity through community broadsheets like "Ned Gate" and "Kensington Street Press". Headquarters remain at 154 Ladbroke Grove, W10.