



Special Branch
Annual Report

1975



SPECIAL BRANCH ANNUAL REPORT

1975

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

Much of the natural aggressiveness of the trotskyist movement in this country has recently been manifested in a series of potentially damaging splits within almost all groups. Although explained in part by the curious internal structure of trotskyist groups to encourage factions within their midst, there have been clear indications that the rank-and-file are frustrated and disappointed at the failure of the tactics of confrontation and dispute which characterise most trotskyist policies. The past twelve months have witnessed the formation and consolidation of an increasing number of smaller, intensely dedicated trotskyist groups formed, in the main, of defectors from the main trotskyist bodies.

Of the three main trotskyist parties, the International Socialists was most affected. Important changes took place during the year which significantly affected both its composition and direction but did little to disguise the factionalism that has split the group and depleted its membership. Concerned that its security had suffered enormously as a result of the exposure in the public press early in the year of lengthy extracts from its internal bulletins, the group over-reacted and became inordinately preoccupied with both its internal security and the viability of its printing subsidiary, S W Litho Ltd at its premises at the Corbridge Works, The Oval, E2.

The group lost ground to other trotskyist groups and viewed with concern the steep decline in membership; its apparent inability to consolidate the power base it has assiduously established within key industries over the past three years; the closure of an increasing number of factory branches, and the failure of both the "Socialist Worker", its daily newspaper, and its leadership to exploit the current political and economic crisis. Aware of an increasing disillusionment within the group, Jim NICHOL, its national secretary, came under increasing pressure to re-vitalise the organisation. At its national conference in June it was resolved to abolish the National Committee, hitherto its highest decision making body, and transfer power to the conference itself which would elect six members to a Central Committee responsible for policy and direction. To review

the group's political and organisational work between conferences a Central Council, comprising representatives of districts and national factions, was formed.

The truth remains however that the endemic trotskyist tendency to dissipate energies and resources in polemical discussion has not been absent from the International Socialists and despite the administrative changes its dissidents openly challenged the Central Committee to convene an extraordinary conference to discuss the inadequacies that existed within the group. The request was refused and in October the "Left Opposition" faction which had consistently disagreed with the group's Irish policies, broke away to form a new organisation called Workers Power, which is likely to join forces with Workers Fight, a faction expelled from IS some two years ago. For the remaining faction, known as the "IS Opposition" and numbering some 150, the situation had become untenable and in December, led by former national secretary Jim HIGGINS and Roger PROTZ, it too split from IS and formed itself into the Workers League, aimed specifically to attract the trade union militant. These developments have left the International Socialists bereft of many of its leading members.

The IS group has already proved itself capable of reacting promptly to industrial situations, establishing contacts in the course of disputes and subsequently deploying them to attract new members, but it became clear that the group was unable, as a direct result of its own internal problems, to consolidate this industrial membership. Its policy of taking a longer term view and adopting a more structured approach to the penetration of the unions has not resulted in any significant success in the larger manual unions, although the group made some headway in unions representing the professional and white-collar workers, in particular the National Union of Teachers and the National Union of Journalists, which now contains two IS members and two sympathisers on its executive committee. Its "Right to Work" campaign received considerable support within the threatened steel, aerospace and motor industries and to back up its

industrial effort its printshop increased the output of "rank and file" papers aimed at specific sections in industry such as the docks, car workers, civil servants, and hospital workers.

Elsewhere the group gave support to the National Abortion Campaign and to the Left-sponsored campaigns on behalf of the "Shrewsbury Two"; against membership of the Common Market and to end private practice within the National Health Service. Its interest within the Troops Out Movement waned but was compensated by its defence of 21 Iranian students arrested for forcibly entering the Iranian Embassy on 29 April, and in the protest movement in this country over events in both Portugal and Spain.

The International Marxist Group, smarting from the criticism contained in the Scarman Report on last year's disorders at Red Lion Square that it had assaulted the police in "an unexpected, unprovoked and viciously violent attack", again failed to come to terms with the incessant internal wrangling between its various dissident factions, known curiously as "tendencies", which threatened to split the group. Its inability to promote common policies stems from the uneasy relationship that exists between its "internationalist" Tendency led by Tariq ALI and Robin BLACKBURN and the "Majority Tendency", which enjoys the main body of support within the group, led by John ROSS, a situation that contributed to the Group's failure to implement a national conference decision to infiltrate the Labour Party on a local basis. The parlous state of the group prompted Ernest MANDEL, a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, (the international trotskyist organisation of which IMG is the British section) to examine the functioning of the group and take evidence from the leadership.

In keeping with its theory of protest on relatively narrow emotional issues and its stated policy of increased activity within the public sector IMG took a close interest in the newly-formed Medical Committee Against Private Practice, in which IMG members

Privacy

and

Privacy

both medical practitioners,

pursued an active campaign to gain trade union and left-wing support. Unclear as to its approach towards the Troops Out Movement, more especially following its unsuccessful attempt, in concert with the Revolutionary Communist Group and Workers Fight to wrest control from ex-IMG member Gery LAWLESS, the group turned its attention to the more tangible aspirations of the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign. Through the medium of its newspaper, "Red Weekly", the group launched scathing attacks on the political developments in Chile and Spain but failed to mobilise any significant support. In September 19 IMG activists were arrested following the unlawful occupation of the first floor offices of the Iberian Airlines offices in Regent Street in protest at the plight of Basque political prisoners.

In contrast to the inhibitions and factionalism that distinguished the activities of other trotskyst groups, the Workers Revolutionary Party, and in particular its autocratic leader Gerry HEALY, remained absolutely convinced that the historic pre-conditions necessary for the proletarian revolution had begun to manifest themselves in the country and this belief now colours the whole spectrum of their policies and attitudes. The authoritarian attitude adopted by the Party and its reticence to participate in "broad based" campaigns often supported by other trotskyst groups, with which it has scant regard, reinforced its determination not to allow another split as occurred last year when Alan THORNETT and his clique were expelled, subsequently to form the Workers Socialist League.

Its political activity amongst shop stewards and the promotion of its All Trades Union Alliance (set up as an alternative to the existing trade union structure) effectively consolidated the Party's position as an organisation capable of aiding and co-ordinating shop floor militancy in industry. Its interest in the campaign to secure the release of the "Shrewsbury Two" manifested itself in the formation of a Wigan Building Workers Action Committee, principally as a means of attracting support to its call for a General Strike, but

support failed to materialise and merely illustrated the apathy within the organised labour movement for the campaign. The march from Wigan to London started inauspiciously when a mere 42 members departed on their long trek although the subsequent rally at Trafalgar Square on 22 February attracted some 1,500 supporters, mainly from the Party's youth wing, the Young Socialists. The Party remained active within the actors' union, "Equity", but in May suffered a severe set-back when it failed to obtain a seat on the union's controlling Council.

The publicity in September following allegations that a young actress had been held incommunicado at the Party's new "education centre" in Derbyshire and the subsequent fruitless raid on the premises by local police operating under a warrant issued under the Firearms Act, 1968, was given considerable coverage in the "Workers Press", its daily newspaper. Always keen to make political capital from any fortuitous circumstance, the party's virulent anti-police stance was taken to such lengths that what sympathy had existed amongst the Left quickly evaporated.

The WRP remained the largest and dominant trotskyist party in the country but, despite a combined membership with its youth wing of over 6,000 and an estimated 4,500 sympathetic to its virulent brand of trotskyism, it ended the year in serious financial difficulties. The Young Socialists, although nominally a separate organisation, acted largely in support of its parent body, and gave active support to the left-wing sponsored campaign against political repression in Spain and Portugal and to the anti-EEC protest movement.

A concerted campaign to oppose the re-adoption of Labour's Minister of Overseas Development, Reg PRENTICE, as Parliamentary Member for the Newham North-East constituency, spotlighted the clandestine activities of the Revolutionary Socialist League, a little known group that has achieved, through the control of the

'Militant' group, an almost classic trotskyist takeover of the Labour Party Young Socialists. Despite public protestations to the contrary by Ted GRANT, its founder and leader, its recent activities have confirmed the existence of the group as a decidedly trotskyist phenomenon, and potentially a threat to public order.

Other trotskyist groups comprise the Revolutionary Communist Group, an elitist group of about 80 members which concentrates on an appeal to intellectuals through its quarterly journal "Revolutionary Communist" with headquarters at 49 Railton Road, Brixton; the International Communist League, an amalgam of dissident International Socialists and Workers Revolutionary Party members, formed in December with an estimated membership of 300, and the League of Socialist Action, a small group primarily concerned with the theoretical aspects of current revolutionary thought.

Following the demise of the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists a small group of dedicated anarchists, led by Ramsey MARGOLIS and Nicholas ("Nick") HEATH, re-grouped in January and formed the Anarchist Workers Alliance. The group has six branches, three of which are in the Metropolis - namely, the North London, East London and Wandsworth branches - and remains the largest anarchist group with a total membership of some 100 persons. Divided as it is by internal dissension, exacerbated by the association of Privacy its former national secretary, with the International Marxist Group, the group advocates "libertarian communism", a form of communism that emphasises personal liberty, a viewpoint put forward in its monthly journal "Libertarian Struggle", which has a circulation of a few hundred. Individual members

occasionally attend left-wing demonstrations but their main activity is confined to branch meetings and discussions.

On the other wing of the anarchist movement are those who believe that communism and anarchism cannot be made to mix. To them anarchism means individual action and solidarity with the anarchist movements abroad. Closer in spirit to the type of militancy propounded by the Angry Brigade, this element is not only very difficult to track down but also to assess in terms of strength and weakness. Some of its adherents are active in pressure groups, such as the Claimants Union, where fortunately much of their revolutionary fervour has been dampened by more moderate influences. The fashionable belief in recent years of an "alternative society" appears to have foundered, and an expansion of anarchism from within this movement has failed to materialise.

The Liverpool-based group known as Big Flame, possibly best described as a revolutionary socialist group, consists in the main of dedicated Marxists though occasionally disputes have arisen within the group, especially with its anarchist wing, as to its

political line. The group has no close links with any of the trotskyist or communist organisations and its chief activity has been the distribution of lengthy documents detailing its commitment on the three topics with which the group has set up commissions, namely on the car industry, the situation in Ireland, and the womens liberation movement. Within the industrial sector the group is in favour of a policy of shop floor agitation leading to workers' control, and in this respect it has made a particular study of the motor car industry, especially the Ford Motor Company at Dagenham at which it has consistently fermented unrest. It has shown sympathetic support towards Peoples Democracy and some of its members are active within the Troops Out Movement.