

Oil Imperialism:

BRITAIN & THE MIDDLE EAST

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5p

In the last five years there has been a tremendous upsurge of struggle against imperialism in the Middle East. First in Palestine in 1965, then in Oman in 1967, guerrilla movements with vast popular backing have begun to pose the biggest challenge to imperialism in a hundred years. Ranged against the peoples of the Middle East are all the imperialist powers of the world, lured by a common greed for oil. The oil companies which loot the Middle East also exploit and oppress the working class here in Britain. If we are to beat our enemy we must know him and how he operates overseas as well as at home. The purpose of this pamphlet is to help workers in Britain acquire this knowledge.

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OIL IMPERIALISM AND BRITAIN

ECONOMICS

Britain's two biggest monopolies are Shell Trading & Transport and British Petroleum (half owned by the British Government). Each made gross profits approaching £400m last year. Their position of dominance is illustrated by the fact that Shell made more than the combined profits of ICI, British Leyland and GEC-AEI. And BP made more than Shell.

Shell Trading and Transport is part of the Royal Dutch Shell Group, which has heavy capital investment from Holland, France and the USA, as well as from Britain. The headquarters of Royal Dutch Shell are in London. BP is exclusively British-owned. Recently it has increased its ties with the United States through a merger with Standard Oil of Ohio. Royal Dutch Shell and BP are in a cartel with five US monopolies. Between them these seven monopolies control over 90% of oil production in the capitalist world. Standard Oil of New Jersey is the biggest of the seven and Royal Dutch Shell the second biggest.

Shell has oilfields in 23 countries in Europe, East Asia, Africa, Latin American and West Asia. BP at present gets all its oil from West Asia and North Africa) for their supplies of crude oil. For instance, in 1969 BP took 141 million tons from West Asia and 17 million tons from Africa (Nigeria and Libya).

The Middle East is the most important source of world oil. Its fields contain 45,000 million tons -- 67 of the world's known reserves. In 1969 it produced 833 million tons -- an increase of 300% since 1960. Its share of world crude output increased from 25% in 1960 to 40% in 1969. BP and Shell have equal or majority stakes in Iran, Kuwait and Iraq, three of the five principal producing countries. All told BP and Shell control about 30% of Middle East oil.

The big leap in production in the 1960s is explained by the profit figures for world oil in the previous decade. Whereas the average annual profit on Texan oil was 11% and on Venezuelan oil was 22%, on Middle Eastern oil it was 65%! These figures reveal more clearly than words the lure of the Middle East for the British and American oil companies; and they show why other imperialist powers, the Soviet Union and Japan, are eagerly jockeying for position in the race to gobble up Middle Eastern oil.

POLITICS

British oil imperialism has a long history. Before World War I Britain had already seized 100% control of Persian oil and had obtained a 75% share in the Mosul oilfield (not yet in production) in Iraq. But the major supplier in the region up to 1914 and for a time the most productive in the world was the Baku oilfield in south Russia, in which Shell had a major interest. The October Revolution in 1917 cut off this source of supply to the European capitalist states. Alternative sources had to be found immediately.

British Government policy in the Middle East after World War I was aimed at doing
Continued/...

just that. In cynical disregard of promises made by various British officials, including "Lawrence of Arabia", to win Arab support in the war, Britain and France carved up the Arab lands. Britain took Iraq, where the oilfields were, and Transjordan and Palestine as well, to guarantee a route for the oil to the Mediterranean. To defend the oil route, Britain threw her weight behind the scheme for a Zionist state in Palestine - an outpost of Western imperialism in the Arab world.

To this very day British imperialist policy in the Middle East is aimed at defending the profits of Shell and BP, which are increasing year by year. These companies "collude and contend" with the big American monopolies and it is impossible to separate the policies of the British Government from those of the US Government. Both governments are determined to preserve the status quo in which the monopolies loot the rapidly declining oil reserves. (At present rates the oil - the sole natural resource of much of the area - will be exhausted in about 40 years).

British imperialism, which created the fascist state of Israel, is still one of its main international backers. Britain, jointly with the Soviet imperialists, sponsored the Nov. 1967 UN Resolution (drafted by George Brown, then foreign secretary in the Labour Government). This laid the basis for the Rogers Proposals and all the subsequent treacherous manoeuvring designed to isolate the Palestinians from support in the Arab countries. Hussein, the butcher of Amman, is a loyal lackey of British imperialism, educated, armed, financed and instructed by Britain. British imperialism is one of the deadliest enemies of the Palestinian revolution.

The Arab Gulf region is the second main focus of British imperialism in the Middle East. The states extending along the West coast of the Gulf, from Oman to Bahrain, produced over 68 million tons of oil in 1969. Their proven reserves amount to nearly 4000 million tons. This wealth is largely in the hands of Shell and BP. The British Government is today fighting a brutal "proxy" war of suppression against the people of Dhofar province in Oman - to defend their oil interests. The recent "palace revolution" in Oman and the attempts to create a "union of Arab emirates" on the Gulf coast are political and diplomatic ploys to supplement the armed aggression.

BRITISH WORKERS

The oil monopolies exploit British workers as well as workers overseas. Oil production involves three stages: (1) extraction of crude oil; (2) refining, in which petrol, fuel oil and lubricants are separated from waste; (3) petrochemicals, in which the waste products are converted to compounds for use in the manufacture of plastics, emulsion paint, detergents, fertilisers, etc. Only 15% of Middle Eastern oil is refined in the Middle East; the rest is shipped in crude form and refined elsewhere. Britain has a refining capacity of 100 million tons per year. Petrochemical plants are usually located near the refineries and this is a rapidly expanding branch of industrial production in Britain. Thousands of British workers are exploited by the British and US oil monopolies in these refineries and petrochemical plants. The chain that begins with gushers in the Gulf and ends with petrol pumps, plastics and paint, binds British workers in an unbreakable bond of proletarian internationalism with the Arab, Persian and African peoples against the common enemy - oil imperialism.

ZIONISM: ENEMY OF JEWS, FRIEND OF THE LABOUR PARTY

The Zionist movement began in the last century as a reaction to European anti-semitism. The persecution of the Jews could only be ended, said the Zionists, by gathering them all together in their own country — the Chosen People in the Promised Land.

Zionism at first won very few adherents among the Jews. It was so obviously a doctrine of defeat and escapism; besides which it was unclear where Zion, the Promised Land, was actually located (some said it was in Uganda). Marxism had a much stronger appeal to Jewish workers, by showing that all special oppression, such as that of the Jews, had its roots in the class oppression of capitalism. Marxism taught the very opposite of Zionism. Instead of the Jews separating themselves from the rest of the working class and running away, they should unite ever more closely with the workers of other religions and defeat capitalism, thus putting an end to all discrimination and persecution including anti-semitism.

So it was that Jewish workers played an active part in their various countries in building the labour movement and in founding Marxist parties.

Zionism's first success was when Balfour declared official British Government support for it in 1917. Subsequently the British mandate over Palestine opened the door to the refugees from Nazi persecution. When the numbers had swollen sufficiently, a short sharp military campaign established the state of Israel in 1948. The Palestinians, who had lived in Palestine for 1500 years, were driven out by Zionist terror (the massacre of Deir Yassin, in which the total population of a village, men, women and children, were murdered and thrown down a well, will rank forever in the annals of barbarity). And Britain withdrew, her task accomplished.

Despite the founding of Israel Zionism has failed in its original aim: 90% of the world's Jews have refused to leave their native lands and move to Israel. Its sole success has been to win the support of oil imperialism -- especially the financial, military and political backing of the governments of the United States and Britain, the leading oil imperialist countries.

In Britain Zionism's appeal has been less strong among Jewish workers than among professed "left-wingers" in the Labour Party. These find Israel a perfect example of sham socialism. Crossman, the former Labour cabinet minister and present editor of New Statesman, says he is "a Zionist first and foremost". Eric Heffer, the leader of the Labour Party's damp squib "attack" on the Tory Industrial Relations Bill, says the kibbutz is "probably the most socialistic institution in the world". Heffer leads the Labour Friends of Israel, a pro-Israeli pressure group in Parliament most of which belong to the Tribune group of "left MPs". Their support for Israel shows them in their true colours as friends of the very fascism that the Tory Industrial Relations policy heralds for Britain.

SEPTEMBER, 1970

The speech "All Support to Palestine" and the statement "Imperialists Back Hussein's Butchery" were written in September, 1970. That month saw the biggest attempt so far at physical extermination of the Palestinian revolution. Paradoxically the attempt came not from the Israeli army, which has been singularly unsuccessful at liquidating the Fedayeen, but from the imperialist fifth-column inside the Arab world. The Palestinians in Jordan live huddled in great refugee camps. The Jordanian Army, under King Hussein's orders, opened fire on these camps and killed more than 10,000 Palestinians.

The Second World Conference on Palestine took place in Amman, capital of Jordan, while the opening shots were being fired by Hussein's army. Despite the harassment the conference, organised by the General Union of Palestinian Students, proceeded smoothly and the speech by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) delegate, an engineer and member of the District Committee of his trade union, was greeted with stormy applause.

ALL SUPPORT TO PALESTINE!

(extracts from the speech given by the delegate of the CPB(M-L) to the Second World Conference on Palestine, held in Amman, Jordan, Sept. 2-12, 1970).

I bring greetings to this Second World Conference on Palestine and to the Palestinian working class and people from myself, a British worker, and from the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). Our party is the only political party in Britain devoted wholly and entirely to the interests of the working class. Our party's aim is to see the British working class (the oldest and most experienced working class in the world) take its rightful place in the ranks of the revolutionary forces of the world, alongside the heroic fighters of Palestine and Vietnam, of China and Albania, dedicated to the total defeat of capitalism and imperialism all over the globe and to the victory of socialism and communism.

For over 150 years the British capitalist class has been meddling in the Middle East, plundering the natural wealth of the area, exploiting the local peoples and buying off or subverting regimes. When British capitalists needed a through route to their empire in the Far East they seized control of the Suez Canal (dug by Arab labour) and converted Egypt into a British colony. When oil was discovered in the Middle East British capitalists were the first to grab what they could get. To this very day British capitalists are dependent on oil supplies from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and the Gulf, literally draining the lifeblood of these economies to reap gigantic profits for themselves. To retain these supplies our capitalist class will resort to the most treacherous and perfidious manoeuvres, usually hand in hand with its senior partner, US imperialism, and with Russian and French imperialism which have their own interests in the region.

* * * * *

British government policy was responsible for the founding of the state of Israel and for the eviction of the Palestinians from the land which they had in for as long as the Anglo-Saxons had inhabited England. In the 30 years before the Balfour Declaration of

November 1917, Zionism had had almost no success in its aim of herding the European Jews into Palestine. But Lord Balfour's declaration of official support for Zionism from British imperialism changed things almost overnight. In the next 30 years, under the British mandate, the victims of Hitler's persecution flooded into Palestine - from the Nazi trap into the Zionist trap. So British imperialism worked hand in glove with German fascism to found the state of Israel and to create a Palestinian 'diaspora' - the eviction by terror of the majority of Palestinians from their homeland and the subjection of those remaining into conditions of virtual slavery.

Since its founding the state of Israel has played perfectly its role of imperialist bastion in the Arab heartland - "a little, loyal Jewish Ulster", as Sir Ronald Storrs, former British governor of Palestine, called it. By permanently threatening, and at roughly 10 year intervals carrying out, aggression against the surrounding Arab states it has served to perpetuate a status quo in the Middle East in which imperialist plunder could continue unabated. And for this service it has been well rewarded: official statistics show that "aid" to Israel is greater than that to any other client state of imperialism, amounting per head of population to 5 times the aid given to the puppet regimes in Taiwan or Saigon.

But the days when the Middle East was a playground for imperialism are rapidly passing. The Arab revolution is developing apace. The Palestinian fedayeen, led by Al Fatah, are teaching profound lessons in the art of defeating imperialism to all the Arab masses and to people around the world - about self-reliance; about armed struggle as the ultimately decisive form of struggle; about the treacherous character of the old imperialist powers and the Soviet revisionists, and their instrument the United Nations; and about the vacillating character of the Arab regimes.

The British working class has a tremendous moral responsibility to the Palestinians. While our capitalist class committed the crime against Palestine the working class, which alone had the veto power to stop them, failed to use it. Yet this was a period of intense activity by the working class. The shop stewards movement swept through the factories and forms of struggle at the point of production were brought to a stage unequalled in any other country. The weakness of these struggles was that they were limited by the social democratic ideas of piecemeal advance that for too long have been the prevailing ideology in Britain. Workers could see the need to fight against their individual capitalist but not against capitalism as a whole - the system which will as readily exploit workers in Palestine or Persia as workers in England or Wales. This was the case even while their own sons were drafted into armies to die in wars in defence of imperialism.

This era is now ending. British workers are increasingly rejecting the Parliamentary reformers who promise paradise in return for a vote. Instead they are relying on their own strength, as is shown by the involvement of more and more workers in strike action, including sections who have never before joined the class battle. Our task is to take this initiative further - to the final destruction of capitalism, enemy of British workers and Palestinians alike.

IMPERIALISTS BACK HUSSEIN'S BUTCHERY

Statement of Communist Party of Britain
(Marxist-Leninist)

The massacre in Jordan is the culmination of a cruel conspiracy hatched by the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union to preserve and advance their own "great power" interests in the Middle East.

The state of Israel is the central pillar on which these imperialist interests stand. The Palestinian fighters (the Fedayeen), in threatening to seize back their homeland of Palestine and destroy the Israeli state, threaten these imperialist interests. (Last year Shell and BP, Britain's biggest monopolies of all, made £800 million profit from their exploitation of Middle East oil).

Imperialism planned a double putsch to end this threat. First, in June, they imposed their "Rogers Peace Proposals", aimed at isolating the Palestinians from outside support. These proposals included a demand that Israel's right to the land of Palestine should be recognised and that the Fedayeen should be disbanded. They amounted to a guarantee that the Palestinians would remain forever, as they have been for over 20 years, stateless, homeless, landless and jobless.

Then, on September 16th, the Rogers Proposals having been accepted by Egypt and Jordan, came the second blow. The Jordanian army, trained by Britain and America, with napalm and phosphorous bombs, planes and tanks, launched a war of annihilation against the defenceless Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps and Amman. Thousands are reported to have been slaughtered.

These brutal deeds will not achieve their aim. The Fedayeen will not be destroyed. The Palestinians who live to fight will never forget this betrayal and will fight on with even greater determination. The Arab "fifth column" King Hussein and all other traitors within, will be destroyed as surely as the fascist Israeli state and the imperialists without. The wretched little Hussein has now joined the ranks of the most detestable creatures in history - those who, like Chiang Kai-shek, Syngman Rhee, Ngo Din Diem and the Ky-Thieu clique, have murdered their own people by the thousands in the interests of imperialism. Their people have judged them. They have already or will inevitably meet the same fate at their people's hands.

British workers should give the Palestinians full support. We must never forget that our employing class stands behind the Jordan massacre. The same class of butchers who slaughter thousands of Palestinians for profit's sake (and then throw up their hands in pious horror and send in the Red Cross) will not hesitate to murder British workers in due time.

21 Sept., 1970

OIL IMPERIALISM IN THE GULF

Beneath the waters of the Gulf between Arabia and Persia lie the richest oil reserves in the world. The states which have territorial rights over the oil consequently have a special importance for oil imperialism. They include not only Persia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait but also several smaller states on the Arabian side of the Gulf which are under complete British rule: Bahrain, Qatar and the seven Trucial kingdoms. British rule over these states dates back to 1806 when the East India Company began its infiltration into the various states along the route to India. Many agreements and treaties were signed with the rulers of the states whereby British traders and other imperialists were given a free hand in exploiting the wealth and the people of these countries. In return Britain was to "protect" these rulers and keep the peace in that area which meant protecting the most autocratic, slave-owning feudal sheikhs from the wrath of their people and ensuring "peaceful" exploitation of this part of the world.

With the end of these agreements coming in the latter part of 1971, the British government has been preparing its colonies for "independence". Britain is sponsoring the setting up of a "Union of Arab Emirates" which is to include the former British colonies in the Gulf. The main purpose of this shaky Union is to protect the Gulf rulers from what Sir John Willoughby, the British military advisor, termed "the chief threat"--internal subversion. Britain is hoping that a large force of local troops together with a massive mercenary army will save her part of the expense of direct engagement in the area.

"Independence" will in fact mean nothing for the people of these states. If genuine it would mean that they would take control over their natural resources, including the oil. This is far from what Britain intends; Shell and BP are much too well entrenched in the area. The promise of independence is part of a British propaganda campaign to present the feudal regimes as "respectable." This was the idea behind the 1970 coup in Oman which replaced the slave-owning autocratic Sultan with his equally autocratic son. (A measure of the new Sultan's "independence" is that his Defence Minister is a certain Colonel Hugh Oldman, seconded from the British Army.)

Oman is at present the centre of the revolutionary movement in the Gulf states. Despite a nominal promise of "military withdrawal" by the end of 1971 Britain intends to keep in Oman and the island of Masirah off the coast 4000 soldiers, 3,400 airmen and a naval strength of 10,000 (including 30 warships and 6 submarines). These troops are in essence an expeditionary force sent by Britain to crush the revolutionary movement against the Sultan of Oman. Despite the odds the guerrillas have been extremely successful and have already liberated two-thirds of the province of Dhofar. Their aim is to join up with liberation movements in all the British-ruled states and once-for-all to drive oil imperialism out of the Gulf. A statement they issued in 1970 to the British people follows.

BRITISH IMPERIALISM OUT OF THE ARAB GULF!

DECLARATION TO THE BRITISH PEOPLE

from The Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf

For over a century Britain has ruled the Arabian Gulf, first to protect the approaches to India, then to guard its oil interests. In the Gulf itself British rule has involved direct occupation of the area. In Muscat and Oman her rule has been indirect, through the local Sultan; he is formally independent but is in fact a British client, financed, armed and preserved by British power.

This British presence has led to the suppression of all movements that threaten Britain and her local servants, or that try to overcome the underdevelopment and misery of the people. The local people have been excluded from the politics of their country and the prisons of the Gulf are full of democrats who oppose this system. Britain has artificially preserved the separate units of the zone. In Oman there are no schools or medical services and the Sultan has over 5,000 private slaves to work his plantations and staff his bodyguard. This is the regime Britain is supporting.

Britain claims she will leave the Gulf in 1971. This is a fraud. Britain has grouped her client sheikhs into a Union of Arab Emirates which will pretend to be an independent state. Yet it will continue to protect British interests and it will be preserved by a mercenary army commanded and supplied by Britain. The sole aim of this army is "internal security" - i. e. suppressing political opposition. Britain aims to continue her rule by proxy. Moreover in Muscat and Oman Britain's position will not alter at all since she claims that the Sultan is already independent. Her bases, planes and military personnel will remain there and will be ready to suppress any opposition.

In addition American imperialism is expanding its influence in the area and hopes to replace Britain as the dominant power. The reactionary monarchies of Iran and Saudi Arabia are being backed by America, all of them intent on controlling and suppressing the peoples of the Gulf.

Since June 9 1965 we, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf, have been fighting an armed struggle against British imperialism and her local clients, to liberate the whole of the Gulf from imperialism and oppression. In the Dhofar province of Oman we have liberated over two-thirds of the territory and driven the British into a defensive position.

Using RAF planes and Pakistani mercenaries commanded by British officers, Britain has replied to military defeat by a brutal attack on the economic life of the liberated area. They have bombed and shelled our herds and the villages, pastures and wells where our people work. British officers have tortured prisoners and innocent citizens, and have personally ordered many of our villages to be burnt or bombed.

We are fighting against both national and class oppression; against the oppression of our nation by Britain and Iran, and against Saudi Arabia; and against the class oppression of the

reactionary despots of the Gulf. We are also fighting on two fronts; a military fight against British intervention, and a social fight against the backwardness that imperialism has preserved in this area; that is against illiteracy, tribal division and the subjection of women. The liberation of Dhofar is only the first step to the liberation of the whole Gulf.

We demand the complete and immediate withdrawal of Britain from all areas of the Gulf, and the renunciation of all British ties with the Sultans, sheikhs and omirs she has been propping up for so long. We denounce both the Tory and Labour Parties for their identical policies of oppression in the area. Moreover we know that the British people have been kept in complete ignorance of these facts by a tight censorship and in particular by the refusal to permit independent observers to visit Dhofar.

Our struggle is part of a world-wide struggle against imperialism and against exploitation by capital. We are one with the heroic people of Vietnam and with the people of Palestine and we stand with the peoples of Rhodesia and Northern Ireland who like us are fighting disguised forms of British colonial rule.

We appeal to all progressive forces in Britain to support our cause, and to oppose this savage and secret war being fought by Britain to protect her oil and her slave-owning Sultan. We shall continue our fight till the whole of the Gulf has been liberated and until British imperialism has been finally driven from the area. Long live the Unity of the Anti-imperialist struggle of the World!

British and American Imperialism , out of the Gulf!

Long live the 9th June!

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