
The Armed Forces in Britain

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Anyone seriously concerned with fundamental democratic change in Britain and with opening up the road to socialism must have a policy for dealing with the State institutions, including the coercive as well as the non-coercive ones.

While the British Labour and progressive movement has, with some exceptions, neglected the role of the army—and this criticism can be fairly levelled at the Communist Party, too—ruling circles in

¹ A more comprehensive examination of the role of armed forces in systems of political power is contained in Jack Woddis's *Armies and Politics* (Lawrence & Wishart), now available in paperback price £2.95. The above article has drawn considerably on the final chapter of this book.

Britain, with their acute awareness of the realities of political power, have thought ahead and taken a number of steps to prepare the army for the future. The new role for which the army is being groomed has been expressed both in military/political theory and in training and practice.

The results of such training have, to a large and painful degree, been witnessed now for ten years in Northern Ireland. This army engagement and “blood-ing” in “counter-insurgency” operations has provided the British army with technical expertise and experimentation in coping with urban guerrillas, and in the employment of new tactics for such warfare. But that is only part of the task which the army is carrying out in Northern Ireland. It is also being employed to control and curb the political activities

of the civilian population. As a result it is being "brainwashed" and is acquiring, even more than it has always had, the harsh outlook of a repressive, counter-revolutionary, anti-working class and anti-democratic institution which looks on all those who demand democratic and national rights as the enemy who is to be extirpated.

Among the worst influences at work is not just the involvement of the troops in crowd control, surveillance, military operations and the general harassment of the civilian population, but their complicity in torture, as alleged for a long time by its victims and by the progressive movement in Britain and Ireland, and now confirmed by Amnesty International as well as by the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg, and belatedly and unavoidably admitted by the British Government. Yet, despite this, all the indications are that torture and brutal beatings are still being employed. All experience from fascist countries as well as from other repressive regimes confirms that the practice of torture is not only a barbarous outrage to its victims. It is a source of corruption and degeneration for those who actually carry it out.

Effect on Britain

At the same time, it is clear that the authoritarian and anti-democratic indignities meted out to the people in Northern Ireland are washing over Britain. The repressive emergency laws in Northern Ireland are matched by the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Britain. The armoured cars that roam the streets of Belfast are beginning to be emulated by Heathrow-type military exercises in Britain. Computerised information on citizens, now the standard practice in Northern Ireland, is beginning to embrace hundreds of thousands of citizens in Britain. More and more it is being borne out that a people that acquiesces in its armed forces being employed to repress another nation thereby weakens its own democratic freedoms.

This underlines the necessity for the progressive movement to work out an approach to this problem and to elaborate a detailed policy for the army which will provide a basis for influencing it in a democratic direction. It is political pessimism to argue that such a change in the outlook of the army personnel cannot be brought about.

Although the army, as an institution, is very much isolated from the majority of people, separately housed, fed and trained, operating mainly under its own separate laws, disciplinary controls and police, and trained to regard itself as apart from the civilian population; and although, in times of relative political calm, the army appears to be motivated by quite different aims, anxieties and opinions than those operating among the people generally, yet, at times of deepening political crisis, army personnel, both

soldiers and officers, are influenced by the waves of political thought and conflict that engulf the nation as a whole.

Portugal

This is shown, for example, by the events in Portugal in 1974/5, when an army which had been trained by fascism for almost fifty years, ended by playing a key part in toppling the fascist regime, and in backing the radical measures of land reform and large-scale nationalisation which consolidated the revolutionary changes.

It is idle, in a situation as in Britain, where the majority of people have not yet been won for fundamental democratic and political change opening up a prospect of socialism, to expect the army to become transformed and display political tendencies in advance of those taken up by the majority of the civilian population itself. To win the heart of the army it is necessary to win the heart of the people. But winning the heart of the people, decisive as it is, is not enough in itself to solve the military problem. Additionally required is a military policy for winning the army for democratic progress and, combined with such a policy, persistent and responsible activity to win support for it both in the armed forces and among the general population.

When one looks at the activities of right-wing forces in British political life one has to admit that they are far more conscious of the key role of the army in political power systems, and display considerable initiative to influence it in a rightward direction. It is, of course, true that they start with an initial advantage, for not only has the army been traditionally isolated from democratic political trends in Britain, but the officer corps, especially its upper ranks, has class and strata ties which incline it more to conservative and even ultra-right politics than they do towards the popular movement.

Nato

The involvement of Britain's armed forces with Nato constitutes a further acute danger for British democracy. Quite apart from the heavy economic burden which this entails, the political character and purposes of the alliance contribute towards the nourishment of our armed forces as an instrument of reaction.

First, Nato is regarded by its policy-makers—in fact, it was set up for that purpose—as a counter-force to the Soviet Union and its socialist allies. Consequently, the whole training, equipment, manoeuvres and deployment of Nato forces are given an anti-Soviet, anti-socialist and anti-communist thrust.

Secondly, Nato has an emphatic counter-revolutionary purpose in Western Europe. Ostensibly established to defend "democracy", one of its key functions in fact is to maintain the system of capital-

ism in Western Europe. This anti-popular purpose of Nato cannot be pursued without a heavy dose of indoctrination intended to prepare the army to hold down the people in the belief that it is combating what is termed "subversion".

A third purpose of Nato is that of protecting the "overseas" interests of Nato partners. Accordingly, Nato provided support and military equipment to Portugal throughout its wars against the liberation movements of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. In the same way, and for the same basic reason, Nato maintains various forms of military collaboration with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Thus, Britain's involvement with Nato strengthens in every way the reactionary and anti-democratic trends in the British armed forces. Important therefore, to the aim of transforming the British army into a real shield of the democratic aspirations of the British people is the withdrawal of Britain from Nato and the dissolution of all military blocs in Europe.

The constant and varied employment of the British armed forces in this fashion, always on the side of reaction, always against democratic rights, against the labour movement, and against national liberation, cannot but contribute towards making the forces a compliant and willing tool of the most nefarious and anti-popular purposes of Britain's ruling class.

Three Possible Consequences

There are three grave consequences of these developments. First, the army is more and more being groomed to play an official role as a more directly interventionist and political instrument *at the behest of the government* (note, for example, its use in industrial disputes in the case of Glasgow dustmen and the fire services). Secondly, tendencies have been strengthened and processes set in motion that could lead to the army, or a section of it, cutting loose and playing a role as an apparently independent arbiter by indulging in its own coup politics and compelling the government of the day to capitulate to its demands for strong action against the popular movement. Or thirdly, reactionary officers could even force the government out of office altogether.

All three of these dangers exist; but the first of these, as things stand at present, is the most serious threat to British democracy. In fact, we are already part-way down that road. Over the past thirty years the British ruling class has pursued an aim of producing an army more readily suited to playing a reactionary political role.

Britain's Armed Forces

Today, Britain's Regular Armed Forces (all three services) number 343,000 highly trained volunteer

professionals. They are backed by some 250,000 Reserves (over 170,000 of them former Regular personnel, and about 70,000 of them part-time Volunteers). In addition, there are near to 140,000 Cadets. The armed forces further employ at home and abroad close to 280,000 civilians. The army itself accounts for about 170,000 professionals, 109,000 Regular Reserves and 57,000 Volunteer Reserves, as well as 70,000 Cadets.

The best known exponent of the new ideas which form much of the basis of the British's army's training is Brigadier Frank Kitson, who has set out his theses in his book, *Low Intensity Operations*.² This study has attracted much comment, chiefly because it has been regarded as virtually a new military manual offering advice to the army on the way to cope with an internal armed insurrection. Brigadier Kitson appears to be well-placed to offer such advice, having had experience in "counter-insurgency" in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus, as well as, significantly, having commanded the 39th Airborne Brigade in Belfast for at least two years subsequent to the crisis that began in 1969. His qualifications as an expert in "operations and intelligence against terrorists" are praised by General Sir Michael Carver³ in his foreword to the Kitson book.

Kitson's Approval

There are a number of outstanding and quite frankly alarming features of this study; particularly alarming when one realises Kitson's place in the army hierarchy, and taking into account that part of his army responsibilities have been to give lectures on his thesis to army personnel on a quite considerable scale. Despite a muted reference to possible right-wing insurgents, the whole book is predicated on the assumption that the enemy is the left, the protesters, the organisers of strikes and demonstrations, the communists or, in Third World countries, "the down-trodden peoples", the movements for national liberation. Thus, apart from the type of technical training that is a consequence of such an approach, it undoubtedly has deep ideological significance, too. Further, the thesis is built on an assumption that all forms of political protest by the left, the "subversives", are but a preparation for *armed* action. Hence today's "subversive" (striker, demonstrator, protester) is tomorrow's military target and opponent. This reinforces the idea already

² Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, London, 1971.

³ At the time Carver wrote the foreword he was Chief of General Staff. Brigadier Kitson is no unorthodox maverick; his book represents very much the official army view. After all, he is the Commandant of the Army's School of Infantry at Warminster.

planted in the mind of the serving man that the radical elements in society should be dealt with by force, by military methods.

In a revealing passage Kitson defines subversion as "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".⁴ Elaborating this point, and presumably spelling out the kind of "illegal(*sic*) measures" he has in mind, Kitson lists "the use of political and economic pressure, strikes, protest marches, and propaganda". Thus, with a curious indifference towards the democratic rights won by the British people over years of struggle, (or is it a rather more sinister psychological sleight-of-hand?), he plants the idea that the exercise of their democratic rights by the people constitutes an act of subversion; and since, in his thesis, such activities are but the prelude to armed insurrection, clearly the armed forces would be justified in taking action to repress them.

In pursuit of these aims, according to the Kitson thesis, the military must be prepared, trained and equipped for a role in society as a whole, involving all forms of intelligence, collecting information, compiling dossiers, engaging in psychological warfare to influence civilians to side with the army against the "subversives", conducting mass surveillance of the population assisted by the use of computers, and so forth. These conceptions, dangerous and disturbing as they are, are all related to actions intended to back up the legitimate civilian government. Although many of his examples are drawn from Third World countries, Brigadier Kitson clearly has Britain very much in mind all the time. In this context, however, of a Britain in the future facing dangers from "political extremists", he comes very near to an outright advocacy of the army being prepared to "go it alone".

"If a genuine and 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. Fumbling at this juncture might have grave consequences even to the extent of undermining confidence in the whole system of government".⁵

What is of particular significance here is the circumstances in which the Brigadier believes it would be necessary for the army "to restore the

position"—namely, the establishment of a broad, popular, democratic alliance combining all the streams of protest into one united flood in the face of which the establishment would be compelled to yield ground.

A New Threat

As a qualified military man who obviously thinks politically about his job, Kitson perceives that the nature of the task facing the ruling class today is of somewhat different dimensions to that which it confronted previously. The growth of state monopoly capitalism, the concentration of economic power in the hands of a relatively few industrial and financial giants, the ruthless drive of big business for ever bigger profits, the concentration of political power in the hands of the State and a few top politicians acting on behalf of and in concert with the big monopolies and banks—all this is creating an ever wider basis for opposition to the ruling class on a broad front. Workers' actions for higher wages in no sense set the limits of the struggle. A host of social questions—housing, health, education, pensions, social security—are pressing for solution. Problems of transport, environment, pollution, civil rights, racialism, are increasingly the subjects of today's union agendas. The women's mass movement for liberation, the struggle of immigrant people, the demands of students, protest activities on behalf of national liberation movements, actions for peace and disarmament—these and a host of other issues are drawing wide strata of people into conflict, in one form or another, with the establishment.

Thus there exist objective conditions for the creation of a broad, democratic alliance of different social classes and strata, and of various social movements, establishing a united coalition which would direct its combined strength against the ruling power. It is these considerations that lie behind one of the basic conceptions in the Communist Party's programme, *The British Road to Socialism*. It would be an exaggeration to argue that it is to block this aim of the Communists that Kitson has evolved his military tactics. Yet it is no doubt in anticipation of the British people's success in opening up such a road that Kitson wants the army to be prepared to act in defence of the *status quo*. In other words, whether he is familiar with the Communist Party programme or not, the spectre that haunts him is a broad, democratic alliance of the British people, pressing for emphatic social change, for a revolutionary transformation of British society.

Yet, if we were to think that Kitson is pioneering some new approach for the army, we would be making a big mistake. To a large degree, he is only spelling out what has been British military theory and practice over a number of years.

⁴ Kitson, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁵ Kitson, p. 25

An Armed Political Wing

Extracts from the Army's training manual, *Land Operations, Volume III—Counter-Revolutionary Operations*, published in *Time Out* magazine (10–16 January 1975), provide a most sinister and disturbing picture of the extent to which the army has already been trained and employed as an armed political wing of the government directed against radical, labour and popular movements. This is no recent development, although the repression in Northern Ireland and its spill-over into Britain have brought new refinements.

Central to the approach of the manual is the concept that a "triumvirate" consisting of the civil authorities, the military and the police should work in unison "as a joint and integrated organisation from the highest to the lowest level of policy making, planning and administration". A series of six measures are defined as the basis of the counter-revolutionary operations in which the army, together with its other two partners in the holy trinity, will be engaged. These six proposed measures are:

- (a) the passing of emergency regulations to facilitate the conduct of a national campaign;
- (b) various political, social and economic measures designed to gain popular support and counter or surpass anything offered by the insurgents;
- (c) the setting up of an effective organisation for joint civil and military control at all levels;
- (d) the forming of an effective, integrated and nationwide intelligence organisation without which military operations can never be successful;
- (e) the strengthening of indigenous police and armed forces so that their loyalty is beyond question and their work effective. This is oftener easier said than done;
- (f) control measures designed to isolate the insurgents from popular control.⁶

It will be noted that, although these measures are linked with action to check "insurgents", it provides a dangerous pattern for military intervention in the field of civilian politics. This danger is underlined by the way the manual slips quite easily from what could be regarded as more correctly military functions into direct intervention against people exercising their democratic rights.⁷ Thus among the range of activities which the army would be called upon to undertake as part of its responsibilities in maintaining internal security are:

- (1) dealing with civil disturbances resulting from labour disputes, racial and religious antagonism and tension or social unrest;
- (2) dealing with riots and civil disobedience, with

or without the political undertones which savour of revolt or even rebellion.

Given that the army is trained into accepting a scenario which, in the manual, depicts a gradual escalation of normal political activity via "political agitation and manoeuvring propaganda activities, formation of cells and cadres (political, intelligence and military) and civil and industrial unrest... Civil disobedience, disturbances, riots, strikes, lawlessness... Use of propaganda and psychological means to discredit the government" into open revolutionary warfare, it is quite easy to see the calamitous effects such propaganda could have on the mind of the troops. Indoctrinated in this way, it is inevitable that many of them will tend to consider *any* strike, *any* protest march, *any* sit-in or factory occupation, *any* anti-Government speech or publication, and especially those coming from the left and the labour movement, as being caused by "communists" and as mere preliminaries for a subsequent armed insurrection.

The Left and the Armed Forces

Since the programme of the Communist Party of Great Britain, *The British Road to Socialism*, sets out a prospect of an advance to socialism in Britain *without* an armed insurrection but on the basis of the democratic verdict of the majority of the British people, a verdict that will find its expression in an electoral majority, too, it is clearly in the interests of the British people, and of the armed forces, as well, that the men in uniform should be aware of that perspective, and of the programmes of other sections of the labour and democratic movement. The demand for democratic rights for military personnel is therefore not a mere question of fairness for the troops. It is vitally in the interests of the civilian population that there should be possibilities for ensuring that the armed forces support the people's democratic aspirations. Otherwise the troops will be left to be brainwashed by the instruction and indoctrination indicated above, with the most dire consequences.

The traditional neglect of the armed forces by the labour and democratic movement in Britain is a serious blindness. Unease about the role of the armed forces is undoubtedly present, but there has been very little conscious effort to work out a policy for the armed forces, to campaign for support for such a policy in the movement, to win backing for it from the general public, and to persuade the armed forces personnel themselves to support it. Yet, without such a conscious effort, without such a policy, it is difficult to tackle this vital problem.

One of the welcome signs of change is the attitude now being taken by a number of Labour MPs and by several trade unions in favour of trade union rights for army personnel. In debates in Parliament

⁶ As quoted in *Time Out*, op.cit.

⁷ Kitson does the same. See above.

several MPs have argued in favour of trade union and other democratic rights for service personnel, including an improved and democratic procedure for handling complaints and for dealing with problems of discipline. A number of those who have taken up these matters have not been unaware of the wider implications of their proposals.

Writing subsequently, Mr. Ron Thomas, MP, has pointed out:

"To many of us the whole question of trade union rights (for service personnel) is inexorably linked with the democratisation of the armed forces which we believe is an urgent and demanding challenge for the whole labour movement. To sustain the demand for the democratisation of the armed forces it is sufficient simply to recall the events in Chile and other countries where the armed forces were or became remote from the aspirations of the workers, and indeed became the instruments of bloody repression against the democratic rights and aspirations of the working people. The free and effective exercise of trade union rights at all levels is of course a prerequisite, indeed, the only driving force, to bring about the democratisation which is urgently needed."⁸

Trade union rights alone are not enough to ensure democratisation of the armed forces. The soldiers need political rights, too.

A Policy for the Armed Forces

The full elaboration of a military policy for winning the army to adopt a firm democratic stand remains a pressing task for the British labour and progressive movement. A democratic military policy must, first of all, direct itself to establishing the role and function of the armed forces. The army's role should be the patriotic one of defending the people and their democratic achievements, and making it possible for them to carry out further democratic changes without foreign aggression or intervention. It should have no internal functions which result in it being employed to suppress the people's democratic activities or the struggles of workers and their trade unions. Nor should it intervene in industrial disputes by carrying out jobs normally performed by the workers involved in the dispute.

Secondly, a progressive military policy should also concern itself with the specific problems of soldiers and officers as regards pay, promotion, training, leave, discipline, leisure facilities, accommodation, health and so on.

Thirdly, there needs to be a two-fold democratic campaign in support of democratic procedures and rights *within* the armed forces, along with democratic supervision from *outside*. Democratic rights for ser-

ving men and women include the democratic political rights enjoyed by the civilian population (the right to belong to political parties, attend political meetings, read political literature and newspapers, etc.), subject only to the exigencies of the service and actual service operations and discipline. Democratic rights for the forces also involves there being a democratic procedure governing their channels for complaints and redress of grievances, and a democratic method for dealing with cases of alleged indiscipline which allows the person charged full rights, with legal counsel of his or her own choice, including civilian counsel, in order to ensure a proper defence.

Trade Unionism

One way in which many of these matters could be handled is by allowing soldiers to elect delegates of their choice. This could be either to soldiers' committees, on a unit or other basis; or, as has been suggested and as is practised in some West European countries, by allowing trade unions to function in the army. Experiences of trade unions in the army in different countries has been rather mixed and inconclusive, and finds little favour in progressive circles in France and Italy. It may well be that in Britain, with our very long and powerful trade union tradition, and given the fact that today more and more sections are being attracted towards unions (such as the police, high-ranking civil servants, top managerial personnel, churchmen, etc.), trade unions in the British army may be more successful than has been the case with other armies in Western Europe.

The trade union movement may well be one of the instruments through which the civilian population could maintain its democratic links with the army as a whole, and play a part, too, in supervision so as to ensure that democratic procedures *within* the army were being satisfactorily adhered to and that grievances were being properly dealt with. Democratic supervision of the armed forces would also, and above all, require parliamentary supervision. This would need to be no mere formality, but a real, living supervision exercised through committees of MPs who would make frequent visits, receive documentation, hear individual as well as collective complaints through the agreed representatives of the soldiers, sergeants, NCOs and officers. Possibly other public bodies and social organisations could also be drawn into the work of supervision.

In addition to the above steps, a progressive military policy would also need to pursue consistently the aim of winning the army for a progressive standpoint, to side with the people's democratic aspirations. The winning of democratic and political rights for the army should give full legal rights to the progressive movement and provide possibilities to it as well as to explain its policies to soldiers and

⁸ Ron Thomas, 'Soldiers' Rights,' *Labour Monthly*, August, 1976.

officers, not only on military matters but on the whole field of politics and ideology.

The Role of the Officers

Of special significance would be the role of the officers. The repressive use of the army either as a coercive instrument of a reactionary government or as the organiser of a coup *against* the government is not likely to be initiated by soldiers. It is the officers who take the lead and give the instructions, and the soldiers who normally obey. The struggle to win the army for democracy must therefore also set itself the aim of influencing the officers. The success of this struggle is, as has been shown in Chile and Portugal, for example, very much influenced by what is happening in civil society. The officers are increasingly from the upper and lower middle strata. What these same strata think and do in civilian life has a great influence on the thinking and behaviour of the officers. In its turn, the conduct and opinions of the officers can also have a feedback amongst the middle strata in civilian life.

The class and social origin of the officers in the British army is of significance here. In the early 1960s it was estimated that nearly 50 per cent of the army's intake into the officer corps came from the existing officer class, nearly half came from public schools, and 77 per cent came from the A-B socio-economic group, that is, the top 12 per cent in our society. This balance has now been emphatically altered. Only about 35 per cent now comes from military families, and about 36 per cent from public schools.

Family and class ties and interests of those at the top of the military hierarchy incline them to the *status quo*, and often to a more conservative outlook altogether. There is another aspect, too, which should not be overlooked; that is the tie-up between the military top brass, the Ministry of Defence and the big arms firms. On 27 April 1976, in reply to a question in Parliament put by Mr. Frank Allaun, Labour MP for Salford East, the Defence Minister, Roy Mason, revealed that in the five years 1971-6 no less than 97 serving officers and 86 Defence Ministry civil servants joined firms which had contracts to supply arms to the Ministry of Defence. In this way those at the top of the military hierarchy become part of the military-industrial complex; and given that this avenue of promotion, as it might be called, beckons attractively while officers are pursuing their army career, it can be understood that for those influential enough to enjoy this as a realistic perspective, the maintenance of the present social and economic system is very much related to their own stake in the system.

Military Expenditure

The question of a progressive military policy also

involves the problem of military expenditure. A substantial cut in arms expenditure, and the bringing home of all troops overseas would not only make a contribution to solving Britain's economic difficulties; it would have an important impact, too, on questions of state political power.

The size of the armed forces and its structure would undergo changes once the forces' role was limited to that of national defence and no longer extended to cover external aggression, oppression or intervention on the side of counter-revolution. Such changes would need to be combined with steps in Britain itself to end all training in anti-democratic and anti-working class measures which at present go under the name of "counter-insurgency" programmes. Special counter-revolutionary units and structures such as the SAS would need to be abolished, and officers who have been connected with these special departments would need to be re-allocated to duties which limit their possibilities of putting into practice the reactionary policies in which they have been instructing the forces under their command. The work of military intelligence, too, would need a drastic overhaul; a new direction would have to be given to its work, and consequent changes made in personnel.

A strategy such as that contained in the British Communist Party's programme *The British Road to Socialism*, which envisages winning over the middle strata as part of its aim of building a broad, democratic alliance, would find it essential to win at least part of the officers to the side of democracy, both to help strengthen the alliance and to help solve the army problem. Winning the officers is also important with respect to influencing the soldiers. A concept of "rank-and-file soldiers versus officers" could produce unwanted divisions and tensions in the army and make it more difficult to influence either soldiers or officers in a progressive direction. If there are to be any differentiations in the army—and in real life these will occur—the needs of democratic change in Britain demand that these should centre around the major *political* contradiction, that of the majority versus the big monopolies and their system of political power, and not be diverted to secondary contradictions of officers against soldiers since, in the main, the officers are not the direct representatives of big capital (apart from the top brass), but are, on the contrary, potential allies of the democratic front.

In Britain the task of transforming the army presents particular problems. As we have noted, for years the armed forces have been trained as a counter-revolutionary force and heavily indoctrinated with anti-democratic ideas.

It does not at all follow that such views will remain the permanent outlook of the troops. After all, in Portugal an army that was trained as an instrument of fascism eventually changed right round,

overthrew the fascist government and opened the doors to democracy. There is, however, one important difference and that is the question of conscription. In Portugal large-scale conscription, including for officer duties, meant that ideas from civilian life found a more direct entry into the armed forces. In Britain we have an elite, professional, non-conscript army. This makes the task of democratisation more complicated. It is not political realism to advocate ending British non-conscript practice, which has long been the tradition except in war periods and in the post-1945 situation. The problem, therefore, is that of democratising a professional, volunteer force. Although this may present its own special difficulties, in essence the problem is the same as that of armies such as those of France or Italy, where conscription is the norm.

Given that there is a possibility to carry through a change-over from capitalism to socialism without armed insurrection, but by reliance on a massive democratic majority, struggle against the army is not the aim in such a perspective. Instead of "smashing the State", which involves "smashing" the army which is a major institution of the State, the aim would be to transform the army, democratising it and making it an institution for the defence of democracy and the democratic changes which the majority in the country would be working to carry through.

If there were a solid majority of people for such changes, the army would be in an unprecedented situation. To go against that majority, that united bloc of various class and social forces, would be a hazardous throw for the military hierarchy and produce grave strains and tensions within the armed forces.

A Massive Check

No political realist would deny that in the face of great impending change there would be forces in our society that would try to utilise the armed forces against the people. The power of the people, fully exercised, would be a massive check to such dangers.

The important thing, however, is not to wait for that decisive moment before acting but to work now, as part of the process of building a broad, democratic alliance, to democratise the armed forces so that the chances of reaction using the army, or part of it, are progressively lessened.

While it is true, as we have stressed more than once, that the army is affected all the way to the top by the big social and political upheavals taking place in civilian life, it would be an illusion to think that these events outside the armed forces are influencing soldiers and officers only in one direction. They are subject to *all* the influences that wash over them from civilian life—the most backward-looking and

conservative as well as the most progressive.

Neutralisation?

It is sometimes argued that the most that can be expected is to "neutralise" the army, and that it is foolish to believe it can be won for a more definite commitment to democracy, let alone to socialism. There are two things to be said in reply to such an argument. First, that the extent to which the army stays neutral and accepts the democratic wishes of the majority depends on the necessary political work being carried out beforehand by the progressive movement, including winning democratic rights for the troops and ensuring that they have a reasoned understanding of what it is the progressive movement is striving to achieve. Second, what is most likely to make the coup-minded officers hesitate to sweep aside the people's democratic verdict is a massive response by the organised workers, as indicated above. Third, even the most rabid ultra-right officers would be deterred from attempting to use the army to thwart the wishes of the civilian majority by the knowledge that a substantial part of the soldiers and the officers would not agree to play this game because they had already been won to support the standpoint of the democratic majority in favour of social change.

The Battle for the Army

If the labour and progressive movement does not win the army for democracy, others have a better chance to win it for counter-revolution. As the class struggle intensifies, and as more people become organised and take up activity for profound democratic change and renewal of our society, two opposing tendencies become more accentuated in the army, in line with what is taking place in civilian life. The big monopolies and the political circles on their side become more desperate and also begin to mobilise their forces for action, as distinct from periods of relative political calm when they tend to rely on their propaganda and the relative passivity and acquiescence of the majority. A sharpening of the class struggle, as the term indicates, means that *both* sides become more active. This finds its reflection inside the armed forces where the most reactionary officers begin to take a more direct political role and become not only more active, but dangerously so, to the point of considering all manner of wild and reactionary adventures. This is a law of all political crises, and, whatever may be the degree to which this becomes manifest in Britain in the coming period, and whatever the form in which it is expressed, it would be entirely wrong to think that Britain will be an exception in this matter. Experience elsewhere shows only too clearly that the battle for the soul of the army is a necessary part of the struggle for a radical transformation of society.