

# British reactionaries said recruiting

By PHILIP WEST

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This is London. Britain is on the brink of economic collapse—the end of democracy is imminent.

The general strike begins Tuesday, Harrods bombed Wednesday, tanks in Westminster Thursday, the queen deposed to Balmoral by late editions Friday. For the six million readers of the "News of the World" Sunday, a special feature on life after the apocalypse with the usual abundance of ladies half undressed in bearskins rather than bikinis.

In Fleet street, the collapse of civilization as the British know it can command countless pages, and only the liberal Guardian with its slogan "where there's still some sanity left" dares to poke fun with a Plan Your Favorite Coup column.

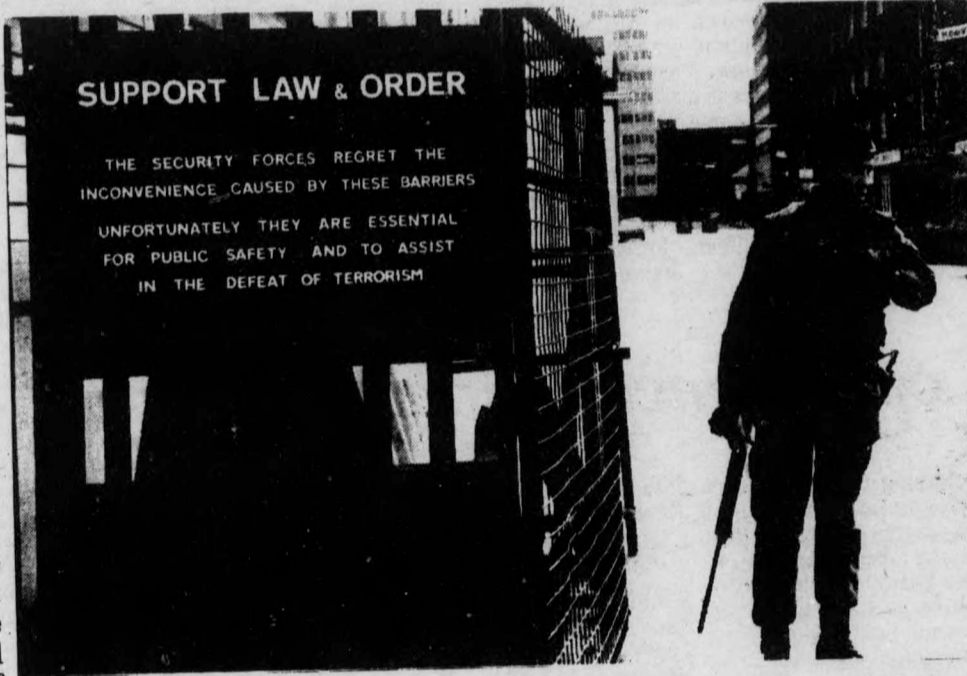
Elsewhere the headlines vary between "Could we have a military takeover in Britain" from the Daily Express to an article in The Times headed "How inflation threatens British democracy with its last chance before extinction". Strong stuff indeed, but it may not be so unreal!

Politicians uniformly agree that Britain is facing its "gravest economic crisis" since the Second World War. Another election is not about to change that fact.

Inflation is running at more than 17 percent, and is expected to climb to 20 percent next year; the trade deficit will probably total \$10 billion this year; bankruptcies have increased, unemployment may jump to one million within months—only the stock market is falling, in a slump equalling that in 1929.

"We're heading straight for a depression", says one merchant banker. "When? Well, we live in an exponential world, where everything happens faster than you think, so, whenever you say, it'll be sooner."

All this promises the British people a long winter of discontent, with the workers bearing the brunt. The Labour government has so far led a charmed existence with the unions, flaunting a rather vague "social contract" to avoid inflationary pay claims.



Whether it is a Labour or a Conservative victory in the upcoming election, that "contract" is likely to collapse with demands for massive pay raises. The only alternative for any government would be to reintroduce severe pay controls.

What happens then is a hazardous guess, but a point somewhere between a general strike and armed rebellion is not, according to those in the city, an unfounded possibility.

"I happen to think," one British company director is quoted as saying, "that, before I die, I shall be out there hiding in the fields. We shall slip slowly towards Marxism without a revolution, or it could be a direct confrontation and we could be there very quickly. Then the question would be, would the Army step in? If not, we'd be lost."

The Investors Review reported one top general apparently took three months leave of absence "to write a manual on how, and in what circumstances, the army would take over." Brigadier Frank Kitson, in his book "Low Intensity Operations" says "already, there are indications that such a situation could arise..."

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"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 situation rapidly. Fumbling at this juncture might have grave consequences, even to the extent of undermining confidence in the whole system of government."

Kitson should not be easily discounted. His book rated a foreword by chief of the general staff, General Sir Micheal-Carver, who was regarded by ex-Prime Minister Heath as the man to keep the country running during any disruption. In the foreword, Carver described the book as "written for the soldier of today to help him prepare for the operations of tomorrow."

Another brigadier, Kenneth Hunt, of the Institute of Strategic Studies, believes it would be comparatively easy to accomplish the first stage of a coup in Britain.

"There are enough men and equipment within range of London. There are the troops used at Heathrow, with the help of a few tanks from Tidworth; that's enough to go straight to the BBC, Downing (home of the prime minister), and parliament."

Hunt's mention of the troops at Heathrow is particularly relevant to any discussion of a British coup d'etat. The joint exercise of troops and police at the airport was originally staged under the Conservative government in reaction to a report that Arab terrorists had stolen a missile from NATO. Since then the exercise, complete with deployment of tanks, has been repeated on a number of occasions, and it was Kitson who suggested that it should be extended to the docks, railways and coal mines.

A series of other notable army exercises have been reported.

One in Corby, Nottinghamshire, by members of the Fifth Royal Anglican Regiment, was part of a war game between two rival factions in "aid of the civilian power."

Another exercise in Hull has 30 soldiers in full battle regalia descending on a deserted suburban house. Later the Conservative minister of defence explained that there was nothing sinister. "Considering internal security is a normal part of a soldier's training. In any war situation one has to look after things until the civil authority can assert itself. That is what the exercise was all about, and they are going on all the time."

One massive exercise in civilian control that has been going on all the time is in Northern Ireland. It was from there that Brig. Kitson announced in 1971 that the army and other forces would be ready to take on the workers in Britain within two years. But in his book he found one fault with the "professionals", as the modern British army is called.

**'Out of the blue, another Churchill has emerged'**

Kitson wrote of the need to maintain specialist units within the army to enable essential civil services to be maintained then. The army's lack of specialists was graphically illustrated during the Ulster workers' strike of May this year, when after 13 days the army occupied 21 petrol stations but unable to operate electrical, gas, water and sewage installations deserted by the workers.

It is into this breach that two old soldiers of impeccable qualification have lately marched with plans for organizations to replace workers during a general strike.

Most impressive is Colonel David Stirling, founder of the Special Air Services during the Second World War in north Africa. He earned himself the nickname "the phantom major" and the DSO before imprisonment in Colditz.

