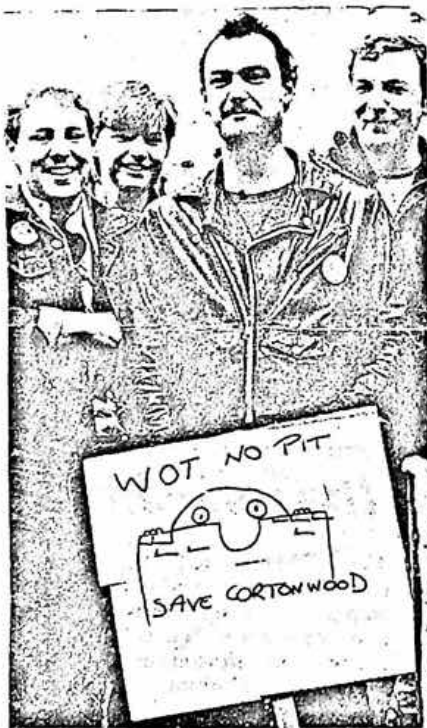


COM PASS

(Organ of the Communist League)

October, 1984

THE MINERS' STRUGGLE



Some seventy years ago Lenin drew attention to the fact that capitalists involved in industry had become merged with those involved in finance to form a single ruling class of finance capitalists.

This analysis remains true, but today - seventy years on - capitalism in Britain has reached such an advanced state of decay that it is impossible for a single government economic policy to give maximum benefit to both industrial and financial capital.

The so-called "wets" in the Conservative Party, along with the leadership of the Labour Party, base themselves on Keynesian economic principles, which serve primarily the interests of industrial capital. According to these principles, a "pure market economy" cannot function effectively in the best interests of industrial capital, but requires the economic intervention of the state: essential service industries should be state owned and operated in the interests of private industrial capital, with state subsidies if necessary; a minimum level of state social services is necessary to

ensure that the labour force works with maximum efficiency and that market demand is maintained at a level which ensures optimum profitability. According to this economic philosophy, a moderate level of inflation resulting from its application is no bad thing.

The Thatcher government, on the other hand, bases itself on "monetarist" economic principles, which serve primarily the interests of financial capital and regard inflation as the principal nightmare. It presents a "pure market economy" as the "ideal" which government economic policy should move towards: state enterprise should be restricted to the armed forces and police; there should be no state subsidies to any economic enterprise - unprofitable "lame ducks" should be allowed to die no matter what the social consequences; there should be, "ideally", no state expenditure on social services - education, health, etc. being left to private enterprise. This would enable taxation to be reduced. According to this "monetarism", unemployment is the result of

workers demanding higher wages than it is profitable to pay them; hence trade unions, which are "monopolistic" and interfere with the regulation of wages according to the "laws" of supply and demand, should be abolished.

Of course, political expediency makes it necessary for the government to move only gradually towards this "ideal", but almost every piece of legislation put through by the Thatcher government has been consciously directed towards it.

THE POLICY OF THE NATIONAL COAL BOARD IS THE POLICY OF THE THATCHER GOVERNMENT: mines which are "uneconomic" (that is, where costs exceed returns) should be closed down; then, when only "economic" mines remain, the industry can be handed over to private enterprise.

THE PRESENT MOMENTOUS STRUGGLE IN THE COAL INDUSTRY WAS PROVOKED BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF COAL BOARD CHAIRMAN IAN MACGREGOR IN MARCH THAT, in accordance with this programme, 20 PITS WERE TO BE CLOSED THIS YEAR WITH THE LOSS OF 20,000 JOBS.

The miners reply that a particular mine may be "economic" or "uneconomic" according to the amount of state investment which has been put into it, and that many older pits are only "uneconomic" because they have been starved of investment.

They point out that, even on present levels of investment, a pit which is "uneconomic" today may become "economic" tomorrow because of factors outside the coal industry altogether - for example, because of changes in the price or availability of oil.

They point out that mining subsidies in Britain are less per tonne than those in Belgium, West Germany or France.

They point out that the closure of an "uneconomic" pit is in fact "uneconomic", since the state payments made necessary by closure (loss of the value of the coal not mined, redundancy payments, unemployment payments, social security payments) exceed the subsidies necessary to keep the mine open. They point out that it costs £2.3 billion to keep "uneconomic" pits open, whereas it would cost £4.5 billion to close them down.

The NCB, on the other hand, maintains that its programme of pit closures will not involve hardship to the miners and their families by reason of its pledges that workers will not be made compulsorily redundant and that those who accept "voluntary redundancy" will receive a substantial sum of money (in effect, a lump sum in social security). The miners reply that jobs in the mining industry are not the property of individual miners to sell, since doing so may debar their sons and grandsons from working in the industry. They point out that a large proportion of miners live in communities which have long been historically linked with particular mines, and in which there is little or no opportunity for alternative employment even when there is no "recession" in progress, as at present. They point out that to close a mine which is the economic basis of such a community is equivalent to the murder of that community. The offer of alternative employment in other areas, leaving aside its disruptive effect on the community, is often meaningless because no one can be found to buy miners' houses in the "dead" community.

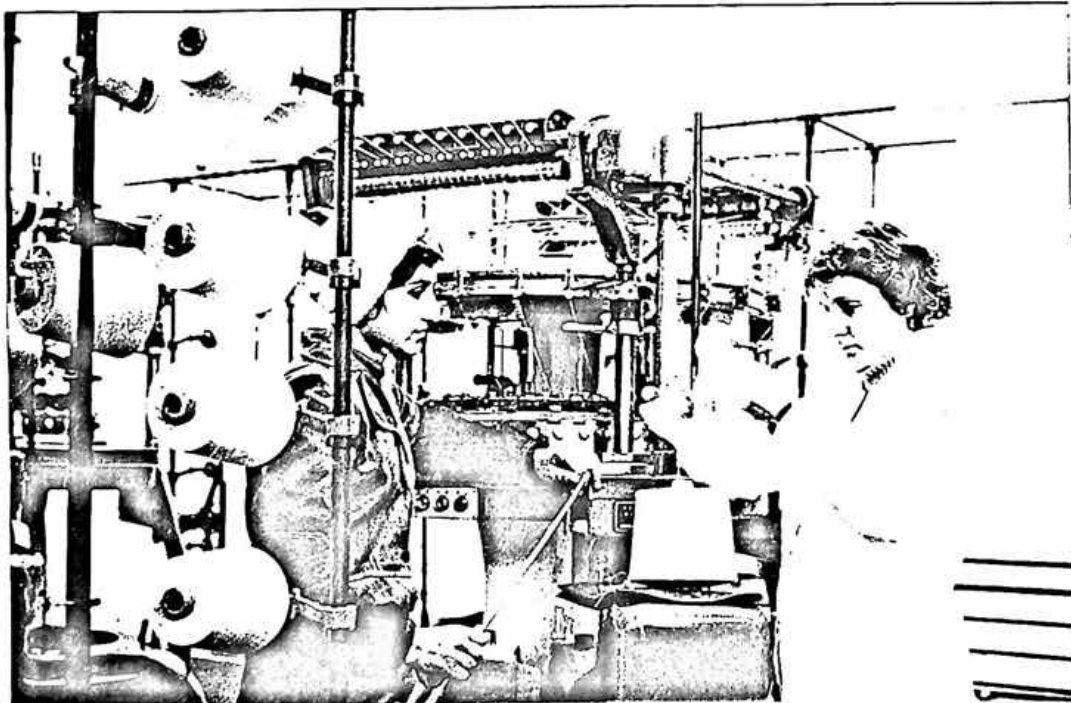
One may have reservations as to whether the tactics used by the leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers were calculated to win the largest poss-

ible majority for strike action. But this is irrelevant to the principle that THE STRIKE IS A JUST ONE, WHICH AIMS TO DEFEAT THE PLANS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE COAL BOARD TO BUTCHER THE COAL INDUSTRY.

The government are aware that their struggle with the miners is crucial for their reactionary programme. They are using every possible means - mass police violence, road blocks, vicious attacks on their leaders in the media, contempt of court proceedings, sequestration of union funds, mass arrests of pickets, bail conditions equivalent to house arrest, restrictions on social security - to try and force the miners back to work.

THE MINERS' STRUGGLE IS EQUALLY CRUCIAL FOR THE WORKING CLASS. IT IS ONE WHICH ALL WORKERS SHOULD SUPPORT TO THE FULL - not for altruistic reasons (as the leaders of the steelworkers' and electricians' unions claim) but in defence of their own interests. For let there be no mistake: THE MINERS ARE AT PRESENT THE VANGUARD SECTION OF THE WORKING CLASS. Were they to be defeated, it would give the green light for an even more ferocious attack upon the working people and their organisations, for a further axing of the social services.

Of course, social services can only be really secure, can only really serve the interests of the working people, in a socialist society, when the working class has won political power. But the great class struggle to secure victory for the miners is a key factor in the politicisation and organisation of the working class which is necessary to lay the basis for the future revolutionary struggle for socialism.



Textile workers in Socialist Albania

ALBANIA :THE 40th ANNIVERSARY



In November 1984 the People's Socialist Republic of Albania celebrates the 40th anniversary of the country's liberation,

Led by the Marxist-Leninist party of the Albanian people - the Communist Party of Albania (now the Party of Labour of Albania) - the Albanian working class liberated the country from foreign occupation, transforming in the course of the struggle the national-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution in accordance with Marxist-Leninist principles.

Today the PSR of Albania is, for the moment, the only socialist country in the world, the only country where the working class is in power. It is therefore the beacon of socialism, as was the Soviet Union in the days of Lenin and Stalin.

It is the beacon of socialism because it demonstrates how, within a mere forty years, the working class can, under Marxist-Leninist leadership, transform even the most backward country in Europe into one which in many respects is socially the most advanced country in the world. As a result of planning, which has replaced profit as the motive and regulator of production, industrial production has risen by 150 times since 1938, agricultural production by 5 times. Unemployment, like taxation, has been eliminated, and price levels are constantly falling as production rises. There is a completely free health service, and one-third of the population attend educational institutions of one kind or another. 80% of the population live in dwellings built since liberation, and rents are limited to 3% of income. Learning from the lessons

of the Soviet Union and other formerly socialist countries, where the existence of a privileged elite opened the door to revisionism of Marxist-Leninist principles and the restoration of essentially capitalist societies, income differentials are limited to 2:1 (in contrast to the figure of 6,000:1 in contemporary capitalist Britain).

The existence of Socialist Albania demonstrates the absurdity of the trotskyist "theorists" who - whether they mean to or not - serve capitalism by protesting that socialism cannot be constructed in a single country. The existence of Socialist Albania presents a threat to decaying capitalist society, with all its accentuating social evils - a society which now, with its nuclear weapons of mass destruction and its inherent drive to war, threatens the very existence of mankind. It is because Socialist Albania is a growing threat to the ruling classes of the capitalist world that they so hate it, why they consistently lie about it in their media - portraying it as a "poor" country where "human rights are repressed".

The PSR of Albania is the ally of working people everywhere and the latter must, in their own interests, defend it against those who wish to destroy it. For it is the state not only of the Albanian working people, but of the working people of the world!

THE "BELGRANO" :

5

THATCHER'S "WATERGATE"



The Nixon administration in the United States sought unsuccessfully to cover up the crime in which it was involved by evasions, half-truths and outright lies. For the last two years the Thatcher government in Britain has been endeavouring to do the same with regard to a crucial incident in its undeclared war with Argentina in 1982: THE SINKING OF THE ARGENTINE CRUISER "GENERAL BELGRANO" BY A BRITISH SUBMARINE.

But whereas Nixon's Watergate involved a mere burglary, Thatcher's is more serious - involving A FLAGRANT BREACH OF INTERNATIONAL LAW WHICH WAS MILITARILY COMPLETELY UNNECESSARY EVEN TO THE SORDID AIMS OF BRITAIN'S COLONIAL WAR AND WHICH DELIBERATELY LED TO THE MASS MURDER OF HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE.

Where was the "General Belgrano" Sunk?

The "General Belgrano" was sunk at 8 p.m. (London time) on May 2, 1982 by torpedoes from the British nuclear submarine "Conqueror". But where?

Reporting to the House of Commons on May 4th, Defence Secretary John Nott stated that the warship was

"... close to the total exclusion zone", (1)

thus admitting by implication that the "General Belgrano" had been attacked outside the 200-mile exclusion zone around the Malvinas/Falklands proclaimed by the British government.

In response to a question from MP Tam Dalyell on December 6th, Minister of State for the Armed Forces Peter Blaker gave the position of the Argentine cruiser when sunk as

6

" . . . 55 degrees 27 minutes south, 61 degrees 25 minutes west"
(2)

and confirmed, in reply to a question from the same source, that this was

" . . . approximately 35 nautical miles" (3)

from the edge of the total exclusion zone.

As Héctor Bonzo, commander of the "General Belgrano" pointed out:

"The nearest British surface vessel must have been at least 250 nautical miles away, east of the Falklands. He (Bonzo - Ed.) would have needed 14 hours to cover that distance at the 'Belgrano's top cruising speed of 18 knots". (4)

In What Direction was the "General Belgrano" Sailing?

In his initial statement to the House of Commons on May 4th, Nott asserted that the "General Belgrano"

" . . . was closing on elements of our task force", (5)

so that

" . . . the threat to the task force was such that the task force commander could ignore it only at his peril". (6)

But in response a question from Dalyell on November 29th, 1982, Blaker replied:

"At the moment she was torpedoed, about 8 p.m. London time, 'General Belgrano' was on a course of 280 degrees", (7)

that is, he refuted Nott's original statement that the "Belgrano" had been "closing " on the British task force and admitted that it had been sailing west-north-west - directly away from it.

In July 1984 Ministry of Defence officials drafted for Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine a reply to another question from Dalyell. This was not sent, but was leaked to Dalyell and published in the "New Statesman". It admitted that the "Belgrano" had been sailing on a course of 270-280 degrees since

" . . . 9 a.m.", (8)

on May 2nd, that is, for eleven hours prior to being attacked.

In view of the difficulty of maintaining that the Argentine cruiser constituted "a threat" to the British task force when it was sailing directly away from it, Peter Blaker offered the House of Commons on November 29th, 1982 a new reason for the attack on her, namely the fear that

" . . . HMS 'Conqueror' might lose the 'General Belgrano' as she ran over the shallow water of the Burdwood Bank". (9)

But most of the Burdwood Bank has a depth of 500-600 feet, and even at its shallowest point it has a depth of 150 feet, while the "Conqueror" when fully submerged is only 55 feet, having been specially designed to operate in the shallow waters of the Baltic. Thus, even if the "General Belgrano" had sailed over Burdwood Bank, the shallow waters would in no way have prevented the submarine's pursuit. But Blaker's statements on the position and course of the cruiser cited above show that the cruiser was, in fact, on a course which would miss the Burdwood Bank by almost 100 miles.

When was Contact with the "General Belgrano" First Made?

In his original statement in the House of Commons on May 4th, 1982 Nott stated that on

" . . . 2 May at 8 p.m. London time, one of our submarines detected the Argentine cruiser 'General Belgrano'. (10)

This statement was repeated, although less precisely, in a government White Paper entitled "The Falklands Campaign: The Lessons", issued in December 1982:

"On 2 May HMS 'Conqueror' detected the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano'" (11)

Since it was undisputed that the "General Belgrano" had been attacked and sunk by HMS 'Conqueror' at 8 p.m. on 2 May, these statements were clearly designed to give the impression that the Argentine cruiser had been attacked almost immediately after it had been sighted.

Yet when, on 6 December 1982, MP Tam Dalyell asked

". . . at what time contact with the 'General Belgrano' was first made by one of Her Majesty's submarines?" (12)

Blaker replied:

"It would not be in the public interest to give this information". (13)

But by April 4th, 1982 Thatcher was admitting in a published letter to Dalyell:

"HMS 'Conqueror', on patrol south of the Falkland Islands, detected an Argentine oiler auxiliary which was accompanying the 'Belgrano' on 30 April. She sighted the 'Belgrano' for the first time on 1 May". (14)

This letter refuted Nott's statement of two years before. It was now officially admitted that the "Conqueror" had been trailing this "threat" for some 30 hours, during the last 11 of which it had been moving away from the British task force.

Who Ordered the Attack?

On 5 May, 1982 Nott told the House of Commons:

"The actual decision to launch a torpedo was clearly one taken by the submarine commander". (15)

8

But on October 3rd, 1982 a Ministry of Defence spokesman told the press that the order had been explicitly approved at a special meeting of the "war cabinet" held at Chequers at lunchtime on May 2nd:

"A special meeting of the inner cabinet which directed the Falklands campaign was convened before lunch at Chequers to change the Navy's rules of engagement to allow an attack on 'Belgrano' outside the total exclusion zone". (16)

This "war cabinet" - officially the "Overseas and Defence Committee (South Atlantic)" - was composed as follows:

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher;
Foreign Secretary Francis Pym;
Defence Secretary John Nott (now Sir John);
Leader of the House William Whitelaw (now Lord Whitelaw);
Chairman of the Conservative Party Cecil Parkinson; and
Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Terence Lewin (now Lord Lewin).

As Thatcher told MP Denzil Davies in her letter of 4 April 1984:

"Ministers agreed to the proposed change in the Rules of Engagement at about 1 p.m. London time on 2 May. Orders were sent immediately to HMS Conqueror, which attacked the 'Belgrano' at 8 p.m. London time". (17)

And a confidential minute of July 1984 by the Head of DS11, J. M. Legge, leaked to MP Tam Dalyell noted:

"There was a delay until 7 May before the appropriate warning was issued for the 2 May change (in the Rules of Engagement - Ed.)". (18)

Self-Defence?

When the British submarine "Conqueror" fired its torpedoes at the Argentine cruiser "General Belgrano", Britain was not in a state of war with Argentina. The government claimed that this action - like all its military actions - was in accordance with international law because it was taken under the terms of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which grants every state the right of self-defence.

This explains why the government sought initially to present the false picture that the "General Belgrano" was "closing" on the British Task Force, and was attacked as a "threat" to the task force as soon as it was detected.

The reality was that the Argentine cruiser had been tracked for 30 hours, for the last 11 of which it had been steaming directly away from the British task force; that it was attacked without warning well outside the Total Exclusion Area proclaimed by the British government; and that this attack was ordered by the British "war cabinet".

Since the order was clearly not given for the purpose of defending the British task force against a genuine threat to it, one must ask what the motive for it was. And to answer this question it is necessary to examine something of the background to the war.

Why the "General Belgrano" was Sunk

When the Argentine junta landed their troops on the Malvinas in April 1982, they never expected that Britain would go to war over some islands 8,000 miles from London and inhabited mainly by sheep and penguins. Britain's claim to the sovereignty over the islands rested only on de facto occupation; in 1980 the Thatcher government had offered sovereignty to Argentina under a lease-back arrangement; and after the Argentine landing Mrs. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the US representative to the United Nations had attended a dinner in her honour at the Argentine Embassy in Washington and, when challenged on the propriety of her action by British Ambassador Sir Nicholas Henderson, had said on television:

"If the Argentines own the islands, then moving troops into them is not armed aggression". (19)

The then Foreign Minister of Argentina, Nicanor Costa Méndez, expressed the view emphatically later that the Argentine junta had not expected that Britain would go to war over the islands:

"From the point of view of a full-scale war, Costa Méndez . . . insisted that he did not expect one, and that the eleventh-hour invasion decision of late March 1982 did not envisage one". (20)

But despite the position of individuals like Kirkpatrick and the public attitude of "neutrality" adopted by the United States during most of April, ruling circles in that country privately supported and assisted Britain. US Secretary of State Alexander Haig told Arthur Gavshon that Britain was

" . . . their most stable European ally, (21)

so that

" . . . from the outset he conveyed to Mrs. Thatcher that, notwithstanding the President's public posture of neutrality over the Falklands crisis, Reagan in the end would stand foursquare behind Britain", (22)

and

" . . . he made no secret of this to Argentine leaders". (23)

On April 30th the United States came out publicly in support of Britain, offering her unlimited military assistance and imposing sanctions upon Argentina. On the following day (May 1st) a British plane bombed the airfield on the islands and the huge British Task Force was close enough to shell Argentine installations and land the first troops by helicopter.

By May 1st, therefore, the Argentine junta was desperately seeking a way of withdrawing from the situation in a way which would not be so nationally humiliating as to make their position at home untenable. After a high-level meeting of officers in the afternoon of this day,

" . . . the Argentine navy transmitted two 'come home' signals to all surface vessels of the fleet at 20.07 (local time - Ed.) on 1 May and again at 01.19 on 2 May - about 20 and 15 hours respectively before the 'Belgrano' was sunk". (24)

10

It was in accordance with this order that the "General Belgrano" was steaming in the direction of home when she was torpedoed on 2 May.

Then, at 1.30 a.m. local time on 2 May, the door was opened which offered the way out sought by the junta. Argentine President General Leopoldo Galtieri received a telephone call from Peruvian President Fernando Belaúnde Terry, who had drafted a peace plan in telephone conversation with US Secretary of State Alexander Haig. The principal points of this plan were as follows:

"Immediate ceasefire.

Simultaneous and mutual withdrawal of forces.

Third parties would govern the Islands, temporarily.

The two governments would recognise the existence of conflicting viewpoints about the Islands.

The two governments would recognise the need to take the viewpoints and interests of the Islanders into account in the final solution". (25)

Discussions continued between Buenos Aires, Lima and Washington during the morning of May 2nd. British Foreign Secretary Francis Pym had arrived in Washington on May 1st, and told the press that the British bombing raids

" . . . were designed to enforce the 'exclusion zone' around the islands". (26)

He concluded by saying:

"There is no other military action envisaged at this moment". (27)

Pym was present in Haig's office during the telephone negotiations.

By noon the Argentine junta had accepted the plan. As a navy source close to the junta expressed it:

"The conversations exist (in recorded form - Ed.), in three American countries, in which Argentina specifically reiterates that her Military Committee will definitively confirm her acceptance at 20.00 hours (Local time -Ed.) on 2 May. This information was given in advance in the last Argentine conversation with President Belaúnde on 2 May at midday when he transmitted it to Washington". (28)

Thatcher herself confirmed in the House of Commons on May 20th, 1982 that the plan was acceptable to the British government:

"The next stage of negotiations was based on proposals originally advanced by President Belaúnde of Peru and modified in consultations between him and Mr. Haig. . . Britain was willing to accept these. . . They could have led to an almost immediate ceasefire". (29)

At 5 p.m. (Lima time) Belaúnde gave a press conference in which he said

" . . . that Great Britain and Argentina would tonight announce the end of all hostilities in their dispute over the Falklands". (30)

But the heads of the British government, and Thatcher in particular, in fact did not desire a peaceful settlement. For this would mean that, having mobilised the largest naval task force to be assembled since World War II and sent it half round the world, they would have to withdraw it without planting the Union Jack once more on the soil of the Malvinas. There was high unemployment at home, large-scale strikes, riots in the streets, something approaching civil war in Northern Ireland, and the government's unpopularity was rising day by day, as evidenced in opinion polls and by-elections. What was needed, in the view of Thatcher and her close advisers, was a war ending in a military victory, in which chauvinism and imperialist nostalgia could be mobilised in the service of the government. On the night of the Argentine surrender, she told the small crowd outside Number 10:

"Today has put the Great back into Britain". (31)

And on 3 July 1982 she told a Conservative rally:

"Our country has won a great victory and we are entitled to be proud. . .

When we started out, there were . . . those who believed . . . that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world.

Well, they were wrong. . .

Just look at the Task Force as an object lesson. . .

What has indeed happened is that now once again Britain is not prepared to be pushed around". (32)

Lord Whitelaw, a member of the "war cabinet" in 1982, told guests at a private function in Windermere in June 1984:

"While her colleagues urged Mrs. Thatcher to pursue the Peruvian peace initiative, the Prime Minister made it clear that she did not want to have anything to do with it". (33)

and another member of the "war cabinet", Lord Lewin, told "The Guardian" in October 1984:

"What I want to convey is the feeling in the war cabinet . . . by April 25 and 26, that a negotiated settlement was not on. . . We had no expectations whatsoever that a negotiated settlement would ever be found which could be accepted and keep this government in power". (34)

Yet even the warmongering Thatcher realised that for the British government to be seen to reject a reasonable peace plan would be fatal to the image which it sought to convey - both at home and abroad - that it was pursuing a policy of seeking a negotiated settlement, with war only as a last resort. The aim was, therefore, to place the Argentine junta in a position where they would be forced for political reasons to reject a reasonable peace plan.

On April 30th, therefore, the "war cabinet" secretly altered the Rules of Engagement to permit an attack upon the flagship of the Argentine navy, the aircraft-carrier "Veinticinco de Mayo" (The Twenty-fifth of May) outside the Total Exclusion Zone, as Legge admitted in the leaked minute of July 1984:

"The engagement of the Argentine aircraft carrier 25 DE MAYO outside the Total Exclusion Zone was permitted from 30 April". (35)

12

Another leaked minute discloses that both Foreign Secretary Francis Pym and Attorney General Sir Michael Havers (who had attended the meeting as legal adviser to the Cabinet) strongly objected to this decision as contrary to international law. (36)

But, to the annoyance of the "war cabinet",

" . . . the carrier could not be found". (37)

Consequently, by May 2nd the plans of the "war cabinet" for war with Argentina were coming under the imminent "threat" of the Peruvian peace plan, which met the proclaimed demands of the British government and was on the verge of being eagerly grasped by the Argentine junta. At 1 p.m., London time, on this day, therefore, the Rules of Engagement were changed again to permit any Argentine warship to be attacked outside the Total Exclusion Zone. In the words of Legge's leaked minute:

"The change of 2 May was not restricted to BELGRANO but included all Argentine warships over a large area". (38)

While the Argentine junta was meeting to give its formal approval to the Peruvian peace plan, at 7 p.m. local time Admiral Jorge Anaya, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, entered the room with the news that the "General Belgrano" had been sunk with heavy loss of life, making acceptance of the peace plan now politically impossible for the junta.

Asked in the House of Lords on May 25th, 1982

" . . . whether there is any truth in the reported allegation by the President of Peru that Britain was directly responsible for the collapse of his mediation efforts in the Falklands dispute", (39)

Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Lord Belstead replied:

"No, my Lords. The Peruvian initiative failed because Argentina rejected the proposals". (40)

But Peruvian Prime Minister Manuel Ulloa had presented a different picture to the Senate on May 4th:

"Argentine rejection of the Belaúnde peace proposals was due to the fact that Argentina had been attacked with the torpedoing of the 'Belgrano' at the very moment that Peru was trying to find a dignified way out of the contest". (41)

Leaks

On January 12th, 1984 MP Tam Dalyell told a public meeting in Ardrossan that he had heard from "a reliable and informed source" that the British chiefs of staff and the "war cabinet" were well aware that the "General Belgrano" was returning to port when attacked, since the orders had been picked up and decoded by the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) at Cheltenham.

Asked in the House of Lords on 28 March, 1984:

"Is it the case that a message ordering the 'General Belgrano' back to port was decoded at GCHQ in Cheltenham?, (42)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Armed Forces Lord Trefgarne replied that such questions

" . . are, I am afraid, matters relating to security which are never discussed". (43)

Less than two weeks after Dalyell's Ardrossan speech, on January 25th, Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe announced in the House of Commons that trade unions at GCHQ were to be banned because of

" . . the need to avoid a repetition of the industrial action that took place in the three years from 1979 to 1981". (44)

It seems not unlikely that the leak made public by Dalyell earlier that month had more to do with the government's decision than some minor industrial action more than three years before.

Then, in June 1984, former Foreign Secretary Francis Pym gave evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee on the sinking of the "General Belgrano". The committee found his evidence unsatisfactory and requested Baroness Young, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,

" . . to provide a note listing the changes made to the Rule of Engagement" (45)

during the relevant period. In early July J. M. Legge, Head of DS11, recommended to Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine

" . . that we should avoid these difficulties by providing the Committee with a more general narrative, explaining broadly when changes were made to ROE (Rules of Engagement - Ed.). . . I attach a draft on these lines. Since it does not actually specify any ROEs, . . it is consistent with previous public statements by Ministers and others". (46)

This confidential minute, together with the draft reply prepared for Heseltine to further awkward questions from Tam Dalyell already referred to, was leaked to Dalyell and both documents were published in the "New Statesman" on August 24th.

In the same month, a senior official of the Ministry of Defence, Clive Ponting, was charged with a breach of the Official Secrets Act and told "The Observer" that he was

" . . accused of leaking documents about the sinking of the 'Belgrano' to the Labour MP Tam Dalyell". (47)

On September 16th, "The Observer" reported that the decision to charge Ponting had been taken on the insistence of Heseltine and against the advice of senior civil servants:

"Mr. Heseltine surprised officials by countermanding their advice and insisting that the Attorney-General, Sir Michael Havers, be called on to agree to Mr. Ponting's criminal prosecution". (48)

Silent Communications?!

Many of the original lies and excuses made by the government in connection with the sinking of the "General Belgrano" have now, more than two years later, been exposed. The government's claim that the action was taken (in the words of Baroness Young, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs) purely

" . . for military reasons", (49)

and was in no way designed to wreck the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the dispute now rests almost entirely on one assertion which it is impossible to believe: that the "war cabinet" knew nothing at all of the Peruvian peace proposals until some hours after the Argentine cruiser had been sunk! Thatcher assured the House of Commons on 5 July 1983:

"The attack (on the 'Belgrano' - Ed.) was made . . before any news of possible peace proposals reached London". (50)

and told MP Denzil Davies in her published letter of 4 April 1984:

"HMS 'Conqueror' . . attacked the 'Belgrano' at 8 p.m. London time. . .

The first indications of the possible Peruvian peace proposals reached London from Washington at 11.15 p.m. London time and from Lima at 2 a.m. London time on 3 May". (51)

But the negotiations between Belaúnde and US Secretary of State Alexander Haig had begun in the early hours of the morning of May 2nd (London time) and for most of the negotiations which followed British Foreign Secretary Francis Pym was actually sitting in Haig's office. It is not credible that Pym should have failed to report a word of these important negotiations by telephone or any other means to London.

Furthermore, according to Haig, the British Ambassador to Peru, Charles Wallace

" . . was in on every bit of the negotiations in Peru. He was right in with the President". (52)

It is impossible to believe that Wallace (now Sir Charles) failed to report anything of these negotiations until even after Pym. On 6 December, 1983 Wallace indicated to Guillermo Makin

" . . that he had vital information about those two pivotal days, though he would not divulge it". (53)

And on the BBC "Panorama" programme of 16 April, 1984, Cecil Parkinson admitted indiscreetly

" . . that the War Cabinet was aware of the negotiations, and in particular those of President Belaúnde, at the time that they were considering at Chequers the decision on the 'General Belgrano'". (54)

Conclusion

Thatcher's political calculation that a successful war against Argentina could, with the assistance of an overwhelmingly jingoist House of Commons and an even more chauvinist media, stem the falling popularity of her government was, at least temporarily true. Gallup opinion polls showed the rating of the Conservative Party, and of Thatcher personally, changed as follows:

	Conservative Party	Thatcher
February 1982:	27%	29%
June 1982:	45%	51% (55)

The cost of this political manoeuvre was 1,043 British and 1,800 Argentine casualties, (56) and £2,000 million in taxpayers' money (57). The additional cost of maintaining the "Falklands Fortress" garrison is put at £684 million for the year 1984-5 alone (a figure equivalent to £380,000 a year per inhabitant) (58)

It is impossible to disagree with the charge made by MP Tam Dalyell in the House of Commons on 21 December 1982, that Thatcher

" . . . coldly and deliberately gave the order to sink the 'Belgrano' in the knowledge that an honourable peace was on offer and in the expectation - all too justified - that the 'Conqueror's' torpedoes would torpedo the peace negotiations. . .

The sinking of the 'Belgrano', when the rt. Hon. Lady knew what she did about the peace proposals . . . was a criminal act by the British Prime Minister. It was an act of calculated wickedness and reckless folly, the like of which has not been witnessed in the political lifetime of most of us in the House". (59)

REFERENCES

1. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 23; c. 29.
2. Ibid., Volume 33; Written Answers; c. 411.
3. Ibid., Volume 33; Written Answers; c. 621.
4. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: "The Sinking of the Belgrano"; London; 1984; p. 112.
5. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 23; c. 30.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., Volume 33; Written Answers; c. 103.
8. "New Statesman", 24 August, 1984; p. 9.
9. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 33; Written Answers; c. 103.
10. Ibid., Volume 23; p. 29.
11. "The Falklands Campaign: The Lessons" (Cmd. 8758); London; 1982; p. 7.
12. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 33; Written Answers; c. 621.
13. Ibid., Volume 33; Written Answers; c. 621.
14. Ibid., Volume 58; Written Answers; c. 384.
15. Ibid., Volume 23; c. 156.
16. "The Times", 4 October 1982; p. 1.
17. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 58; Written Answers; c. 384.
18. "New Statesman", 24 August, 1984; p. 8.
19. C. Dobson, J. Miller & R. Payne: "The Falklands Conflict"; London; 1982; p. 77.

16

20. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: op. cit.; p. 30.
21. "The Guardian", 2 October, 1984; p. 11.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: op. cit.; p. 161.
25. Ibid.; p. 84.
26. "New York Times", 2 May, 1982; p. A12.
27. Ibid.
28. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: op. cit.; p. 92-3.
29. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 24; c. 477-8.
30. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: op. cit.; p. xiv.
31. A. Barnett: "Iron Britannia"; London; 1982; p. 83.
32. Ibid.; p. 149, 150, 152.
33. "The Guardian", 3 October, 1984; p. 2.
34. "The Guardian", 2 October, 1984; p. 11.
35. "New Statesman", 24 August, 1984; p. 8.
36. Ibid.
37. "The Observer", 9 September, 1984; p. 1.
38. "New Statesman", 24 August, 1984; p. 8.
39. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Lords", Fifth Series, Volume 430; c. 951.
40. Ibid.
41. P. Foot: "The Sinking of the Belgrano"; London; 1984; p. 647.
42. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Lords", Fifth Series, Volume 450; c. 226.
43. Ibid.
44. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons". Sixth Series, Volume 52; c. 917.
45. "New Statesman", 24 August, 1982; p. 8.
46. Ibid.
47. "The Observer", 26 August, 1984; p. 1.
48. "The Observer", 16 September, 1984; p. 1.
49. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Lords", Fifth Series, Volume 443; c. 119.
50. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 45; c. 154.
51. Ibid., Volume 58: Written Answers; c. 384.
52. "The Guardian", 2 October, 1984; p. 11.
53. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: op. cit., p. 96.
54. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Lords", Fifth Series, Volume 451; c. 459.
55. D. Rice & A. Gavshon: op. cit.; p. 168-9.
56. A. Barnett: op. cit.; p. 15.
57. Ibid.; p. 27.
58. "Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons", Sixth Series, Volume 48; c. 1071.

Compass is published by

