

PRESS STATEMENT:

THE RECENT VISIT OF THE SULTAN OF OMAN TO LONDON

The only war outside of Northern Ireland in which British troops are now involved is the war against the revolutionary guerrillas in the Sultanate of Oman. This war, which began in 1965, is one in which Britain has a deep, clandestine involvement. Earlier this year, in April, British Defense Secretary Carrington visited British troops and bases in Oman, and on his return affirmed British determination to continue their policy of intervention. The visit of the Sultan of Oman to London earlier in this month has given the London government the occasion to amplify this policy and to diffuse the propaganda traditionally put out to mask Britain's role.

The situation in the Sultanate has long been shrouded in official lies by Whitehall, and in complacent distortion and silence by most of the British press. In all but name the Sultanate is a British colony and has been so for over a century. Today the army and air forces are commanded and staffed by British personnel, deployed under a spurious 'defense treaty' of 1958 which is in fact a guise for colonial control. Over 300 British army and air personnel are officially listed as serving in the Sultan's army. A further 100 or so SAS counter-insurgency troops carry out offensive operations while disguised as a 'British Army Training Team'. Hundreds more British personnel, allegedly in Oman to 'guard' and 'service' the RAF bases there, also participate in the war. Like the US intervention in Laos, it is a covert form of involvement.

The suppression of all opposition in the Sultanate is essential to the European, North American and Japanese governments who need oil from the Arab and Iranian states around the Gulf. Any 'trouble' in Oman would threaten the industrialised states who are now intensifying their intervention in this area to ensure the continued access to oil. Oman is at the moment the weakest link in the oil-producing states, and the British, who have long supported the murderous Sultans of this country, are now trying to foist their clients on the world as ^{an} enlightened, democratic monarch. The present Sultan Qabus was installed in 1970 by the British after his excessively conservative father, Sultan Said, had been deposed.

The recent visit of the Sultan to London is part of this policy in that it both helps to foster the illusion of the Sultanate's indep-

endence, and provides the opportunity for the British government to consult and exhort their tame Omani monarch. The Sultan's talks with Heath, Home and Carrington were no doubt centred on the need to continue repression in the Sultanate.

During his visit the Sultan gave a press conference to selected papers in which he purported to give an analysis of the situation in his country. He stated that his forces were 'gradually winning' the war in Dhofar, and that the British military personnel had suffered 'only a few light casualties over the past few months'. The Sultan's statements on the military situation are notoriously unreliable: in February 1972 he told the Beirut weekly al-Usbu al-Arabi that the guerrillas had been chased out of Dhofar altogether. Following this statement, the guerrillas attacked and destroyed part of the RAF base at Salala, killed the Sultan's uncle in a major land battle, and attacked and temporarily held the town of Mirbat in the largest engagement of the war. The British casualties in the war are hidden by the Sultanate, but, contrary to the Sultan's statement, it was admitted by the London Ministry of Defense in July that a serving RAF pilot had been shot down and killed over western Dhofar.

The Sultan also expressed the 'hope' that the guerrillas would be 'persuaded' to abandon their fight. This was camouflage put out to confuse liberals in the west. The Sultan's armed forces have been bombing and shelling the guerrilla-held areas of Dhofar in southern Oman in an attempt to wipe out the population or drive them into government-controlled territory - as in the Vietnamese 'resettlement' campaigns. Crops have been burnt and wells destroyed. Since coming to power in 1970 the Sultan has refused even to draw up a constitution or to lessen his power in any way. In June of this year it was announced that 10 political prisoners had been shot and another 23 sentenced to life imprisonment in a trial which had never been announced and to which no observers were allowed.

The Sultan is now asking Britain for more military assistance for a war that is using up over 60% of his country's budget. His people consider him to be an illegitimate ruler, who owes his existence to the foreign powers that sustained him - Britain, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. There will be no peace in Oman until this miserable kinglet is driven from the country and until the foreign intervention, led by Britain, is brought to an end. Whatever Sultan Qabus and his friends try to pretend in London, it is the people of Oman who will decide his fate.

The Gulf Committee, c/o ICDP, 6 Endsleigh St, WC 1. September 26 1973.