

[1974] [1975]

APPEAL FOR SUPPORT FOR THE PEOPLE OF OMAN AND THE GULF
AGAINST THE BRITISH-IRANIAN OCCUPATION

The area of Oman and the Gulf extends from Kuwait in the north through Bahrain, Qatar, the Omani coast (Trucial Oman Coast) now the Union of Arab Emirates) and the Sultanate of Oman extending along the south-east and south of the Arabian Peninsula down to DHOFAR which borders Democratic Yemen (formerly South Arabia) whose capital is Aden.

Different parts of the Gulf region have been colonized by Britain for between one and nearly two centuries.

British colonialism divided the area into small tribal states and encouraged infighting between them. Each tribal ruler became completely dependent on British support to keep his hold over his people and thus implemented British policy which was basically aimed at isolating the area from the rest of the world to stop the wind of change from blowing into the area. For most people in the area, the only symptoms of Western technical advancement they could observe around them was Britain's war machinery. One of the rulers of the area Sulatan Said Bin Taimur was installed by the British forces in 1932, protected for 38 years by every means including barbaric air bombardment of villages and eventually removed by those who installed him to make way for his son. This new sultan, Qaboos was thought to be more efficient and less hated by the people and therefore more capable of suppressing the people's aspirations. Sultan Said, with the support of British troops and mercenaries recruited by the British army, enforced his regulations which included banning travelling without his personal permission, and prohibiting the import of western medicines. Wearing trousers and sunglasses, and the use of irrigation canals except on his own land were also forbidden. He had hundreds of slaves in his palace which was guarded by British officers.

Since oil was discovered in the area, it has been dug out quickly and cheaply, the only beneficiaries being capitalism, mainly British and American, and the local corrupt British-supported rulers. The people only received greater oppression. The workers were and still are deprived of all their fundamental rights - the right to strike, to organize, to act in defence of their class interests, their right to a decent wage - even a minute fraction of what is spent in the Sheikhs and Sultan palaces and of the profits of the international capitalist oil companies.

Of course the working class and all the other oppressed sections of the people did not give up, they struggled by all the means they had; they demonstrated, struck and rebelled. Each time they were faced by British bullets, bombs, prisons and torture chambers. They did not defeat their enemy but each time they gained more experience of how to wage a successful struggle.

In 1965 a small group of freedom fighters started their armed struggle in the mountainous south Omani region of Dhofar. Through active popular support, revolutionary determination and a correct political line, they were able to expel the British officered mercenary troops from most of Dhofar's countryside and frequently shell the R.A.F base at Salalah, Dhofar's capital. By 1969 the Sultan's troops were confined to the coasted plane of DHOFAR.

The people of Dhofar could at last get a taste of freedom. They were relieved of the Sultan's heavy taxes and

repressive measures. The Front with its limited resources started the first schools in the area and embarked on a program to wipe out illiteracy, a health programme, an agricultural development program, a political education program with a major objective of eradicating tribalism and a campaign to free women from the old slavish bonds that crippled one half of their society. The Front nationalised all agricultural land and water resources in the liberated areas and distributed them equally among the people. It took the initiative in establishing elected people's councils to run the day to day life of the liberated areas.

However, British Imperialism was not going to let the people enjoy their achievements for fear that DHOFAR may become an inspiration for the rest of Oman and the Gulf where the oil wells are, and that the people may start demanding control over their natural resources.

Thus, despite talk of withdrawal from the Gulf area by 1971, there was no mention of withdrawal from the Sultanate of Oman. In fact the British government continued to prop up the Sultan's regime by the most barbaric means. In the words of a British officer, Captain N.G.R.Hepworth, "We also burnt down known rebel villages and shot their goats and cows. Any enemy corpses that we recovered were propped up in a corner of the Salalah suq(market) as a salutary lesson to any would-be freedom fighters" (Open File, The Guardian, 12/12/1973).

In fact, the British troops in the Sultanate of Oman were reinforced and those in the other states, only partially withdrawn.

The new puppet Sultan carried out several major offensives against the liberated areas and the R.A.F. bombed the civilian population in order to make life intolerable. This terror campaign failed and new reinforcements were called upon.

In the past 2 months, the Shah of Iran sent several thousand troops to support the British forces and the Sultan. Iranian progressives have condemned this aggression.

The Popular Front For the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) which leads the struggle has appealed to the British working class for support. PFLOAG sees its fight as common with that of the British working class. Its appeals were not heard, because the capitalist press blockades any news from the area.

British progressives are called upon to demand that their organizations send messages of solidarity with PFLOAG, P.O. BOX 5037, ADEN, DEMOCRATIC YEMEN.

Support from the British working class will have a great moral Boosting effect on the liberation fighters.

For further information, contact THE GULF COMMITTEE, c/o I.C.D.P. 6, Endsleigh Street, London W.C.1 ,

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