

SQUARE LEG

In 1975 we had 'Inside Right', three years later, 'Scrum Half, and now in September this year, 'Square Leg', the latest of a series of war games designed to test the new system of British Home Defence that has taken shape since the early 1970s. Square Leg formed part of one of the largest NATO exercises ever staged. The exercise, 'Autumn Forge', involved 25 separate manoeuvres the largest of which was 'Crusader 80', testing the British Army's ability to simultaneously reinforce its presence in mainland Europe and defend the United Kingdom against both external and internal attack. Square Leg thus formed the latter, 'home', component of 'Crusader 80'. Not only was it one of the largest and most elaborate exercises of its kind, but it was also, to the embarrassment of the authorities, one of the most widely publicised. Many details have appeared in *Time Out*, the *Guardian* and, above all, in an excellent series of articles by Duncan Campbell in the *New Statesman* (Sept. 19 and 26; October 3 and 10). The extent of the leakage strongly suggests that many on the inside have serious reservations about both the exercise itself and its implications.

The overall scenario for both Crusader and Square Leg reveals much about current thinking in the upper echelons of NATO and the British military establishment. It envisages a new 'Orange' (ie, Soviet) leadership deliberately and relentlessly building up to an unprovoked assault on Western Europe between January and September of this year, apparently unmoved by the American nuclear armoury, let alone the British 'independent' deterrent. This Soviet drive is aided by such happenings as 'a violent anti-NATO campaign . . . initiated in France and Italy sponsored by known Orange-directed subversive groups' and acts of suspected sabotage, 'thought to be Orange-inspired'. In Britain fuel rationing is imposed a month before the eventual declaration of war on September 15. Preparations to move art treasures are initiated late in August, 'power of direction' over shipping and British Airways are adopted, and on 12 September the Cabinet (not Parliament!) approves Queens Order 2, setting in motion the emergency powers procedure. From the beginning of September there is continuous left and right political activity, 'with pacifism as a front for subversion' as the main theme. In the West Midlands some demonstrations require the use of MACP (Military Aid to the Civil Power ie, the use of troops in support of the police). Despite the official 'stay put' policy and the control of essential service routes (motorways

and main trunk roads), it is expected that in the period of prewar tension many people will leave the main population centres for remote rural areas. On 15 September fighting begins on the Continent, while in Britain there is conventional bombing of some defence-related targets. Curiously, the scenario envisages a breathing space at this point: the government HQ in the regions are not manned until the 18th. A nuclear strike of over 100 bombs takes place on the following day, devastating many military targets, and industrial and population centres.

Taking the West Midlands as an example, the scenario of a post-nuclear strike Britain is horrifying. Birmingham and Coventry are totally devastated by direct hits of 3 megatons each, with massive loss of life. Rugby suffers extensive damage and a high casualty rate from a lower yield strike on the neighbouring Polaris-control radio installation. Fires rage for up to a week after the bombs; water, gas, electricity and telephones are cut off; roads are blocked; health provision is overwhelmed and a 'triage' policy adopted according to which the most seriously injured are left to die. Initial casualties in the rural areas and small towns of the region are relatively low, but mount steadily in the post-strike period as the injured die: by the end of the exercise period, two weeks after the strike, radiation sickness is entering its third, fatal stage, burial areas are congested and the threat of disease is causing the authorities mounting concern. The exercise does seriously raise the question of whether anyone has any real conception of the possible casualty rate, not immediately after a strike, but after a period of, say, six months. When Lord Belstead stated in March this year that 30 million people would 'survive and go on surviving' if they took the precautions set out in the official pamphlet, *Protect and Survive*, he did not specify the time period upon which this estimate was based.

The Square Leg scenario leaves no doubt that the principal function of the armed forces and police in a World War III Britain is seen as the defence of the realm against internal enemies. The listed tasks for both are in fact almost identical — maintenance of law and order, especially in urban areas, 'control of selfish and disgruntled minorities', support and protection for special courts, 'key point' protection, guarding control centres and internment areas, protecting VIPs, the 'subjugation and elimination of hostile elements', controlling movement etc. Unlike the police, the military alone have responsibility for the 'execution of sentences'.

It would be a mistake to conclude that the

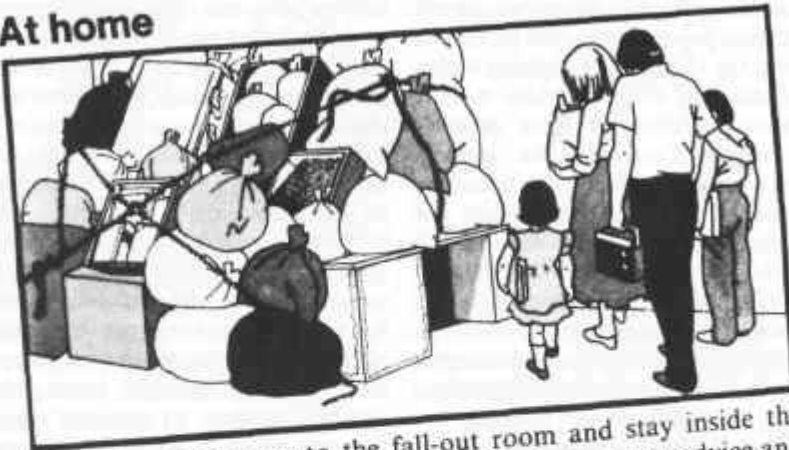
British state now has a complete, fully-elaborated system of alternative government in the event of war or other major national emergency. Square Leg in fact revealed that the system has many weaknesses and that some vital components are missing, eg, some sub-regional headquarters have not yet been built, they have no proper communications to link them with the county and district control centres, while many of the latter appear to be located in ordinary unprotected council premises. Nevertheless, the exercise has served to emphasise the seriousness with which the state now views such preparations and the degree to which home defence is directed against a perceived threat of domestic origin. It is also clear that many of the components of this alternative system of government have now become almost accepted features of life, eg, the use of the armed forces in industrial disputes and natural disasters, the military guarding of Heathrow and other 'key points', the refinement of emergency powers and public order legislation, the para-militarisation of the police, and the assumption of ever-greater powers by full-time, non-elected local government officials. This whole process represents a major threat to democratic rights and civil liberties and insistently demands an effective response from the Left.

One of the striking features of Square Leg was the extent to which the usual democratic agencies of government were bypassed. The scenarios for the counties and districts were drawn up by full-time emergency planning officers and their staffs, and were circulated only to other full time officials such as the chief executives, chief constables, fire officers, area medical officers etc. Elected councillors had no part in the exercise and were not informed of the measures envisaged. But to some extent councillors are themselves to blame for this state of affairs. How many have taken the trouble to find out what their emergency planning officers are doing and have investigated the war scenarios of their own towns and districts? How often are questions about home defence matters raised in the council chambers? There is an urgent need to lift the veil of secrecy over these issues: next year's round of local council elections should provide an opportunity of giving them a public airing.

But Square Leg raises another fundamental question for the Left: what should be its attitude toward civil defence? The present government planning is widely, and rightly, dismissed as an elaborate deception of the people of Britain. At the same time it has always been the case in the past that the Left has vigorously promoted the cause of civilian

As quickly as possible, wiping all the dust you can from your skin and clothing at the entrance to the building in which you shelter.

At home



All at home must go to the fall-out room and stay inside the room with the radio tuned for Government advice and

What to do after the Attack:

After a nuclear attack, there will be a short period before the fallout starts to descend. Use this time to do essential tasks. This is what you should do.

Do not smoke.

Check that gas, electricity and other fuel supplies and all pilot lights are turned off.

Go round the house and put out any small fires using mains water if you can.

If anyone's clothing catches fire, lay them on the floor and cover them in a blanket, rug or



...able also replenish water

The Government booklet on surviving World War 3, 'Protect and Survive' (50p from HMSO).

Home Defence system and we can confidently expect more exercises in the future. The experience of Square Leg will probably push the government in the direction of even greater secrecy: an appropriate designation for the next wargame may be 'Extra Cover'.

protection in wartime. Simple opposition to Home Defence as presently conceived may no longer be adequate if the Left is to have a credible anti-nuclear policy. Perhaps it is time to make clear that in a nuclear-weapons-free, non-NATO Britain (purged of both British and American nuclear bombs and other strategic installations) there should be a

completely open, democratic system of mass civil defence, offering some measure of protection in the event of an accidental use of nuclear weapons or a conflagration in which Britain is not directly involved? Meanwhile, the Thatcher government is firmly committed to strengthening the existing

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