

B. No. 1 (Plain)

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METROPOLITAN POLICE

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Special Report }

SPECIAL BRANCH

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17th day of March, 1968.

SUBJECT

V.S.C.
Demonstration.

Reference to Papers

346/68/1

This report deals with the demonstration, organised by the VIETNAM SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN, which took place to-day, 17th March, 1968.

The demonstration was decided upon following a request by the North Vietnamese Government and the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) for mass demonstrations throughout the world on or about 19th March, 1968, to mark the 18th anniversary of the first mass demonstration in Saigon against United States involvement in the political struggle then taking place in Vietnam. To-day's project was therefore entitled "INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN".

"March 17th Vietnam Ad Hoc Committee" was set up in London on 11th January, 1968 under the patronage of Bertrand Russell, to plan the demonstration and co-ordinate the activities of sympathetic organisations, prominent amongst which was the "STOP-IT COMMITTEE" (Americans Against Aggression).

In order to build up support for to-day's demonstration and to draw the public's attention to the question of American activities in Vietnam, a nation-wide campaign was organised, with approaches being made to almost every University in this country and to "Peace Action" Groups in London and the provinces. Poster sticking took place on a wide scale and small demonstrations were held in London, against such premises as Pan-American Airways, Dow Chemicals Ltd. and at Downing Street, almost every day during the preceding week.

From the outset it was envisaged that disorder would occur on the day and, although the organisers claimed openly that the demonstration would be peaceful and that the marchers would pass the United

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States Embassy on their way to Hyde Park , [REDACTED] information from three factions within the VSC showed that

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[REDACTED] a clash with police to culminate in entry and damage to the U.S. Embassy was their main aim. Near to the date of the demonstration the Ad Hoc Committee published their three options for action on 17th March as follows:-

1. Holding a meeting in Grosvenor Square Gardens, whether or not permission by police was granted (the organisers in fact, hoped that permission would be refused so that the meeting would constitute an act of defiance).
2. Blocking the whole of Grosvenor Square by means of a "sit-down" so that clearing the Square would take long enough for the purpose to be achieved.
3. Surrounding the Embassy on all four sides and allowing no one in or out for the duration of the demonstration.

Further evidence of intended violence was forthcoming when printed posters advertising the demonstration were distributed with the words "Come Armed" superimposed.

During the weeks prior to 17th March close co-operation was maintained with police in University towns, [REDACTED] From these sources it was learned that Marxist and Maoist students from British Universities together with groups from Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France and Holland, would attend and bring weapons and missiles.

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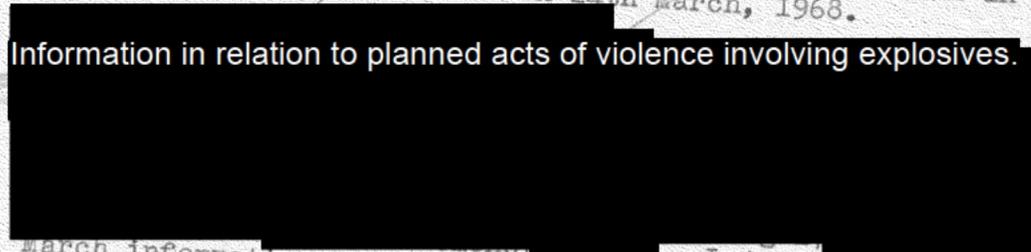
The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, it will be remembered, is a Trotskyist controlled organisation. This led to the Communist Party of Great Britain withholding support from the demonstration and the event received no publicity in the "Morning Star". Support was expected nevertheless from some members of the Young Communist League, as well as Young Socialists, Young Liberals and most student organisations. Pacifist groups in general, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Youth C.N.D.

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in particular, were known to be abstaining from participating as they considered the demonstration to be one-sided in supporting the North Vietnamese only; these pacifist groups intend to hold their own demonstration in London on the Vietnam issue on 24th March, 1968.

Information in relation to planned acts of violence involving explosives.



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March information was received from a member of the public to the effect that a person at [Redacted] was preparing to cause an explosion the following day. Police visited the address and found no explosives but discovered that a tenant (local Branch Secretary of the Y.C.L.) had several bottles of paint, presumably intended as missiles at the demonstration.

Privacy

Privacy

At this time persistent stories were reaching us that provincial student groups travelling to London for the demonstration would be in possession of weapons. As a result, coaches bringing students from Cambridge, Leeds and Coventry on 17th March were searched by police and several arrests and charges were made for "possessing offensive weapons". In addition, in six coaches, plastic bags of paint, drums of pepper and bags of marbles were found which could not be associated with any particular individual.

To-day's events therefore consisted of a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square followed by a march to Grosvenor Square, where grave disorder ensued. At this stage precise figures of arrests made, numbers of police injured and property damaged cannot be given; these will be furnished in a later report.

The meeting in Trafalgar Square began at 2.40 p.m. and ended at 3.40 p.m. Attendance built up during the meeting to a maximum of 7,000, and, apart from a few incidents, such as the throwing of a smoke canister, colouring of the water in the fountain with pink dye, the burning of a U.S. Flag and the throwing of bags of flour, there was no serious disorder. One or two people were arrested at the time, and another was arrested later for possessing 13 smoke bombs and about 1,000 bags of red dye (paint) which had been seized in a van by police earlier.



The chairman of the meeting was Barbara WILSON, a leading member of the V.S.C., and the speakers were:-

Reg TAYLOR, A.E.U. shop steward and secretary of Ruislip Constituency Labour Party.

Tariq ALI (active in the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding - a pro-Maoist group).

Vanessa REDGRAVE (ex-Committee of 100).

John PALMER (an Irish trotskyst and member of the V.S.C.).

Obi EGBUNA (leader of the Universal Coloured Peoples Association).

Igor WEBB (American member of the "Stop-It Committee").

Zutiq(?) ALI

Alain CREVINE (member of the French National Vietnamese Committee)

Christian SEMPER (German).

Roy SMITH (of the Universal Coloured Peoples Association).

Pat JORDAN (Secretary of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign).

Shorthand notes were taken of these speeches, but nothing of an apparently actionable nature was said. (Transcripts can be made available if required).

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Barbara WILSON opened the meeting by deploring the action of the British left-wing in failing to focus attention on the Vietnam War, for which the N.L.F. was paying a heavy price. The V.S.C. campaign, sponsored originally on a grant from the Bertrand Russell Foundation, she said, had gone from strength to strength, thereby disproving the belief that there was no feeling among the British on Vietnam. She read a message from Bertrand Russell supporting the Vietnamese and deploring U.S. action and urging listeners to-day to demonstrate solidarity with the N.L.F. and to challenge the complacency of the British and American Governments on the slaughter and terror in Vietnam.

Reg TAYLOR, said that, as an A.E.U. shop steward and a member of the Ruislip constituency Labour Party, he had assisted in the passage of several resolutions, favoured at trade union level and Labour Party Conference,

protesting against the Vietnam War.

The second speaker was Tariq ALI. He said he was present to express solidarity with the guerilla fighters of the N.L.F. who were the vanguard of the fight against U.S. imperialism. The attitude of the British Government in giving support to the Americans, was dangerous and shameful.

Vanessa REDGRAVE spoke next. She read messages of support from various celebrities in the film world. For herself, she expressed opposition to the Vietnam war and said she would hand in a letter to this effect to the U.S. Embassy.

John PALMER said that to-day the V.S.C. intended to demonstrate with pride, and not merely to offer empty words. He was convinced that this would prove the biggest, the most important and the most militant demonstration in recent times. To-day were present not only students but a large cross section of the labour movement - delegations of dockers from London and Liverpool, building workers, A.E.U., and the A.E.I./G.E.C. factory at Woolwich.

The fifth speaker was Obi EGBUNA who opened by saying, "We are here to-day to kick U.S. Imperialism in the groin". He claimed to represent "Black Power" which was prepared to "spit in the eye" of U.S. Imperialism.

Igor WEBB said that millions of pounds were being spent on the Vietnam war and several British firms were assisting the Americans, e.g. British Hovercraft and Dow Chemicals. The way to end this was to build up a popular mass movement to oppose the war, not so much on the grounds of conscience as of self interest, to show that our lives and livelihoods were not in the power and control of a few politicians and bankers. In this spirit he and other Americans were prepared publicly to burn their draft cards to show that they did not intend to fight in Vietnam. (Three pieces of paper were held up and set on fire).

Zufik? ALI spoke next and described President Johnson's policies as criminal. He claimed that Johnson should be indicted for war crimes. He ended a fairly incoherent speech with the words "long live the Vietnamese struggle".

Alan CREVINE, speaking on behalf of French sympathisers, urged the North Vietnamese to fight and not to capitulate to Imperialism.

Christian SEMPER spoke on behalf of German organisations and said his government was playing a part in assisting the U.S. in Vietnam. He deplored this and was pleased to demonstrate solidarity with the N.L.F. He urged further activity, both in the U.K. and Germany, including industrial action.

The last speaker was Pat JORDAN, who, noticing the restiveness of the crowd, said that the main business of the day was to demonstrate solidarity with the N.L.F. He claimed that the V.S.C., despite all forecasts to the contrary, had proved that massive support for the N.L.F. could be assembled. Unless the policies of the British and American Governments were changed the V.S.C. would build a movement sufficiently massive that "the authorities will lose control of the streets".

The Chairman then announced the route of the march and the demonstrators moved towards the South West corner of Trafalgar Square.

Banners indicating support for the N.L.F. and opposing U.S. policy were carried by many of the demonstrators, in addition to banners denoting the groups represented. A list of the groups taking part is shown at Appendix "A".

The route taken by the procession was Charing Cross Road, Oxford Street, North Audley Street into Grosvenor Square. Contrary to the original plan agreed with police they refused to follow the prescribed route which included Cavendish Square, Wigmore Street and Orchard Street.

It was evident from the beginning of the march that the demonstrators, who by now numbered some 8,000, did not intend to comply with police directions, and they took throughout every opportunity to obstruct police arrangements. It was impossible to contain them in an orderly procession - they spread across the full breadth of the carriageway in Charing Cross Road and half the carriageway in Oxford Street. They halted at Cambridge Circus for fifteen minutes where there was a scuffle in which a police motor-cyclist was injured and a window of a London Transport bus broken. The march then continued to Oxford Circus where there were several scuffles, two windows being broken in Dolcis Ltd. Here one or two persons were arrested.

At this point, two hundred demonstrators broke away and went ahead of the column to Dow Chemicals in Wigmore Street. They were there contained by police, however,

and they continued to Grosvenor Square.

It was particularly noticeable during the march that, whilst the general standard of cohesion between the numerous political groups was very low, the organisation of the German contingent was sufficiently competent to enable them to act as a "ginger-group" for the occasion. They set a pattern for others by linking arms and the poles of their banners, holding the shoulders of persons in front and encouraging other demonstrators to form a solid block of two to three hundred and surge forward as a mass.

By comparison it should be said, the small Swedish contingent was well-behaved.

As the demonstrators approached Grosvenor Square from North Audley Street the leading column immediately broke into a run and attempted to breach the police cordon drawn up across the road leading to the U.S. Embassy. Uniformed police, who had strong reserves at their disposal prevented this, and succeeded in funnelling the column along the North side of Grosvenor Square.

By this time the demonstrators numbered some 10,000 people, and by sheer weight managed to force their way into the gardens. Encouraged by this they showed that they intended to use every means in their power to assault the U.S. Embassy.

Sticks, banners, bags of paint, fireworks, clods of earth and missiles of varying kinds were hurled at the police and towards the Embassy, where despite the fact that the crowd was held by police at a line not nearer to the building than about fifty yards, about twelve windows were broken (possibly by persons firing ball-bearings by means of catapults from the rear of the crowd). Concerted and sustained attacks were made upon the police lines for a period of one hour. Many persons were arrested and several police officers injured.

The demonstrators were slowly pushed back and Grosvenor Square and the streets leading from it were clear by about 7 p.m. During their retreat, however, demonstrators broke windows at the entrance to the Europa Hotel in Duke Street. Other groups attempted later to storm the Dorchester and Hilton Hotels in Park Lane, but were effectively diverted by police.

In all, something in the region of 230 arrests were made.

To-day's activity emphasises that the Vietnam issue is one upon which younger elements of the militant Left Wing and Student Groups will demonstrate with terrifying ferocity, particularly when guided by foreign groups such as the Germans, who to-day comprised some 120 adept agitators (who nevertheless contrived to avoid being arrested). On this occasion only firm and resolute action by a strong force of police prevented serious damage to the United States Embassy.

Attached to this report as appendices are:-

- "A" - Organisations taking part.
- "B" - Persons identified as taking part, together with S.B. file references.
- "C" - Results of searches in S.B. records on other persons mentioned in this report.
- "D" - Details of motor vehicles used by demonstrators before and after the proceedings.

V Gilbert

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Detective Superintendent.

A. Cunningham
CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT.