

S.B. No. 1 (P )

METROPOLITAN POLICE

400/68/102

Special Report

INDEXED  
Date 20/3/70

SPECIAL BRANCH

7th day of November 1969

SUBJECT  
International  
Marxist Group  
-meeting  
Reference to Papers

1. I was present today with D.C. [redacted] at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1 where a public debate took place on the subject, "What is Trotskyism", between Ernest MANDEL of the Secretariat of the IVth International, and Monty JOHNSON, of the Young Communist League. The meeting began at 7.45p.m. and ended at 10.30p.m. About 500 persons were present. The meeting became excited at times but there was no disorder.
2. The debate had been organised by the International Marxist Group who were well represented in the audience, as were the International Socialists, the Revolutionary Socialist League, and the New Left Review Group. Maoists were present and made frequent interruptions. The Communist and Y.C.L. contingent numbered about 20 persons.
3. The meeting had been advertised in "Tribune" and in the "Morning Star". Admission cost 2/6 per head but there was no collection.
4. The Chairman was Robin BLACKBURN of the New Left Review Group. He acted throughout with authority and with strict impartiality. He allowed the two speakers an initial period of half an hour each to make their statements, then followed a period of about an hour for five-minute contributions from the floor, and then came the summing up speeches, leaving MANDEL with the last word.
5. Ernest MANDEL said that it was not his purpose to argue with Monty JOHNSON on what Trotsky may or may not have said in the past, nor was he concerned to refute some of the wilder allegations that had been made by communists about Trotskyists. The fact that he was present debating with JOHNSON indicated that Communists realised that Trotskyism was a force to be reckoned with. Trotskyism was not an outdated ideology, nor was it a failure. Since the re-organisation of the IVth International about ten years ago Trotskyism had gone from strength to strength. There were thriving Trotskyist parties in Ceylon, in Japan, and in France. In the recent presidential election in France the Trotskyist candidate, Alan KRIVINE, had polled 250,000 votes. Trotskyism was thriving because it had a message which was highly relevant to the present condition of the world. The Trotskyist policy of the IVth International had 4 pillars:
  - 1) a commitment to "permanent revolution" which derived directly from Leon Trotsky, 2) support for revolutionary movements in the under-developed world, 3) democratic centralism as a principle of organisation, and 4) a desire for the unity and the comradeship of the

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proletariat and its allies throughout the world.

6. Developing his theme MANDEL said that the Communist Parties under Russian domination had become completely bureaucratized; they operated censorship, and far from establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat they dictated to the worker what he should do and what he should think. In Czechoslovakia the people had been reaching towards a measure of "workers' control", there had been some chance of the "withering away of the state" as proclaimed in Marxist doctrine. Yet the Russians had sent in tanks and had silenced the workers. "What sort of Marxism", he asked, "was this?" In Latin-America there were many opportunities for the replacement of corrupt imperialist regimes, but communists had hindered the formation of guerilla movements. Castro had shown the way in Cuba, and the lack of enthusiasm shown him by the Communists was an example of the hypocrisy of their claim to be a revolutionary party.

7. MANDEL continued that in France, in May 1968, the objective conditions were present which could have led to the replacement of the Gaullist regime by a workers' government. But the French Communist Party had split the French left and refused to push forward with the revolution. In the Soviet Union the Communist Party had become so swamped with bureaucrats that the ordinary worker had no voice in public affairs. For parochial reasons the Russians were told that China was a threat. They were told to hate the Chinese, the "yellow men". These undertones of racialism and nationalism, said MANDEL, were a scandal to the world communist movement.

8. MANDEL said that the vision of the IVth International was the unity of the proletariat throughout the world; freedom to dissent, the right to pursue Marxist theories to their ultimate beneficial conclusions. This vision had seized the imagination of revolutionaries in all countries, and this would lead to the defeat of Imperialism and end the domination of monopoly capitalism.

9. Monty JOHNSON said that he was disappointed that MANDEL had used the occasion to attack communism. Whereas JOHNSON had prepared himself for a serious discussion on the ideas of Leon TROTSKY, he now found that MANDEL was saying, in effect, "forget about Trotsky and what he said, that is not important". JOHNSON said he felt bound to deal with the points made in MANDEL's speech. The massive growth of Trotskyist support in the last ten years was a complete myth. True there was a strong Trotskyist party in Ceylon, but nowhere else were Trotskyists in government. As for the 250,000 French Trotskyists, they represented only 1% of the total vote. Myth making was the hallmark of Trotskyists. So anxious were they to cram their revolutionary activity into the two or three years they could spare from their lives that they wanted revolution instantly and without regard to the objective circumstances. It was Lenin's view that the revolution could only be successful if it

had the backing of the majority of the population. This had been the case in Russia in 1917, but was not so in France in May 1968. The overwhelming victory for De Gaulle in the following elections was proof of this. It was also a travesty of the facts to imply that the Cuban revolution was Trotskyist. JOHNSON continued that the situation in Latin-America was by no means favourable to revolution unless one had in mind a putsch-type insurrection. The need in the Third World, as elsewhere, was for a patient and concrete analysis, with a Marxist perspective, and a vast programme of explanation and education. This, according to JOHNSON, was what Communists believed and this is what they practised.

10. It was not possible to identify all the individuals who made speeches from the floor. The most forceful speech came from [REDACTED] of the International Socialists. He argued that the French Communist Party had misjudged the situation in France in May 1968. The result of the election illustrated the disappointment of French workers with the lack of leadership from the Left. The opportunity had been missed and blame for this rested squarely on the French Communist Party. Tarig ALI said that he had been disappointed that the British Communist Party had given so little in the way of assistance to the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. He accused French Communists of having beaten up demonstrators in France who carried the flag of the National Liberation Front (of Vietnam). [REDACTED] said that much of the criticism of the Communist Party which he had just had to listen to was rubbish. If the Trotskyists were to study the works of Lenin they would see that Communist Party policy was firmly based on his principles. Speakers from the R.S.L. and from Maoist groups also made contributions but they were somewhat irrelevant to the issues under discussion.

11. In his final speech JOHNSON expressed the hope that Trotskyists would temper their criticism of Communists and join forces on issues where there was common ground, such as rents, wages and racialism.

10. MANDEL flung himself back into the attack on the French Communist Party, and revealed, probably quite deliberately, something of his real purpose in attending this meeting. He claimed that the May 1968 situation could have been turned into a revolution if only there had been on hand a group of some few hundred militant activists who could have stood against the C.R.S. riot squads. He claimed that the Trotskyists had put their forces into the battle but they had been outnumbered by the French C.R.S. He alleged that the French Communist Party had possessed a strong-armed squad in May 1968 but had declined to use it. He believed that there was a need in countries like Britain and France for groups of about 100 to be available to move about the country, and when potentially revolutionary situations arose then these

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groups could offset the forces of repression, such as the police and armed forces, upon which the bourgeoisie governments relied. MANDEL was very careful not to make this point too specifically. It was said by way of an aside, and could not on the strict interpretation of his actual words be taken to be an incitement to form such groups there and then. It was meant as a bait to those trotskysts with a taste for excitement, who might have been wondering how the revolution was to be brought about against the wishes of the majority of the population. There was no show of enthusiasm at that particular point of his speech, although, sitting as I was among the younger element of the I.M.G., I was aware that the point had not escaped unnoticed.

10. It will be understood that as the majority of the audience was sympathetic to Trotskyism MANDEL's speeches were well received. He declined an invitation from [redacted] Privacy to debate with the International Socialism group, and said that he expected a busy day on Saturday (8.11.69) having some five speeches to make, and that he was returning home shortly afterwards.

[redacted]  
(By Creamer)  
Sergeant.

Submitted

[redacted]  
Chief Inspector.

[redacted]  
CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT.

Copy to Bea S...  
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SB(2) P/A

[redacted]

Appendix A to Special Branch report dated 7.11.69  
concerning a meeting held by I.M.G. in Conway  
Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.

Persons identified as having attended the above meeting are as follows:

Ernest MANDEL ✓ - RF 408/63/1  
Monty JOHNSON ✓ - RF 402/49/569

Privacy

Tariq ALI ✓ - RF 402/65/440

Privacy

Pat JORDAN ✓ - RF 402/60/182  
Bob. PURDY ✓ - RF 405/67/82  
Pete GOWAN ✓ - RF 405/69/765

Privacy

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