

"SUNDAY TELEGRAPH" 3-11-68

PROTEST DAY: BEFORE AND AFTER

# The Revolution that Never Was

PETER GLADSTONE SMITH on how the "big demo" scare stories came to be taken so seriously

LAST SUNDAY'S Vietnam demonstration turned out to be much less revolutionary and violent than either Scotland Yard or Mr. Callaghan, the Home Secretary, expected. Why?

The police expected petrol bombs to be thrown and a violent mob to invade the Stock Exchange. The residence of the American Ambassador, Mr. David Bruce, was provided with bowls of fluid that would be an antidote if acid were thrown.

Mr. Callaghan gave a warning that hooligans would form marauding bands to provoke violence against the police and other institutions. Diplomatic missions, hotels and newspapers were confidentially warned to prepare for siege.

The fears were shown to be greatly over-rated and a primary reason must be that the Special Branch and M.I.5 took too seriously the influence of a tiny minority of violent anarchists and revolutionary Marxists.

Many new and comparatively green detectives of the Special Branch grew beards to listen-in at meetings of the Maoists and ad hoc committee. They would hurry back to Scotland Yard with pamphlets circulated at the meetings, against the organisers' wishes, urging arson and guerrilla warfare.

### Avoiding Traps

The idea of occupying buildings such as Broadcasting House and the Hilton Hotel had been circulated by word of mouth among anarchists and revolutionaries since March. They considered that demonstrators were too easily "trapped" by the police in Grosvenor Square.

It is known that relations between M.I.5 and the Special Branch were strained in the weeks before the march. The cause of their disagreement is not known.

But it is clear that the Home Office was not sure how seriously

to take the threats. In the event the leaflets proved to have no more significance than the hundreds of political "fringe" pamphlets and newspapers that are printed throughout the year and sold in Charing Cross Road.

It does not follow that the police precautions were exaggerated, or unnecessary. Scotland Yard does not think so.

The Yard's tacticians believe that it is simply because such massive counter-measures were taken that some of the extremists abandoned their plans. In a way



Commissioner WALDRON: Outflanked the militants

both sides won their battle before it began, and Trotskyites could be seen smugly taking snapshots of barred and boarded offices and shops for their journals.

Before the march the Yard chiefs charmed the figure-head leaders into co-operation by their conciliatory attitude. Mr. Tariq Ali, of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, was particularly impressed by his reception.

When the Maoists confronted Sir John Waldron, the Commissioner, and said: "We demand the right to march to Grosvenor Square!" he replied quite simply: "All right." This took the wind out of their sails.

The violence that occurred was mainly confined to the breakaway march to the American Embassy,

where five policemen were injured and taken to hospital. Attempts were made to rush and break police cordons and banner poles were used as weapons.

Detectives are seeking the men who kicked P.C. Derek Rodgers when he was on the ground. If found they will be charged with causing grievous bodily harm and could go for trial at the Old Bailey.

The main march to Hyde Park was peaceful because the vast majority intended it to be. But again here the skirmishes by a minority of hooligans were far fewer than expected.

This was partly due to the success of the Home Office in keeping out of Britain foreign agitators with a record of violence. But there were also intangible factors: the first wisps of a smoke signal over Paris were beginning to herald a possible peace settlement in Vietnam.

### Not a Hoax

Was the talk of an October 27 revolution a hoax? The answer last week at police and Home Office conferences was "No."

The most extreme rumours suggesting that there would be well-organised take-overs of public buildings proved to be unfounded. The hotch-potch of Marxists and anarchists on the British scene are anything but organised.

The Home Office knew that there were shrewd political agitators behind the scenes who intended to provoke a confrontation with the police. And looking at what has happened in France and other countries they took massive precautions.

In the event the British militants proved to be only a pale shadow of their more virile and convinced foreign counterparts. And foreign countries do not have the trump card that Mr. Callaghan could play.

He was the hero of the hour. The British Bobby.

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- 6 NOV 1968