

**In the Undercover Policing Public Inquiry**

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**First Witness Statement of Ernest Armstrong Tate**

**31.1.2020**

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1. I am now 85 years old, being born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1934. I have both British and Irish nationality by birth. I emigrated to Canada at the age of 21 in 1955 and also have Canadian nationality. In my professional career I worked for many years in energy management for a major Toronto public utility. In 1976 I graduated in Mechanical Engineering from what is now Ryerson University in Toronto. I have been politically active all my life and I have written an account of my political activism in the 1950s and 1960s in my 2 volume memoirs. This relates to my work as a member of the 'International Group' (a section of the "Fourth International", as founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 before his assassination) which became in Britain the International Marxist Group (IMG). I was in Britain for almost 5 years between 1965 and 1969, and was heavily involved in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC) which was set up in 1966. Since returning to Canada in 1969 I have been heavily involved in the trade unions and for many years I was Chief

Steward and Vice President of a major local of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I am now retired, and living in Toronto.

2. I make this Statement pursuant to a request made under Rule 9 Inquiries Act dated 16 December 2019. I received the Request and the accompanying Witness Pack on 2 January 2020. I have been asked to file my Witness Statement by 31 January 2020.
3. I note that the contents of the WP consist of 23 Special Branch (SB) Intelligence Reports dated between 8.2.1968 and 3.2.1969 in which my name is mentioned. These are reports based on activity of officers of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch unit called the "Special Operations Squad" (SOS) (only later re-named the "Special Demonstration Squad" (SDS) in 1972-3) set up in 1968 and funded directly by the Home Office under James Callaghan, Secretary of State, in the Labour Government headed by Prime Minister Harold Wilson.
4. I note that my SB 'Registry File' ('RF') references is given as 402/66/451 which I presume to mean a file was opened on me in 1966. I understand that SB intelligence reports would routinely be passed to MI5, now known as the Security Service and that my full file remains 'Top Secret' despite the fact that I left the UK in 1970 some 50 years ago.
5. It is therefore the case that the few reports disclosed to me in this Public Inquiry are only a fraction of the secret surveillance files held on me, the International Marxist Group (RF 400/68/182) of which I was a full time organiser, and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (RF 346/65/15), in which I was also heavily involved.
6. To compound the lack of disclosure, this Public Inquiry has decided not to disclose to me any of the Witness Statements made by any of the SOS officers who spied on me, or any statements from managers or an appropriate officer who could



- provide evidence on behalf of a deceased officer. There are no photographs provided of any officer except for Chief Inspector Conrad Dixon, who I understand was head of the small SOS unit at the time (1968-69).
7. The undercover officers who have been identified who spied on me appear to be as follows: TN0039 Chief Inspector Conrad Dixon, HN299/342 'David Hughes' (albeit he is stated on the UCPI website as being deployed only from 1971), HN321 'William Paul Lewis', HN329 'John Graham', HN326 'Douglas Edwards' and also HN332 whose details do not yet appear on the UCPI website.
  8. Further, the Metropolitan Police have not been asked by the Inquiry to provide 'Position Statements' which would set out exactly why SOS was set up, what its operational parameters were, and why it was necessary to begin more intrusive surveillance, including forming intimate relationships with targets, than it had done previously; and also why it was allowed to continue to operate after the 27 October 1968 VSC demonstration had passed off largely peacefully.
  9. As at the time of submitting this witness statement I can only assume that the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police (both of whom are represented at the Inquiry, funded by taxpayers money) will argue that this intrusive surveillance, a clear breach of the basic human right to privacy, was justified due to a threat of serious violence from those groups or individuals spied on. However, given the huge extent of pre-existing spying by M15 and Special Branch on political and peace activists, (including for example Bertrand Russell the well-known British philosopher), it seems to me that the creation of SOS in 1968 is merely a reflection of existing policy, without any care at all for people's basic human rights.
  10. One of the key overarching issues identified by the Inquiry in their 'List of Issues for SDS' is 'Targeting and initial authorisation' - what was the principal purpose of

each deployment, what criminality (if any) was it intended to detect, disrupt or prevent, and to what extent were these authorisations justified at the time they were made (and, one might add, whether there was any continued justification further down the line)? In addition, there is of course the whole question of the conduct of individual officers once deployed.

11. In so far as any State agencies will represent that there was a threat of violence from the individuals and/or groups put under surveillance by undercover officers, I profoundly disagree with (a) the notion that I, the VSC, or the IMG, threatened violence, especially serious violence; (b) the notion that I or the VSC or the IMG should have been targeted because although opposed to violence, infiltration would allow the police to monitor others (ie the argument that 'collateral intrusion' is justified); (c) the notion that even the threat of relatively mild disorder would justify the gross invasion of privacy that undercover infiltration entailed (ie it was a tactic that was grossly disproportionate to its aims). It is also apparent that after the October 1968 VSC demonstration had passed off relatively peacefully, the SOS should have been disbanded, having served its purpose which was explicitly, as I understand it, to go 'undercover' in order to gather intelligence in advance of that demonstration. It should never have morphed into a unit that infiltrated hundreds of groups and spied on individuals in such an intrusive way.
12. It is my position that there is no justification for the gross intrusion by the police into people's private lives on the basis that a person's, or group's politics is frowned upon by the State, unless there is a real, not fanciful, threat of serious violence. I believe that Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights concerning respect for privacy, private and family life, should be read back into the situation existing in 1968-69.

13. I understand that Special Branch records from 1887 onwards are subject to almost complete secrecy regardless of age and such an approach has been upheld by the Information Commissioner. Some documents were obtained through a 'Freedom of Information Act' request by journalist Solomon Hughes 10 years ago in an attempt to establish what happened in 1968, and these were put onto a website (the Special Branch Files Project); for the purposes of this Public Inquiry some documents have been declassified from 'Top Secret' status and have been disclosed to Core Participants. Nevertheless, the disclosure remains very partial. In my view it will be difficult for me and other CPs to counter any narrative given by the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police concerning what happened from 1968-2008, given the limited disclosure.
14. I am now asked to cooperate on this basis and answer some very targeted questions in the Rule 9 request on the basis of the selective disclosure supplied. It is clear in my mind that these questions focus very narrowly on the issue of violence, hence it appears to me that this will be the justification used by those in charge of SDS throughout the period - although we may not get to fully explore this until Module 6. The other major interested parties, the Metropolitan Police and the Home Office who oversaw the wrongdoing of SDS officers have full access to every file they want.
15. In contrast to the clandestine and secretive nature of the British State, I have written 2 published volumes about my activities as a political activist in the years in question: *"Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s and 60s, Ernest Tate, A Memoir"* (Volume 1 Canada 1955-65, Volume 2, Britain 1965-1970), Resistance Books, London, 2014. The Inquiry, the Police and members of the public can read what I have written about my activities. I have nothing to hide.

## **RULE 9 REQUEST QUESTIONS ANSWERED**

### **PERSONAL DETAILS**

**16. Q 1. Please give your full name and date of birth.**

17. Answer: Ernest Armstrong Tate, 24 May 1934.

### **POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

**18. Q 2. Please outline your political activities as a member of the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, including dates and positions of responsibility held. In particular:**

**19. Q 2.1: Is the Inquiry correct to understand that you were a member of the National Council of the VSC? If so, between what dates did you have a seat on the National Council? What did this role entail?**

20. A: It was never called the "Vietnam Solidarity Committee"; it was called the "Vietnam Solidarity Campaign": see page 71, Volume 2, of my memoir, *"Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s and 1960s"*, published in 2014 by Resistance Books, London. I also co-wrote with Phil Hearse an 11 page paper entitled *"The Building of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and its Consequences for the British Left,"* dated 17 February 2016, posted on Marxsite. The paper was delivered at a conference at the University of East Anglia in 2016.

21. I was one of the VSC's founders. It was founded on June 4-5th, 1966. I was a member of its National Council and its executive committee, from that date on until April, 1969. The executive committee, a sub-committee of the National Council, provided leadership to the VSC between National Council meetings and was

responsible for its national functioning on a day-to-day basis. I wrote for it and spoke often on its behalf on various public platforms and helped to formulate policy.

**22. Q 2.2 Did you work in the VSC's London office?**

23. A: No.

**24. Q 2.3 What were the aims of the VSC?**

25. A: To build a solidarity campaign with the Vietnamese against the American aggression, calling for its immediate end and the withdrawal of all of American forces, and the end of British collusion with the Americans. It also called for support for the Vietnamese National Liberation Front.

**26. Q 2.4 What methods did the VSC use to advance its aims?**

27. A: Mainly through building broad united-front coalitions of like-minded organizations and individuals to build mass mobilizations on the streets against the war.

**28. Q 2.5 Did the VSC vet its members?**

29. A: No. All that was required was for members to agree with the positions stated above in the answer I gave to **Q2.3**. Note that the political debates were quite open, and as a result, at the founding conference in 1966 a large number of Maoist delegates withdrew to a separate location and formed the rival Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front (BVSF). The anarchists too held separate conferences, as they had a slogan "Neither Washington nor Hanoi."

**28. Q 2.6 Did the VSC take other security precautions to keep its plans, tactics or other matters confidential? If so, please explain?**

29. No. All business and policy meetings were open to all members, but closed to the public.



**30. Q 2.7 Was the VSC concerned about infiltration by the Police or others? If so, please explain why?**

31.A: It was never an issue. We knew the police were interested in what we were doing, but because we were not doing anything illegal, we explicitly warned our members against pointing fingers of suspicion at anyone, based solely upon rumours and innuendo. We were too well aware of the long history of the working class where the police and the employers and malicious factions have used this vicious tactic for their own ends, to help split and destroy the movement.

**32. Q 2.8 Did you attend the March 1968 VSC demonstration? If so, was violence planned and by whom? What violence did you witness?**

33. A: Yes. No violence was planned by the main organisers, the VSC. My memory is, and I write about this in my memoir, volume two, page 243, that when the tens of thousands that day attempted to enter Grosvenor Square, they were met by hundreds, if not thousands of uniformed police, many on horseback, who in a very aggressive manner, tried to prevent them getting near the American Embassy. As a result, and regrettably, violence erupted with many police and demonstrators injured and/or arrested. I hold the police responsible for that.

**34. Q 3. Were you also a member, or supporter of, the International Marxist Group in the period 1968-1969?**

35. A: Yes.

**36. Q 3.1 If so, what role and/or position/s of responsibility did you hold in 1968/1969?**

37. A: I helped to organize the IMG. Again, see volume two, page 71, of my memoir, where I describe this in some detail. I was a member of its National and Political Committees.

**38. Q 3.2 Please describe the relationship and interaction between your IMG activism and your role with the VSC.**

39. A: My primary loyalty was to the IMG. It was the main organization which brought the VSC into existence. In the VSC, IMG members functioned as an open caucus to prepare for its various conference and activities.

**40. Q 3.3 What were the aims of the IMG and what methods and tactics was it using in 1968-1969 to advance its aims? In particular:**

**41.Q 3.3.1 Was the IMG a revolutionary group?**

42.A: Yes. Please see Chapter 11 of Volume 2 of my memoir, especially p203-205 where I explain the meaning of the name of the Group and it's political perspectives.

**43. Q 3.3.2 Did the IMG believe that revolution would, or might, require the use of force?**

44. A: Yes.

**45. Q 3.3.3 Did the IMG believe that force should be used to bring about revolution in 1968-1969?**

46. A: No.

**47. Q 3.3.4 Did the IMG believe that public disorder would advance its cause?**

48. A: No.

**49. Q 3.3.5 Did the IMG believe that breaking any laws was justified or necessary to advance its cause? If so, which laws and for what purpose/s?**

50. A: The IMG did not believe in breaking the law, but if a particular law was oppressive or dangerous to our democratic rights, and there was mass opposition in society to it, then the IMG might have explored ways to challenge that law.

**51. Q 3.3.6 Did the IMG vet its members?**



52. A: No one could be a member of the IMG without first demonstrating over a period of time as a probationary member, their commitment to the organization through providing financial support, commensurate with their means, and through activity in support of its program and by consistently attending its membership meetings.

**53. Q 3.3.7 Did the IMG take other security precautions to keep its plans, tactics or other matters confidential? If so, please explain.**

54. A: Leadership bodies of the organization practiced what is termed, "cabinet solidarity". Disputes in these committees could be taken to the general membership for discussion, only if there was a majority in the committee in favour of doing so. Only formal members had the right to attend its membership meetings.

**55. Q 3.3.8 Was the IMG concerned about infiltration by the police or others? If so, explain why?**

56. A: It was never an issue while I was in the leadership. See my answer to 2.7 in this respect, dealing with the VSC.

**57. Q 4. Are you surprised that the police deployed undercover officers to report on the activities of the IMG and/or VSC?**

58. A: Yes. It's a scandal and it reveals how far democratic rights in Britain have been abused over the past fifty years. It has become the norm, it seems to me, for the State to put the boots to anyone it doesn't like. If you're a socialist or Marxist or someone who has different ideas about how the economy and society should be organized, should we expect dirty tricks from those who are supposed to protect us?

**59. Q 5. Did you use an alias or aliases in relation to any of your political activity? If so, what was it/what were they and why did you use an alias?**

60. A: Yes, sometime I used the pseudonym "Ernest Strong" when I was writing journalistic articles and mainly in minutes of the IMG's National and Political

Committees. I did this mainly to avoid discrimination at the hands of the state in case that I might, in the future, be searching for regular employment. In Canada, I had lived through the period of McCarthyism in the 1950s and knew what political repression and its consequences looked like; blacklisting was a prime example of how easily the State could destroy a person's livelihood.

## **INTELLIGENCE REPORTS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS**

**61. Q 6. Please consider the documents which the Inquiry has obtained and included in your witness bundle. You are named in each one of the enclosed reports. Are the details that have been recorded accurate? If not, please identify any inaccurate reports and set out the respects in which the report is inaccurate.**

62. Answer:

**Tab #1 MPS-0739885:** It's too long ago for me to remember this meeting on 8 February 1968, but it is reasonable to assume I was present. According to the report by the Special Branch officer "David Hughes" (HN299/342) it was an open public meeting attended by about 70 people at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel to show the film "American War Crimes in Vietnam". This was just one week after the beginning of the 'Tet' (Vietnamese New Year) Offensive in which 80,000 Vietnamese regular and irregular soldiers took on over 1 million US and South Vietnamese troops. The terrible battles of Khe Sanh and Hue followed. The US and South Vietnamese (ARVN) committed numerous atrocities, the one that made the front page was the one of the South Vietnamese General blowing out the brains of a prisoner in the streets of Saigon. The US embassy was attacked and although ultimately 'Tet' was a tactical defeat for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, it was a strategic and political victory that had a world-wide impact on how the war was perceived. I note how one of

the future protests mentioned was against Dow Chemical in Wigmore Street, London, the manufacturers of the notorious substance 'napalm' which burnt people alive. Again, there was that terrible image of naked children fleeing from a US napalm strike that we all remember. There was also to be a protest at the USAF base at Lakenheath; the US air force being responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, women and children, as well as enemy soldiers. 1 million people perished in the war, as well as 50,000 US soldiers, most of whom were teenagers. I note there was to be a protest against the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who supported the US government.

63. It is not entirely clear to me why this document has been redacted, including the names of, I presume, Chief Inspector Conrad Dixon, and Chief Superintendent Cunningham. What is interesting is that this routine report of SB Form M1 is *prior* to the formation of the covert SOS/SDS unit. This shows that Special Branch were easily able to access our meetings and report on everyone, without the need for planting operatives in our organisations. I see that VSC has a Special Branch Registry File 400/67/73 so there must be a nice thick stack of files on VSC still being kept secret. I would like to see the archives opened as this is now 50 years ago, one wonders what the Metropolitan Police still have to hide after all this time?

64. It is a shame there is no witness statement from HN299/342 'David Hughes' as it could explain perhaps the difference between his routine SB duties in monitoring our meetings and his later doing the same thing within SOS/SDS. At this time, I presume he was just an ordinary member of 'C' squad. I note that there was an application by the Metropolitan Police for his name to be kept anonymous. The 'Minded to Note' by the Chairman states as follows: *HN 299 / 342 is a septuagenarian and lives alone in a small community. He was deployed against 3 groups of his own selection between*

*1971 and 1975. There is nothing to indicate that his deployment was anything other than unremarkable. His cover name will be published, as will the names of the groups. In the unlikely event that any member of any of the groups can remember him, publication of his cover name, not of his real name, is what is required to prompt information or evidence from them. Publication of his real name would risk unwelcome media attention and the attention of those who may be ill disposed towards him within his small community. It would not assist fulfilment of the terms of reference of the Inquiry. The interference with his right to respect for his private life which it would risk would not be justified under Article 8(2) ECHR.*

65. I am pleased to see that the Inquiry is underlining the importance of the right to respect for private and family life, and I trust this same important right will be afforded to the people who were spied on when and if any judgements are reached concerning the gross interference with this right as practiced by the Metropolitan Police Special Branch and others.

66. No photograph of this officer, who was then presumably in his twenties, has been supplied to assist in trying to recall him and his activities. I cannot recall him by name.

67. **Tab #2 MPS-0739886:** Again, it is too long ago for me to actually remember this meeting on 15 February 1968 but I assume I was indeed present. This is said to be a "private" meeting, but "David Hughes" HN 299/342 was again present, amongst 35 people, I am sure it would have been an open meeting for anyone who wanted to be involved in VSC activities. There is a report that towards the end of the meeting some people present said they intended breaking windows of the US embassy and were prepared for a "punch up" with the police; others said they wanted a sit-down protest. To be clear, VSC policy was always non-violent, we were only too aware that the

violence was a particularly strong attribute of the State. The officer's assessment that a "fair amount of violence" could be expected at the forthcoming solidarity demonstration in March 1968 was not an assessment I would have shared at the time.

**68. Tab #3 MPS0730911:** I was on the March 17th demonstration along with about 25,000 others. This report of 28 March 1968 is submitted by the Special Branch Commander to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It therefore appears to be explicitly prepared for the sake of supporting prosecutions by the State, presumably of the VSC leadership. It would help to have a witness statement explaining the reason for this report. It is surely unusual that Special Branch officers (including the later head of SDS Chief Inspector Conrad Dixon) were tasked to take ordinary witness statements from members of the public. It does contain the VSC leaflet that summarizes the press conference of 19 March 1968 given by Pat Jordan (Chairman of VSC), Mike Martin (Secretary of VSC), and Tariq Ali (member of the Ad Hoc Committee for organising the demonstration). The VSC leadership refuted the charge that the VSC had deliberately set out to provoke violence. It details two particular incidents that resulted in the confrontation with police in Grosvenor Square, firstly the initial refusal to allow the letters of protest to be delivered to the Embassy, as had been agreed with the Met Police beforehand, and secondly the fact that the march was blocked by police at the corner of North Audley Street, such that the demonstrators were very compressed. Nothing of course is said about the fact that the police were armed with truncheons and mounted on horses, and quite capable of dishing out extreme violence to unarmed protestors. Some harrowing reports are contained in accounts given by observers of the National Council for Civil Liberties, an independent organization.

69. Whatever the rights and wrongs of what happened, it appears that this outbreak of violence led to the authorities getting in a panic and seeking to understand this new militancy in advance of the October 1968 demonstration; and this led to the formation of SOS/SDS in the summer. And yet the answer to this militancy is given in the leaflet: *"the mood and temper of the demonstration on Sunday was determined by the nature of the American aggression. It is impossible to remain calm and peaceful before the barbarism of American aggression in Vietnam."*

70. What is interesting about this bizarrely selected and highly partisan package of material presented for the Public Inquiry in 2020 to consider (assuming it finds its way into the Hearing Bundle) is the huge absence of all the other documents that the British Government continue to suppress. The requests made by the journalist Solomon Hughes in 2008 for disclosure of the SB files about the VSC resulted in him being refused all access to the reports of the March 1968 demonstration. The only files disclosed were the ones that appear on the Special Branch Files project website. What have the Met and the Home Office got to hide? This Public Inquiry cannot properly draw any conclusions about the March 1968 demonstrations without complete open access - but if this is really meant to be a Public Inquiry then the public - journalists and academics, historians and those of us who were involved at the time - should be allowed to see the material. I would add that my account of both the October 1967 demonstration and the March 1968 demonstration are set out in Chapter 14 of my memoir (volume 2).

71. **Tab #4 MPS0722106:** This report of 2 April 1968 by Chief Inspector Conrad Dixon, signed off by Chief Superintendent, presumably A Cunningham (name redacted), is I presume the 'C' Squad ('Domestic Extremism') report into the March



VSC demonstration, and I assume belongs together with the report above. I think that Conrad Dixon is an important player in the history of SDS and it is a shame that he is now deceased as I am sure he would have plenty to say. In his 1999 obituary in *The Times* it is stated that he was the leader and founder of SDS, having been born into an army family, educated at Oxford and joined the Royal Marines. At Special Branch he apparently *"specialized in anarchists, Trotskyists and anarcho-syndicalists."* In 1968 he was sent for and asked what he needed to gather 'top grade information' on revolutionaries, and replied *"20 men, half a million pounds and a free hand."* I would like to emphasize the words "a free hand" as this suggests a complicity at higher levels with SDS being allowed to thrive in a culture that broke the rules. I also note that this obituary is quite open about his role in SDS, in contrast to the institutional secrecy of the Metropolitan Police.

72. Paragraph 3 of his report, suggesting that various groups were discussing proposals for violent action at Grosvenor Square, is not something that I recall, and I wonder if it is true. I note that Dixon says *"it is not possible to use these sources for evidential purposes, and no evidence of violent intentions was obtained by police officers who gained entry to some of these closed meetings."* This can only mean that there are existing SB reports (perhaps filed in RF 361/68/12 Ad Hoc Committee?) that detail these supposed discussions. I would like to see them. If there was no evidence of violent intentions obtained by SB officers, then I can only assume this gossip comes from "informers". This all sounds like make-believe; CI Dixon obviously knew what his masters wanted to hear. One wonders if the future creation of SOS/SDS was not out of desperation to try and find this supposed "evidence" that was so sorely lacking.

73. Paragraph 4 seems to imply that the SB report is directly as a result of the Attorney General, Sir Elwyn Jones, seeking to justify not just a prosecution of the VSC



leadership but the dissolution of the VSC itself under s2 Public Order Act 1936, which was originally brought into law to deal with the British Union of Fascists. The truth is there was not the slightest evidence that VSC planned any form of violence, VSC only believed in lawful resistance to police violence (ie lawful self-defence). It seems clear to me that this SB report is obviously expressing and reflecting the political prejudices of the British government of the day and the police; it is utterly self-serving and the Inquiry should beware of placing too much weight on it. At paragraph 10 it states that I was interviewed and gave the opinion that the police cordon across North Audley Street at the junction with Grosvenor Square had the effect of compressing the demonstrators to such an extent that they had no alternative than to try and break the cordon. [There is a clear aerial shot available online which shows this to be true]. This may have been a more or less accurate report of what I said. Mike Martin said that if the petition had been presented as planned then the violence could have been avoided. Pat Jordan stated that the organizers had tried their best but had lost control of events. The prejudice displayed by Dixon against Tariq Ali is typical of the time. I refer the Inquiry to the dossier compiled by the National Council for Civil Liberties that provided independent observers on the day. This dossier is referred to by Peter Jackson, Labour Party MP for High Peak (1966-70), in his speech to the House of Commons, reported in Hansard, 4 April 1968. He was apparently the only MP on the demonstration and was able to provide his own account, which supports mine.

**74.Tab #5 MPS-0732692:** This is a report of a meeting on 4 April 1968 at Toynbee Hall. I assume it is correct that I was present. I have no recollection of this meeting as it is so long ago. I note the same SB officer HN 299/342 "David Hughes" is the author of the report.

75. **Tab #6 MPS-0741312:** These documents placed in SB files in July 1968 for Chief Inspector Dixon to action are the first shown to me that are dated after the formal creation of the "Special Operations Squad" (SOS). These copies of the minutes of a VSC Executive meeting held on 5 July 1968 and the VSC National Council on 10 July 1968 are very faint and difficult to read. It is stated that I was present, I assume this to be true but it is too long ago for me to recall. There is nothing in these meetings or minutes that was secret.

76. **Tab #7 MPS-0738693/692:** This report dated 30 July 1968 by CI Dixon, signed off by Chief Superintendent A. Cunningham, is an account of a meeting of 100 people at Toynbee Hall concerning the organization of the forthcoming 27 October 1968 VSC demonstration. It is a reasonable summary of my views and those of the IMG.

77. **Tab #8 MPS-0738746:** It's too long ago for me to remember this VSC meeting at Conway Hall on 20 August 1968, but it is reasonable to assume I was among the 20 or 30 people present. I presume the source of the information given as 'Informant' means an undercover Special Branch officer, namely DS R Creamer who was present (having presumably obtained a blue ticket) and is the author of the report. DS Creamer is not listed on the UCPI website as an SOS/SDS officer, but the report is submitted by CI Conrad Dixon who was head of the new unit at the time. I note that a copy of the report was sent to 'Box 500' which I understand to be code for MI5, with copies also to 'C' and 'E' squads. I therefore assume that this report was an 'SOS' report. It is not clear to me why the RF references have been redacted in this document, and

presumably the word 'Secret' at the top of the document. Can the Inquiry clarify the status of DS Creamer?

78. **Tab #9 MPS-0730063:** This is another interesting report (dated 10 September 1968) by the head of the new SOS unit, CI Conrad Dixon, and contains what I would consider an utterly superficial and very opinionated police summary of contemporary British radicalism. It appears that the office stamp 'Secret' at the top and bottom of the page has been redacted. Dixon's report is very distorted, but just what I would expect from a secret policeman. His characterization of Tariq Ali as a "mob orator" and Ralph Schoenman as a "notorious agitator" and the general tone of the report suggests a policeman with a deep loathing of his subjects; he is perhaps aware that his career is better assisted by producing alarmist reports of this nature for his superiors than more carefully considered ones: the creation of SOS had to be justified. The report was written up just a few days after the VSC National Council meeting in Sheffield on 7 September 1968 (about which there is no report disclosed) which confirmed the route of the October demonstration. As for the supposed rumours or reports about the acquisition of (fire)arms and the preparation of Molotov cocktails, these are the product of a febrile imagination; even he admits have no evidential basis. He even accepts that the anarchist conference of 8 September 1968 in London condemned "senseless violence. I believe that there was a deliberate State tactic to foment public hysteria to frighten people away from joining future demonstrations - notwithstanding that the increased publicity may have actually had the opposite effect.

79. The report is inaccurate in respect of my role - I never at any time worked full-time for the VSC nor did Alan Harris, whom I knew quite well. People around the VSC were well aware of these facts. I was an IMG official.

80. **Tab #10 MPS0738815:** This is a report of a meeting of the NW London Ad Hoc Committee on 11 September 1968 at the Friends House in NW3. It's reasonable to assume that I was one of 30 people present; I have no memory of it. It is said that I reported back on a recent meeting in Sheffield (I note there are no SB reports provided to me from regional Special Branch). Two SB officers were present, CI Dixon and a Detective Inspector HN332 whose identity has still not been disclosed.

81. **Tab # 11 UCPI0000005782:** This report of PC Barry Moss and CI Dixon dated 19 September 1968 attaches a report, said to be written by me, on the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation. Unfortunately this document is almost completely illegible and impossible to read; there may be a copy in IMG archive collections somewhere. I do not recall writing this. A copy was sent to MI5.

82. **Tab #12 MPS-0722099:** I don't remember this meeting of 32 people of the VSC Lambeth branch at the 'Duke of Cambridge' on 26 September 1968, authored by 'William Paul Lewis' HN321 (deployed 1968-69). His state of hearing was obviously poor as he suggests I referred to the coming demonstration as "the October Revolution" (!) instead of "the October Demonstration" which was being discussed. It says I talked of trying to secure the support of the working class and trade unions for the demonstration, which I am sure is correct; perhaps as a consequence we raised a little money at the meeting for the AEF (Engineering Union) strike fund. As for HN321 I note that the Metropolitan Police applied in July 2017 for his cover name to remain anonymous, despite the fact that this is meant to be a Public Inquiry. The application states that he did not take his identity from a deceased child, but aside from this we

know nothing. It is a shame that the Inquiry is unwilling to provide me with a copy of his statement to be able to comment on. His 'Minded to' Note, granting anonymity over his real name states:

*HN321 is now in his 70s. He was deployed against two groups which no longer exist, for one year, between September 1968 and September 1969. There is not and has never been any known allegation of misconduct against him. He undertook the role of an undercover officer on the understanding that his identity would be kept secret. He is concerned about possible media interest if his real identity were to be revealed. He is, in particular, concerned about the impact on his wife, also in her 70s. His concerns are not irrational. In the unlikely event that disclosure of his cover name, which can be made, prompts evidence from one or more members of the target groups it will not be enhanced by disclosure of his real name. It is likely that disclosure of his real name would prompt intense and unwelcome media interest in him and so would give rise to serious interference with his and his family's right to respect for their private life under Article 8 of the European Convention which would not be justifiable under Article 8(2). Closed reasons accompany this note.*

83. I repeat that I am pleased to see that the Inquiry is underlining the importance of the right to respect for private and family life, and I trust this same important right will be afforded to the people who were spied on when and if any judgements are reached concerning the gross interference with this right as practiced by the Metropolitan Police Special Branch and others.

84. **Tab #13 MPS-0742197:** This report dated 2 October 1968 relates to a VSC Press Conference at Conway Hall called by the Ad Hoc committee for the October demonstration and attended by 30 representatives of the press and national media.

The route of the demonstration was confirmed, especially that there were no plans to go to the US Embassy this time. It is reported that I said the demonstration would be much bigger than the last two, up to 100,000 people. I was right. The report is submitted by Inspector R Wilson, presumably not an SOS undercover officer but a regular Special Branch officer of 'C' Squad (?). I am presuming he is the author of the book *'Special Branch, 1883-2006, a History'*. The name of the Chief Superintendent is redacted. The VSC Press statement is not attached to this report.

85. **Tab #14 MPS-0730096:** This report (another by CI Conrad Dixon) dated 3 October 1968 is said to be a "regular weekly report" on the preparations for the national demonstration in 3 weeks time. I'm mentioned in this police report as an IMG member and member of the VSC executive.

86. Interestingly this document was made public in 2008, obtained by the journalist Solomon Hughes - but paragraph (b) was redacted for some reason; it mentions a supposed attack by London School of Economics (LSE) students on the Stock Exchange and an occupation of the LSE itself. According to the *Times* obituary of 1999, Dixon was involved as an undercover officer in that occupation [on 25 October] and seized the telephone exchange. I presume this is the reason for the redaction.

I note his observation regarding students, who he says provided the bulk of the support for the VSC demonstrations thus far, and that "their behavior on demonstrations is largely spontaneous." I agree, there was never any plan for violence from the IMG or the VSC, rather the complete opposite, we wanted a huge but peaceful demonstration. In so far as the Maoists wanted a more militant approach by confronting police in Grosvenor Square, we in the VSC were opposed to this and the 3 Maoist controlled VSC local branches had been disowned by the National Council for this reason. It is



noteworthy that the Maoist contingent was said to number no more than 100 people. Dixon's report concludes that it is the people who are *not* represented on the VSC - anarchists, Maoists and "foreign elements" - who are "most likely to use violence and to be hostile to the police." When all this is considered, what is obvious is that there were a tiny number of people who were desirous of a clash with the police, and that any situation that arose would be largely spontaneous. The fact of undercover policing or even regular Special Branch reporting made not the slightest difference to the manner in which events transpired on 27 October 1968. *The Times* obituary of 1999 gives Dixon credit for advising that the police lines needed to be thicker to prevent demonstrators breaking through. At half a million pounds this was expensive advice indeed, and related only to basic crowd control.

87. **Tab #15 MPS-0742228:** This is the Daily Telegraph report of our press conference on 2 October 1968. I'm on the platform, off to the left, Tariq Ali is speaking. In the report he made a plea to "flush out" anybody who was planning violence.

88. **Tab #16 MPS-0730091:** This is CI Dixon's next weekly report dated 16 October 1968, and signed off by Chief Superintendent A. Cunningham. Both myself and my partner Jess MacKenzie are listed as prominent in VSC affairs.

89. **Tab #17 MPS-0722099:** This report is about a meeting of VSC Lambeth branch, held in the 'Old Queen's Head', Stockwell, on 17 October 1968 with 32 people present. I do not recall this meeting but I assume I was indeed present with my partner Jess MacKenzie as reported. The report appears to be produced by HN 321 'Bill Lewis' who was present in his 'undercover' capacity as a deployed Special Branch SOS officer.



90. **Tab #18 MPS-0730093:** This appears to be the definitive police report of the 27 October 1968 VSC demonstration, submitted by Chief Superintendent A. Cunningham. Chapter 17 of the Second Volume of my memoir, gives a much better account from of course a quite different perspective. I disagree with his statement that the VSC was "to a considerable extent responsible for the violence which occurred at the demonstrations in London on October 1967, March and July 1968." [I note in passing no documents are disclosed to me about the July demonstration]. It is unfair to characterize the approach of the VSC and myself as simply "paying lip service" to the concept of an orderly demonstration. This is what we wanted. We did disagree with the Maoists (see my answer to Q8.1 below) and excluded them. His statement that "the majority were well disciplined and acted in an orderly manner under the direction of the VSC marshalls" is correct and rather belies his earlier dire warnings of considerable public disorder being likely. Tariq Ali is rightly mentioned as urging demonstrators at Trafalgar Square to continue along Whitehall and not go to Grosvenor Square. There is mention of 500 Maoists and 300 anarchists independently splitting off and going to Grosvenor Square where there was some very limited disorder which resulted in 17 arrests. I would say the credit for the overall good discipline and peaceful nature of the VSC march should be given to the VSC. In so far as CI Dixon and his SOS, and the Metropolitan Police wish to claim credit, then surely this was the moment for SOS to be disbanded as a separate squad within Special Branch, and for the senior officers to take back the "free hand" that Dixon had insisted on.

91. **Tab # 19 MPS-0735443:** This I am told is a picture of CI Conrad Dixon, I presume from 1968 (perhaps when he was in the LSE?). I have no recollection of having seen him and it's not clear if our paths ever crossed. It would be more helpful to have photos of HN299 and HN321, HN329 and HN332.

92. **Tab #20 MPS-0731634:** This is a report on an IMG meeting of about 30 people held in 'The Earl Russell ' public house on Sunday 3 November 1968. I do not recall this meeting as it is so long ago, but it is reasonable to assume I was there with my partner Jess MacKenzie. The meeting was to discuss the political situation in Northern Ireland where of course I was from. HN321 'William Paul Lewis' was again present and wrote up the report. I am assuming by now he had become an IMG member. I note a copy of this report went to MI5 and a copy to 'B' Squad ("Irish Extremism"). The context was that the first Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) march had taken place on 24 August 1968 in Dungannon, drawing 4000 people. This passed off peacefully, but on 5 October 1968 another NICRA march was viciously attacked by police officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), this was the start of what became known as 'The Troubles.' Once again the serious violence was from the police not the protestors.

93. **Tab # 21 MPS-0730768:** This is report by CI Dixon of a meeting of the VSC at Conway Hall on 11 November 1968. 100 people were present, and although I cannot recall this meeting I am recorded as speaking. This was a meeting to discuss the 27 October demonstration. I note that further undercover officers were present: TN0034, a Detective Sergeant, HN321 'William Paul Lewis', HN329 'John Graham', HN326 'Douglas Edwards'. No witness statements of any of these officers are in the Witness

Pack. I note that in the anonymity application by the Met Police HN326 'Douglas Edwards' is said not to have used the identity of a deceased child, and that *"the extent of his infiltration was more superficial than that of later officers"* (although it lasted 3 years). The anonymity order states: *"HN326 is in his 70s. He was deployed against three groups, two of which no longer exist in any form, for 2 and a half years between 1968 and 1971. He has been careful to preserve his anonymity and is worried about disclosure of his real name. He is concerned that it may be discovered by organisations such as undercoverresearch.net and fears media intrusion. He suffers from conditions which may be exacerbated by worry."*

94. In respect of 'John Graham' all we are told is *"HN329 is now in his 70s. He was deployed against two groups, which no longer exist, for one year between 1968 and 1969."* I do not know if I came across any of these officers at the time.

95. **Tab #22 MPS-0722099:** This is a report by CI Dixon of a VSC meeting at Conway Hall on 20 December 1968, some 55 people attended. I do not recollect this meeting but I can presume that I was present. Officers HN321 and HN329 were there.

96. **Tab #23 UCPI0000005797:** This is a report by CI Dixon of the VSC National Conference held on 1-2 February 1969 at Conway Hall in London in which I am recorded as present. The name of the Chief Superintendent is redacted as are the small areas at top of each page no doubt stamped 'Secret.' Eleven documents are appended to the report including one under the name of Alan Harris, Pat Jordan and myself dated 31 January 1969.

97. **Q 7.** The documents in your witness pack include reports of VSC meetings, at which you are recorded as having been present, both before and after the creation of the SDS (believed, at this stage, by the Inquiry, to have been on 30 July 1968). What additional access to the VSC would the use of undercover police officers, as opposed to plain clothes detectives, have given to the police?

98. A: I don't know. It probably made it easier for them to steal membership lists.

99. **Q 8.** You are recorded as having been a “dove” on the question of violence by comparison to the “hawk” “Albert” Manchanda in the report dated 30 July 1968 (MPS-0738693 at Tab 7).

100. A: This is gossip I have never heard before.

101. **Q 8.1** Is the description of the differences between you and “Albert” Manchanda accurate?

102. A: My disagreements with Manchanda were fundamentally political, about what should be the program of the VSC. I did not know at that time what his views were about violence in relation to the Vietnam protest movement. I never ever discussed this issue with him. I never trusted him. He led a splinter group which tried to wreck the founding conference in 1966. For a description of this, see page 88, Volume 2, of my memoir. The Maoists formed a separate organization, the Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front (BVSF).

103. **Q 8.2** Please explain in your own words the tensions between you, and those who subscribe to your way of thinking, and Manchanda and the Maoists, whom the Inquiry understands he led, during 1968 and 1969. The Inquiry is particularly interested in understanding these tensions in the context of the planning and execution of the 27 October 1968 demonstration.

104. A: See answer to Q 8.1 above.

105. **Q 8.3 Please look at the photograph in your witness pack marked MPS-0735443 (at tab 19). The Inquiry understands this to be a photograph of Conrad Dixon, who signed the above report dated 30 July 1968. Do you recognize him? If so, what can you recall about him and what he did?**

106. A: No. I have no memory of ever having seen that person.

107. **Q 9. Please look at the report dated 10 September 1968 (MPS-0730063 at tab 9).**

108. A: See my comment on tab 9 above. I reproduced this document in volume two of my memoir, which was published in 2014. I received it from Solomon Hughes of the *Guardian* in 2008, who along with Paul Mason of ITV took legal action to force the police to release it.

109. **Q 9.1 At the bottom of p.3 the report records that you were employed full-time at the premises of the VSC located on the second floor of offices situated at 120 Commercial Road, London, E1? Was that information correct?**

110. A: No.

111. **Q 9.2 In the first paragraph on p.4 the report states that *"The more cautious representatives of International Socialism and International Marxist groups paid lip service to the vision of a peaceful demonstration"*. Is that an accurate assessment of what happened?**

112. A: This is gossip from sources that were not involved in the campaign. We in the leadership of the VSC and the Ad Hoc Committee, were totally committed to peaceful demonstrations, and if violence took place, it was incidental and outside of our control. This is why we did not go to Grosvenor Square on 27 October 1968. It was mainly a peaceful event, much to the surprise of the police, who by that time had frightened the authorities into a state of panic. [See the 'Street Power' leaflet that was given out to

demonstrators by the October 27 Ad Hoc Committee (reproduced in Volume 2 of my memoirs at p212) that explicitly sought to avoid confrontation with the police].

**113. Q 9.3 Later in the same paragraph, the report states: "All the indications are that the Maoists and anarchists will disregard any sort of instruction from police or march leaders – and take an independent line on that day". Would you have agreed with that assessment on 10 September 1968? If not, why not?**

114. A: I, and the rest of the leadership of the VSC suspected the Maoists would make an effort to hi-jack the demonstration as it made its way past Trafalgar Square; that's why we stopped the demonstration in the middle of the street when they tried to divert it to Grosvenor Square. We effectively policed our own demonstration. See my account of the day in Chapter 17 of my book, especially pp266-7.

**114. Q 9.4 On page 5, there is a list of tactics which are regarded as having been suggested at branch, but not national level. To what extent were you aware of such suggestions? To the extent that you were aware: (a) to what extent did you approve of them; and (b) insofar as you disapproved of them, what did you do about them?**

115. A: This is the product of the fevered imagination of the security services who seemed to be out to frighten their superiors and the Wilson Labour Government. It looks like every little piece of scary information from whatever source, or whatever they invented, was used for this purpose. We, the organizers of the demonstration, wanted the largest mobilization possible, one to which the participants could bring their families without the fear of being exposed to violence. That's why the Ad Hoc Committee adopted a march route that ended up with a rally in Hyde Park. What happened on that day, high-lights the wisdom of that decision. Over 100,000 people turned out.



116. **Q 9.5** Later on the same page there is a reference to a meeting of the National Council of the VSC in Sheffield, at which a general outline of the activity of the 26/27 October emerged. Were you at this meeting and, if so, (a) did it decide the route of this demonstration as described on the following page; and (b) what, if any, attempts were made by the VSC to keep details such as this confidential.

117. A: Yes. That's where we finalized the decision on the demonstration route. It was the major discussion. No, there was no policy to keep the route secret.

118. **Q 10.** Please look at the Special Report dated 19 September 1968 and attached document (UCPI0000005782 at tab 11).

**Q10.1** Did you in fact prepare the attached document as the report asserts.

119. A: It's possible I wrote that document; but the obvious photo-copying of photo-copies so many times has made it illegible.

120. **Q 10.2** The document refers to the overthrow of Western capitalism and concludes with a reference to revolutionary action which has its goal the overthrow of the total society. Do these aims accord with your understanding of the aims of the IMG?

121. A: See above. The document is illegible. If you can provide me with a legible copy I would then be happy to answer.

122. **Q11.** Is the Inquiry correct to understand that you moved to Canada in or around April 1969?

123. A: Yes.

124. **Q 11.1** Did your involvement with the British anti-Vietnam protests end when you moved to Canada?

125. A: Yes.



126. **Q11.2 Did your involvement with the IMG in Great Britain end when you moved to Canada?**

127. A: No.

## **RECOLLECTION OF EVENTS**

128. **Q 12. Please provide a factual account of events at the demonstration of 27 October 1968 in particular from the point of view of the freedom of the VSC to mount a demonstration and with regards to policing and any public disorder that you might have witnessed.**

129. A: The factual accounts are provided in my memoir, as stated above.

## **IMPACT**

130. **Q 13. If not already covered in your answers to the above questions, please explain when you were first aware that the VSC had been the subject of undercover policing and the impact that had on you. Please also explain the impact that sight of the reports in your witness pack recording your political activities has had.**

131. A: The first I heard of the Inquiry was in June, 2019. I had not seen anything about it in the Canadian press. I am pleased that the Inquiry is taking place and I hope it will finally expose the gross violations of people's civil liberties that took place at the hands of the British security services for so many years. It is an outrage, as has been reported to the BBC in 2002 in their three-part documentary, "*True Spies*" -- and it is only one example -- that an undercover policeman, known as "Dick Epps" (HN336), said he copied the keys of the offices of the International Marxist Group, which he also had infiltrated, and passed them on to MI5. It is suggested that MI5 later burgled those

offices— which is a crime – to obtain membership and financial records. I would like to see a copy of his witness statement and see how he justifies committing crime in this fashion, and who authorized it. I am also concerned that some of these officers may have adopted similar tactics (as discovered later) of sleeping with female activists, and it may now be too late to uncover this repulsive tactic.

132. The Inquiry has to decide whether it will simply protect the interests of the police and the State, even after all these years, or whether it will come down on the side of civil liberties and the right of people to have a private life free from intrusion by State security forces. I hope that the Inquiry will lead to legislation and public oversight that will limit their ability to harass those who happen to be critical of society or are fighting for social change. I note that illegal surveillance programs were mounted by both the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. These both led to Inquiries which declared the activities illegal: the Royal Commission, known as the McDonald Commission (1977-81) in relation to the RCMP, and the COINTELPRO scandal reported on by the Select Committee of the US Senate, known as the Church Committee (1976). I believe the findings of the latter are instructive and worth considering, because at the very time that Senator Frank Church was delivering his damning verdict, the British State was quietly engaged in much of the same activity.

## **OTHER**

**133. Q 14. Is there anything else that you wish to add that may be of assistance to the work of the Inquiry?**

134. A: Not at this time, but I would welcome the opportunity to make a supplemental statement if need be, after seeing the witness statements of the officers, the Opening

Statements of the Home Office and Metropolitan Police, or any other documentary material of importance.

## **DOCUMENTS**

**135. Q 15. Do you have any documents that may be potentially relevant to the work of the Inquiry, e.g. photographs, diaries or other contemporary documents? If so, please explain what they are. If you are content to provide copies to the Inquiry for use as evidence please do so. Alternatively, if you are concerned about providing copies now, please set out your concerns briefly and the Inquiry will contact you to discuss them.**

136. A: Of course, there is my two-volume memoir, *"Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s and 1960s"* which I have already referred to. But I am also aware of documents from the period concerning the VSC and IMG held by Warwick University, Coventry, and the International Institute of Social History (IISH) and the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE), both in Amsterdam. And also, the Tamiment Library, New York, and the Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. The archives in Hull contain the NCCL report on the March 1968 demonstration and additional papers. The Special Branch Files project website (<http://specialbranchfiles.uk>) has other Special Branch reports relating to the October 1968 VSC demonstration, some authored by CI Conrad Dixon, which have not been sent to me in the Witness Pack but may be of relevance. There are also numerous photos of the VSC demonstrations available online, in particular there is an aerial view showing the crush at North Audley Street at the March 1968 demonstration.

137. I attach to this statement: (a) an electronic copy of my book *'Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s & 60s'* referred to above; (b) a copy of an extract from Hansard

House of Commons debates 4 April 1968 in respect of the March 1968 VSC demonstration to Grosvenor Square; (c) a copy of the April 1968 National Council for Civil Liberties report into the same demonstration; (d) a copy of the February 2016 paper to the University of East Anglia, *The Building the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and its Consequences for the British Left* authored by myself and Phil Hearse; (e) a copy of 1999 *The Times* obituary concerning Conrad Dixon (f) Vietnam Solidarity Campaign Bulletins, issues 12 (March 1968) and 18 (September 1968) found at : <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/vsc/index.htm>.

#### DIVERSITY

138 Q 16. What is your racial origin?

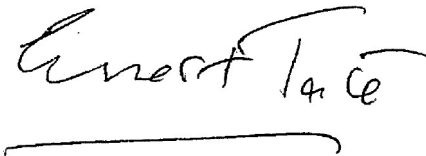
139. A: Caucasian.

140. Q 17. What is your gender?

141. A: Male.

I believe the contents of this statement to be true.

Signed

  
Ernest Tate

Dated 31 January 2020

17/August, 2020