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OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

SH(70) 1st Meeting

COPY NO. 13

CABINET

OFFICIAL COMMITTEE ON SUBVERSION AT HOME

MINUTES of a Meeting held in Sir Burke Trend's
Room, Cabinet Office, S.W.1., on
WEDNESDAY, 11th MARCH 1970 at 3.30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Sir Burke Trend,
Cabinet Office (In the Chair)

Mr. G.F.N. Reddaway,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. A.S. Kerr,
Department of Employment and
Productivity

Mr. J.H. Waddell,
Home Office

Mr. R. Toomey,
Department of Education and
Science

Mr. R. Thistlethwaite,
Security Service

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. J. Tyrer,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Security Service

Security Service

SECRETARY:

Mr. B.M. Day

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SECRET

1. STUDENT PROTEST

The Committee had before them a note by the Secretary (SH(70)1) covering a memorandum by the Security Service on the current situation amongst British students.

Apartheid

MR. THISTLETHWAITE said that the two main subjects of student protest in the foreseeable future were likely to be apartheid and the universities' confidential personal files on students. The Stop the 70 Tour Committee had held a national conference on 7th March in London to concert efforts against the South African cricket team, which was due to arrive in this country on 1st June. The London branch of the Committee was acting as the coordinating agency, but there were four provincial committees with much local autonomy. Four major national demonstrations were planned, the first on 6th June at Lords. Other demonstrations were also likely to be held, not all of them at cricket matches. Likely targets included any games involving the public appearance of identifiable South African teams. The cricket fixtures amounted to 11 matches on six different grounds. The Security Service would keep in close touch with the Home Office in order to advise on the deployment of police resources at demonstrations.

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Student Files

Discussion then turned to protests against the maintenance of confidential files by the universities about individual students and particularly their political opinions. The following main points were made -

(a) Some letters which were the subject of protests had proved to be forgeries. It was not clear whether the forgeries had been made for subversive reasons or merely as student pranks, but the exposure of forgeries helped to discredit the students' protests.

(b) There were signs that the student agitations were having an adverse effect on Vice Chancellors, and the universities were tending increasingly to seek legal protection against student occupation of university premises and disruption of university work. Legal remedies were, however, likely on the whole to be ineffective, and the universities might seek support from the Government, if only in the form of moral backing.

(c) It was arguable that Ministers should try to hold aloof on the grounds that the universities were independent and should run their own affairs. As a matter of policy the Department of Education and Science had always rejected proposals for public enquiries into the conduct of affairs at the universities, and it would be unfortunate to undermine their responsibilities for internal discipline. On the other hand, there was considerable Parliamentary interest in the student files issue, and Ministers had to try to cope with this. The attitude which they might take towards involvement in university affairs was likely to need further consideration.

(d) It was difficult to assess the extent to which the agitation about files was inspired by organised subversion, but the greater danger appeared to lie in the Communist Party's penetration of the National Union of Students. A communist had been elected to the Executive Committee for the first time in April 1969, and the Party's future prospects appeared good. Their membership of the Executive Committee would enable them to exploit a number of issues. A development which needed to be watched was the possibility of a reaction amongst Fascist students, as was already apparent in Italy and France.

The Committee -

Took note.

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In discussion concern was expressed not only about the size of recent wage settlements but also the increase in their frequency. In some cases fresh claims had been made within six months of previous settlements. Anarchy in industry appeared to be growing with little prospect of firm leadership emerging at least during the current year.

The Committee -

Took note.

Cabinet Office, S.W.1.

12th March 1970