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AC(H)(WG)(68) 4th Meeting

COPY NO. 4

CABINET

OFFICIAL COMMITTEE ON COMMUNISM (HOME)
WORKING GROUP ON COUNTER MEASURES

MINUTES of a Meeting held in Sir Burke Trend's
Room, Cabinet Office, S.W.1., on
THURSDAY, 15th AUGUST 1968 at 10.15 a.m.

PRESENT:

Sir Burke Trend,
Cabinet Office (In the Chair)

Sir Denis Greenhill,
Foreign Office

Mr. J.H. Waddell,
Home Office

Sir Herbert Andrew,
Department of Education
and Science

Mr. R. Thistlethwaite,
Security Service

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:

Sir John Wolfenden,
Chairman, University
Grants Committee

Mr. J. Tyrer,
Foreign Office

Mr. J.S. Elliott,
Security Service

SECRETARY

Mr. D. Heaton

S U B J E C T:

STUDENT PROTEST

STUDENT PROTEST

SECRET

(Previous Reference: AC(H)(WG)(68) 3rd Meeting)

THE CHAIRMAN said the Prime Minister had agreed to a meeting of Ministers under his chairmanship in September to consider the problem of student unrest, with particular reference to the demonstration arranged for 26th-27th October. This demonstration was of course not primarily a student affair, but it was no doubt stimulated by student unrest, and there would be student involvement. The Foreign Secretary had pointed to the adverse international effect of a successful violent demonstration, and the corresponding advantage if it was a failure; he was also concerned that violence on this occasion might touch off trouble in the universities at the beginning of the new academic year.

In discussion the following main points were made:

- (a) The demonstration was being organised by an ad hoc committee so far under Trotskyist control. It was supported inter alia by the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation, by the Radical Students Alliance and, with some misgivings, by the Communist Party. Trafalgar Square was not available to the organizers for 27th October, and the demonstration would probably take place on Saturday 26th October. There was considerable dissension within the organizing committee, whose work the Maoists had successfully disrupted. This might well oblige further planning to take place in private, which would make mass support for the demonstration more difficult to secure. The attendance target was 100,000, and the likely attendance seemed likely to be of the order of 20,000.
- (b) It would not be practicable to prevent the demonstration taking place. The object should be to allow it to be a demonstrable failure, by encouraging the process of disruption among the organizers and thus minimising its chances of success.
- (c) The Home Office would be discussing with the Metropolitan Police the tactics they would use in the face of the more effective methods likely to be used to counter police action. The police would no doubt be ready to adapt their traditional tactics but would be reluctant to contemplate the use of such devices as water-cannon, tear-gas and riot-shields, or to abandon their proven reliance on mobile (i.e. human or vehicle) rather than fixed barriers.

SECRET

In further discussion on the general problem of student unrest at universities, the following points were made:

(d) Trouble was still likely to start at the freshmen's conferences in early October. Attempts would no doubt be made to discredit the National Union of Students (NUS) and the individual Presidents of Students Unions. It was still important to encourage the moderates by a policy of open support for the NUS. Large grants were already made by the Department of Education of Science to student bodies and organizations, and it might be difficult to do anything more in support of the NUS, but this was a subject which the Department might profitably discuss with IRD.

(e) It would be helpful for the Home Office to be able to advise police forces of the gist of whatever legal advice was received by university and college authorities.

(f) There seemed scope for unattributable publicity timed to appear in the latter half of September: firstly, a short and fairly lighthearted piece designed for sceptical students, on the lines of the attack on the Radical Students Alliance produced by the NUS earlier this year; secondly, something for distribution in academic circles, which would find its way to Vice Chancellors, on the lines of the paper produced by IRD in May (AC(H)(WG)(68)2) and the articles subsequently published in The Times; thirdly, suitable material in the responsible press in late September and early October, calculated to influence student opinion. In this context Independent Television proposed to show a helpful film at about the end of September, and the Prime Minister had agreed to talk to Lord Hill and Lord Aylestone about provocation by television teams. In all this, it should be borne in mind that it would be counter-productive for the Government to be seen to be unduly concerned at or with the problem of student unrest.

Summing up this part of the discussion, THE CHAIRMAN said it would probably be convenient for Ministers to meet on 12th, 13th, 16th or 17th September. The Home Secretary might appropriately provide a short note on the October demonstration - its origin, purpose and likely scale and nature; how far its organisation had been disrupted and how it was proposed to deal with it. A second short paper should assess the prospects of student unrest later this year, and describe the limited measures we could take to inform university authorities of the background and encourage moderate student opinion. If the Secretary of State for Education and Science did not wish to put such a paper forward, the Cabinet Office should do so after clearance with the Departments concerned. It

would be helpful if Sir Herbert Andrew would keep Sir Douglas Hadow and Mr. Daniel in the picture, and the Prime Minister would be asked whether he wished the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales to be invited to the meeting.

The Working Group -

- (1) Took note with approval of the Chairman's summing up.
- (2) Invited the Department of Education and Science to discuss with the Foreign Office (IRD) the possibility of further support for the National Union of Students.
- (3) Invited the Security Service and the Department of Education and Science to inform the Home Office of any legal advice given to university and college authorities respectively.
- (4) Invited the Foreign Office (IRD) to arrange unattributable publicity along the lines proposed in (f) above.

MR. WADDELL informed the Working Group of the approach made to him by Mr. Donald McLachlan on behalf of Mr. Alan Bullock, and the suggestion that he (Mr. Waddell) might meet Mr. Bullock to discuss the Government's attitude to student unrest and the desirability of a more robust attitude than the authorities in Oxford had yet displayed.

In discussion it was agreed that Mr. Bullock probably had in mind the greater use of rustication to deal with student trouble-makers, who would then have their local authority grant withdrawn for the rest of the term; but this course involved a serious danger of making martyrs. It was true that the problem at Oxford was different from that in most universities, in that there was no strong university authority or central student organization, and discipline was essentially in the hands of the colleges. But student affairs were the business of the university and college authorities, and the Government certainly should not interfere. It would also be quite inappropriate to pass any confidential information to Mr. Bullock. If the latter wished to pursue the matter further, he should be invited to discuss it with Sir John Wolfenden or with Sir Herbert Andrew.

The Working Group -

- (5) Invited Mr. Waddell to be guided by the points agreed in discussion.

Cabinet Office, S.W.1.

16th August 1968