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HOME OFFICE  
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17th November, 1972.

Dear Burke,

I mentioned to you a few days ago that I had spoken to Philip Rogers about a note prepared by my Group on Claimants Unions.

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He agreed that it would be sensible to circulate copies only to the limited number of Ministers who know about the work of the Group. His only comment on the content of the note, a copy of which I now attach, is that it gives the impression that the aims of the unions are pursued in rather more coherent and orderly fashion than the other information available to him suggests. I entirely accept this comment.

You will now want to consider what to do about circulation - and may think that there would be something to be said for holding it up until the Group produces some further work of greater substance. But I am entirely in your hands about this.

I am sending a copy of this to Herman, who should, I suggest, arrange circulation to members of the Group whether or not it is going to Ministers at this stage.

Yours sincerely,

James Waddell

The Rt. Hon. Sir Burke Trend, G.C.B., C.V.O.

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CLAIMANTS AND UNEMPLOYED WORKERS UNIONS

Introduction and Summary

The purpose of this paper is to assess the significance of Claimants and Unemployed Workers Unions (CUs) and the extent of subversive involvement in them. CUs are composed of people who are claiming or have claimed supplementary benefit from the Department of Health and Social Security (D.H.S.S.) and who seek to maximise such benefits. There are some 100 CUs about half of which are part of a loose federation, the National Federation of Claimants Unions (N.F.C.U.). The most regularly active CUs are based in, and draw their strength from the 'Alternative Society', composed of those who have rejected the standards of established society. Consequently although some CUs and individuals associated with them have a real concern for the unemployed and claimants for supplementary benefit, the most active are less concerned with the real needs of claimants than with the political mobilisation of those they regard as the deprived. These CUs are particularly subject to the influence of Anarchists who seek to expose the alleged inadequacies of the Welfare State and to bring about more or less violent confrontations with it and its servants, with priority given to the intimidation of D.H.S.S. staff.

2. The example set by the attempts to mobilise the "deprived" has also stimulated the formation of temporary Strike Claimants Unions during major industrial disputes. On occasion these have succeeded in attracting considerable numerical support which has been used to pressurise (and intimidate) D.H.S.S. staff. Pressure of this sort is now becoming part of the regular armoury of industrial militants.

3. Although individual Communists are active in a few CUs and the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.) publicises their activities, the C.P.G.B. is wary if not hostile to the movement as a whole. The principal Trotskyist organisation, the Socialist Labour League (S.L.L.), takes the same line.

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In contrast other Trotskyist groups - notably International Socialism (I.S.) and the International Marxist Group (I.M.G.) - were active in the CUs initially but, in other than strike situations, have now largely lost out to the Anarchists.

4. Although CUs may have contributed marginally to abuses of the welfare system their main danger lies in their disruption of the work of D.H.S.S. both directly and by their example to strikers. The intimidation of D.H.S.S. staff and the resultant staff problems for the Department should be containable by co-operation with the trade unions and the selective invocation of Police assistance. Problems posed by CUs on a wider scale are part of the general threat presented by the 'Alternative Society'.

## Brief History

5. CUs set out to organise individuals with a claim on the Welfare State and seek to maximise the assistance which the state can provide. Although the first CUs were started in 1968 by students in Birmingham

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The most active CUs were associated from the start with the institutions of the 'Alternative Society' including communes and the Underground Press. Leading members were drawn from the ranks of revolutionary students and others inspired by the writings of MARCUSE who saw the CUs as a way of sustaining their life-style through access to the state's "money machine", as a means of reaching the deprived and as a vehicle for giving expression to their alienation from the "establishment". During 1971 the movement grew from 20 to 100 unions partly under the stimulation of the campaign against unemployment which reached its peak towards the end of that year. Most CUs are small and the period of expansion

seems to be over. Major strikes have resulted in temporary increases in the membership of CUs and the creation of temporary Strike Claimants Unions.

Aims

6. The objectives of CUs affiliated to the N.F.C.U. are:-
  - a: to demand the right to adequate income without a means test;
  - b: to create a free Welfare State for all with its services controlled by the people who use it;
  - c: to demand the right to full information and no secrets (about discretionary guidance to D.H.S.S. officers); and
  - d: to permit no distinction between the so-called deserving and undeserving;

Individual CUs have campaigned on a variety of different issues as shown in Appendix I. Nationally most attention has been given to the campaign for the abolition of the cohabitation rule. During strikes attention is concentrated on payments to unmarried strikers.

Organisation

7. The National Federation of Claimants Unions (N.F.C.U.) was formed in March 1970 to "communicate and co-ordinate on a minimum policy basis". To be eligible for affiliation CUs must consist of and be run by claimants and ex-claimants, but some use non-claimants as representatives in dealing with D.H.S.S. Each CU is autonomous and not all are affiliated. In August 1972 there were over 40 affiliated CUs. Conferences are held regularly in different cities. There is no headquarters but the Claimants Publications Library in Birmingham attempts to maintain a central record of CUs. A Devon and Cornwall CU has accepted responsibility for the preparation of Federation publications. In practice successful publications by individual CUs are given national distribution within the Federation. Central co-ordination is exiguous and the Anarchist influence results in individual CUs remaining almost

wholly autonomous. N.F.C.U. circulated publications do however result in a common policy on some issues.

8. CUs are unevenly distributed throughout the country, not necessarily being concentrated in major industrial areas. Appendix II shows the areas in which CUs have been active. The total number fluctuates and is of the order of 100 with London, Birmingham and Liverpool having each more than 10. The London and Birmingham CUs tend to dominate the N.F.C.U. Activity is sporadic and only about half the CUs are regularly active. Factors determining their location include the local level of unemployment, the incidence of mass redundancy, the proximity of universities with Anarchist or Trotskyist groups and in some cases, as in Devon and Cornwall, the absence of a strong trade union tradition. Strike Claimants Unions do not normally survive the ending of the strike which led to their creation. CUs normally remain small as their beneficiaries show little interest in the political diet offered, although they may have some continued prospect of growth in areas such as Camden, where the 'Alternative Society' is already well entrenched.

#### Methods

9. Just as membership of CUs is meant to be confined to those claiming or in receipt of benefit, so those seeking the assistance of a CU are expected to join. They pay a small subscription and are obliged to attend political meetings. In practice most do not.

10. Most active CUs are ready to intimidate the staff at local D.H.S.S. offices. They advise claimants never to go alone and support them if necessary by CU representation and by organising demonstrations and sit-ins at D.H.S.S. offices. D.H.S.S. has records of 153 incidents involving 52 local offices. Of these 36 were demonstrations or sit-ins at 23 of which Police had to be called. They encourage claimants to make frequent and sometimes unjustified appeals, seek to draw attention to their activities by stunts such as the dumping

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of children on D.H.S.S. counters and sometimes use harassing telephone calls to senior officials. In 1971 the North Staffs Claimants Union planned to abstract confidential files from local D.H.S.S. offices in accordance with N.F.C.U. policy. In a few cases junior D.H.S.S. staff have become sympathetically involved in CU affairs. Demonstrations and stunts on behalf of the normal run of claimants tend to be on a small scale and to be containable, but organised pressure on D.H.S.S. offices in strike situations, whether or not directly organised by established CUs or ad hoc Strike Claimants Unions, can be on a larger scale. During the building strike in Scotland for example the numbers involved ran into thousands. The work of D.H.S.S. was seriously hindered and there were direct repercussions on the Department's own industrial relations.

11. CU activists are interested in a wide range of political protest movements outside their claimants work, and some CUs have participated in demonstrations about the Common Market and unemployment. They tend to be active in the interests of those they consider deprived including the unemployed, coloured workers, students, prisoners, the sick and the homeless. Although it is often difficult to distinguish between the activities of individuals known to be active both in a subversive organisation and in a CU and those of CUs as such, there appears to be a growing tendency for CUs to take an attitude on the political issues of the day and to present themselves as the politically active voice of the 'Alternative Society'.

12. Individual CUs have produced various publications but not on a regular basis. The most commonly circulated publications are the "Unsupported Mothers Handbook" and the "Strikers Handbook". As the extracts in Appendix III show the publications are motivated more by hostility to the D.H.S.S. (invariably described as the "S.S.") than by a genuine desire to meet the individual requirements of claimants.

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## Subversive Influences

13. Although the Communist "Morning Star" is prepared to give publicity to the activities of CUs the C.P.G.B., apart from a few individuals, has taken little interest in them. On the Trotskyist side the S.L.L. is hostile whereas the I.S. and I.M.G., while competing with each other, try to keep a foot in the CU door and have had some temporary success in organising CUs in strike situations. In the movement as a whole both are handicapped by their reluctance to divert scarce organisational resources into the CUs and by their tendency to regard them primarily as a pool of potential recruits for the I.S. and I.M.G.'s own political groups. The result is that, as the most regularly active CUs are now based on the 'Alternative Society', the predominant subversive influence is Anarchist. In London there are links with individuals who have come to notice in connection with the Angry Brigade's 'Stoke Newington Eight' (those currently on trial for offences in connection with bombing) and their supporters. Anarchists use CUs to milk the Welfare State, to expose its alleged inadequacies and to provoke confrontations, preferably violent, between the state and the individual.

## Attitude of the Trade Union Movement

14. The CUs receive little or no support from trade unions most of whom regard themselves as more experienced than CUs in advising their members on their rights and full time officials are quick to resent the interference of outsiders, many of whom are students. This trade union attitude was apparent during the recent dock strike in London and in Sheffield during the mining strike. In less organised industries such as building, there has been greater readiness by unofficial or semi-official strike organisations to make use of CU services. In London a building workers social security co-ordinating committee was established in co-operation with a Strike Claimants Union. In Wales however a local building trade union leader repudiated CU assistance. The involvement of an I.M.G. influenced CU in the recent Jaguar strike at British Leyland back-fired and led to disavowal by the strikers of statements made on their behalf by the CU.

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Nevertheless in major strikes the example and activities of CUs have led in some cases to a more aggressive attitude by strikers towards the D.H.S.S. CU-type tactics of exerting pressure on D.H.S.S. through sheer force of numbers and, on occasions, violence are now part of the normal armoury of the militant trade unionist. He will be encouraged to make use of this weapon by the Anarchist influenced CUs and by Trotskyist groups either directly or through Strike Claimants Unions.

### Conclusion

15. CUs as such are as yet of minor importance and are a further reflection of the activities of the 'Alternative Society' which finds its expression in the Underground Press, the establishment of communes, sit-ins and occupations on behalf of tenants and the unhoused. Close co-operation between D.H.S.S. staff and the Police should be able to keep the pressures exerted by CUs on D.H.S.S. within manageable limits.

16. The increasingly heavy pressure being exerted on D.H.S.S. in strike situations owes more to the example than to the direct activities of CUs. The pressures can be relieved in co-operation with trade union leaders and by prompt and effective Police action where actual violence is employed.

17. The long term threat to society presented by CUs is part of the general threat presented by the 'Alternative Society' and its institutions.

3 November, 1972.

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