

hec 5
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covering



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As a part of a wide-ranging assessment of inner-city violence being prepared here for consideration by Permanent Secretaries, I have been asked to prepare a short passage on the role in recent riots of agitators or extremists. I attach a draft, culled, unashamedly, from the papers you have sent me. It needs to be very short, and not highly classified, if at all. Are you content with the attached? I need to hand it in tomorrow.

G. H. PHILLIPS

HO Est 85 (K)

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THE INFLUENCE OF EXTREMISTS

In the comments of some chief officers of police, and in press reports on the rioting at Toxteth, Moss Side and Wood Green, there have been references to outsiders, speedy mobilisation and a degree of tactical direction. Police investigations into the riots, including an analysis of arrests and of the sightings of apparent organisers, may throw more light on these references. But, as yet, we have no evidence of the instigation or coordination of the riots by extremists or subversive elements outside the communities themselves.

2. The Southall disturbance was different. It was precipitated by the provocative behaviour of coachloads of skinheads who travelled to the area from the East End to listen to a skinhead band. [REDACTED]

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What happened in Southall was a more serious version of a mini-riot between skinheads and West Indians in March 1981 at a similar concert in Notting Hill. The risks of such occurrences remains. Arrangements are in hand so as better to spot potential flashpoints, and the wider issues of right-wing extremist provocation form a part of the study into racial attacks.

3. However, once the riots in Southall, and elsewhere, had occurred, some extreme left-wing groups reacted to try to take political advantage of the situation. Some groups organised public meetings, leafletting and the sale of their magazines. But the degree of interest and urgency in trying to exploit the riots varied widely among the different groups, who were clearly taken by surprise at what had happened. Extreme left groups, despite their level of activity, do not seem to have been successful in making any serious inroads into the black communities affected by the rioting. However, the rhetoric of the anti-police, and anti-establishment, propaganda they pump out to some extent colours, as well as echoes, the attitude being taken by many black leaders in Toxteth and Moss Side. The result can be an impression that white left-wing subversive influences are at work in the black communities when in fact the interests of the two are divergent.

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