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SIR JOHN HUNT

102311

SUBVERSION (HOME) COMMITTEE

MEETING ON MONDAY, 31 JANUARY, AT
3.30 P.M. IN YOUR OFFICE

BACKGROUND

/ 1. I attach, at Annex A, background notes on the events in 1976 which led to the revival, in reconstituted form, of the Group on Subversion in Public Life (SPL) and the Subversion (Home) Committee (SH). Full terms of reference, membership and distribution of papers of the IAG and SPL are at Flag C and D; and some background on SH and other counter-subversion groups is at Annex B.

SH(76)1 (Report by SPL)

2. Until November 1976, SPL had not actually met for at least two years. In view of this, and the changes in its membership and terms of reference, the Group carried out a comprehensive review of the activities within the scope of their terms of reference from two main points of view:-

- (a) The threat - as set out in a detailed paper (SPL(76)1, of which you received a copy) and as amplified by Departmental comments at the meeting.
- (b) Reporting on the threat - the extent and direction of the Security Service effort, including any gaps in this.

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3. The outcome of their meeting has been satisfactorily reflected in the survey at paragraphs 2-10 of the paper; the Annex it covers is an abridged version of the SPL paper, up-dated and incorporating points made in discussion on it.

4. The following points arise from the report:-

- (a) Do SH agree that SPL have covered all the ground and that the thrust and balance of the Security Service's collection effort, subject to (b) below, is right? [cf recommendation (a)]
- (b) The report identifies one significant gap - in relation to information on the Communist and Trotskyist activities within the Labour Movement. Do SH support recommendation (b)?
- (c) The report indicates the wide field of subversive activity and the interest of Departments generally in being alerted to this and, where possible, associated with action which can be taken to counter it. The report also shows that useful links are already being established between certain Departments and the Security Service. SH may well feel therefore that recommendation
(c)

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recommendation (c) would be useful.

- (d) As paragraph 12 shows, SPL only briefly discussed counter-action. Should the arrangements for this be reviewed (recommendation (d))? If so, does SH want SPL to look more deeply into this, and if so, what guidelines should be set for them?

HANDLING

5. You may agree that discussion at SH could fall conveniently into two parts: the report and matters arising directly from it; and counter-action.
6. The report is largely self-explanatory, but you may wish to ask Mr. Armstrong, as Chairman SPL, briefly to introduce it. Are there any fresh developments which he (or DGSS) would wish to bring to SH's attention? Present plans are to produce another general report for consideration by SPL in about four months' time. Is this about right? Does SH agree that this and similar reports should go to all Permanent Secretaries? Are there any reports of a more specific kind which SH would wish SPL to commission? Have SPL any in mind?
7. You may then wish DGSS to initiate discussion on recommendation (b). What precisely has DGSS in mind? What about recent developments - e.g., the Labour Party's NEC decision? How would reporting be done? Could IAG be used,

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or would a separate Group need to be formed? To whom should reports go? What effect would any additional work of this kind have on the Security Service's balance of effort both generally and on subversion in particular? Are there financial and manpower considerations?

8. If an approach to Ministers is supported, how should this be carried out? Would SH(76)1 serve as a basis or what further material is required?

COUNTER-ACTION

9. The previous history, so far as I can piece it together and as also referred to in Annex B of this brief,

(a) confirms that counter-action has always been ultimately under the control and co-ordination of a Cabinet Office Committee;

(b) suggests that counter-subversion has most actively been concerned with subversion in industry.

10. You may find it helpful to know that in discussion on this subject, members of SPL made the following points:-

(a) consistent with the current threat, targets for counter-action, if contemplated, should not be confined to industry;

(b) while it was true that IRD expertise still remains, and there could be a role for them to play, future counter-action should look wider than the use of the media. It was suggested, for example, that

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there was action which the Civil Service itself might take - an illustration of this was the use of posting to disperse concentrations of left-wing employees in Departmental Staff Sides;

- (c) some counter-action might only be effective if it was taken quickly; on the other hand, there were other kinds of action which would be all the more effective if they reflected a mature and co-ordinated response to a given threat.

11. The above suggests that there may be two levels on which a review of counter-action should concentrate: longer-term and quick response. SH would appear to be the right forum for the first, and for overseeing the second; the difficulty arises over quick response, in which at the SPL meeting, (I think not altogether fair) comparisons were drawn between what I now realize to be the activities of the Dean Group and the work of the Heron Sub-Group.

12. The questions therefore seem to be:-

- (a) Does SH agree that a more positive and systematic approach to counter-subversion is called for?
- (b) If so, how and by whom should proposals to this end be prepared?
- (c) Do they in any case agree that it is for SH to continue to control and supervise at official level, all aspects of counter-subversion but are they prepared to delegate authority in cases where quick response might be justified?

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- (d) If delegation was considered acceptable, to whom should SH's authority be delegated?
- (e) How far, if at all, could any counter-action be taken without reference to Ministers?

Relationship between the work of SH and JIC(76)16.

13. Finally, you asked to be reminded that you proposed that JIC(76)16 (behind) should not be submitted to Ministers (the Prime Minister only in the first place was proposed) until it could go forward with a report from SH. This approach was agreed by Sir Michael Palliser, Sir Arthur Peterson and Sir Frank Cooper, those principally concerned with JIC(76)16; DGSS and Mr. Armstrong have seen the paper but Sir Douglas Allen and Mr. Barnes will not have done so.

D. A. Nicholls

[D. A. NICHOLLS]

28 January, 1977.

Attachments:

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ANNEX A

You asked to be reminded of the background to the revival of SH and SPL.

2. In January 1976 you were invited to a discussion at the Home Office about subversion. The discussion was abortive, not least of all because there were no papers for consideration by the meeting, but it indicated a Home Office "bid for a good deal of freedom" in the field of counter-subversion (cf. Flag 'A' in S & P 1367 behind).

3. When the relevant papers were ready, they were the subject of a further meeting (Flag G in S & P 1367), which concentrated on the reconstitution of SPL. In the ensuing correspondence, you took up the point about the body to which SPL should report and the outcome was your letter of 6 July 1976 (Flag H in S & P 1367).

4. At the first meeting of the reconstituted SPL, the Chairman drew their attention to the revival and Terms of Reference of SH.

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ANNEX B

1. Activities concerned with countering subversion, including work by IRD in this field, have always been controlled and co-ordinated by a Cabinet Committee. This was the Official Committee on Communism (Home) until January 1969; it then became the Official Committee on Subversion at Home (SH) under the Chairmanship of the Secretary of the Cabinet, with the following Terms of Reference:-

"To focus intelligence about communist and other subversive activities in the United Kingdom, to advise Ministers on appropriate measures (other than those in relation to the public service, which are within the purview of the Official Committee on Security) to counter these activities, and to co-ordinate such counter-measures."

It appears not to have met (formally at least) after 1970 and you approved its dissolution in 1974.

2. However, in July 1972 the Dean Group was set up. You will wish to be reminded, at page 1 of Flag X, of the background to its establishment. You will see, on page 2 of Flag X, that ~~its~~ ^{in turn it} terms considered the establishment of a sub group on Industry co-ordinated by (the then) Mr. Heron; this was set up at the Dean Group's second meeting (Flag Y) and I understand met almost weekly until February 1974. You will also see the references to the Subversion Home Committee at (j) of page 2 and at 3 overleaf on page 3; there appears [to have been

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to have been no reporting back on these points to the Dean Group, but in August 1972, under Prime Ministerial direction, an inter-Departmental Group under Mr. Waddell (SPL) was set up "to improve the co-ordination of intelligence on subversion in public life and to provide regular and comprehensive reviews on this subject for Ministers." The relationship between the Heron Group, Dean Group and SPL was referred to at Flag Z.

3. The Dean Group last met on 17 December 1973.

4. From reading the Dean Group and SH papers it appears that:-

- (a) ^{*the Dean Group*} ~~it~~ supervised counter-action generally on behalf of Ministers;
- (b) it did not meet formally to do so in 1973; but
- (c) the Heron Group were also carrying out, from July 1972 till February 1974, its own counter-action ad hoc, based on the information it collected (cf. Minute 1 at Flag Z);
- (d) SH did not play a big role during this period though its interest was recognized;
- (e) despite the broadly drawn Terms of Reference, counter-action by the Group and sub-group was primarily in relation to subversion in industry.

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