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SPL(76) 1st Meeting

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CABINET

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL GROUP ON SUBVERSION  
IN PUBLIC LIFE

MINUTES of a Meeting held in  
Room 215, Cabinet Office on  
WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER 1976 at 10.30 am

PRESENT

Mr R T Armstrong  
Home Office (In the Chair)

Mr J M Moore  
Civil Service Department

Mr R W Whitney  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

[Redacted]  
Department of Education and  
Science

[Redacted]  
Department of Employment

[Redacted]  
Scottish Office

Deputy Assistant Commissioner  
V S Gilbert  
New Scotland Yard

Sir Michael Hanley  
Security Service

[Redacted]  
Security Service

Sir Clive Rose  
Cabinet Office

Mr J S Elliott  
Cabinet Office

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

[Redacted]  
Security Service

[Redacted]  
Security Service

SECRETARIAT

Mr D A Nicholls  
Mr G L Angel

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THE THREAT OF SUBVERSION TO THE UNITED  
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1. RECONSTITUTION OF THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL GROUP ON SUBVERSION IN PUBLIC LIFE (SPL)

THE CHAIRMAN, welcoming members of the reconstituted Group, drew attention to its enlarged membership and the wider scope of its terms of reference: it was now charged with co-ordinating assessments as well as giving guidance on the collection of intelligence about subversive activities across the whole spectrum of national life. Under its terms of reference the SPL could propose new areas for investigation but it would be prudent to seek higher authority where these were of particular political sensitivity. The appropriate body would be the reconstituted Subversion Home (SH) Committee which would oversee the work of the SPL and advise Ministers, as necessary, on appropriate measures for counter subversion in the UK.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Chairman's introductory remarks.

2. THE THREAT OF SUBVERSION TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Group had before it SPL(76) 2, a report by the Security Service on the above subject.

THE CHAIRMAN, summing up a general discussion, said that the report provided a useful summary which, while covering the whole range of subversive groups and their activities, emphasized the continuing and significant threat posed by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). It would be appropriate for a paper on these lines to be produced regularly and he invited the Security Service to prepare a further report for consideration by the Group in six months' time. In doing so, it would be helpful if account could be taken of their discussion, which had revealed a number of issues that a report of this kind might cover, including the financing of subversion and the links between subversive organisations in this country and their counterparts overseas. Meanwhile, the paper before the Group did not call for amendment or further circulation, but should be used as a background against which to review developments and consider what further action was required.

[REDACTED]

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Chairman's summing up.

The Group then turned to individual sections of the report. THE CHAIRMAN summed up a discussion of these, as follows:-

Subversion in the Labour Movement (paragraphs 1-23, as amended). It was agreed that there were grounds for concern at the growth of subversive influences in the Labour Movement. The group would wish to draw this to the attention of the SH Committee.

The Public Service (paragraphs 24-28). It was agreed that the growth of subversive activity contributed to increased disruption and that this gave rise to concern. The Civil Service Department were examining the problem in consultation with Departments and with the Security Service.

Education (paragraphs 29-33). While the field of education did not, in general, give rise to the same degree of concern as had been expressed about the Public Service, the Group would wish to endorse the increased effort being made to establish the extent of the subversive influences at work.

The Media (paragraphs 34-36). The Group would wish to note that while it was difficult to make any overall assessment of the impact of subversion in this area, the scale of the threat was probably not substantial. They would agree that it was right to maintain a careful watch over developments.

Racial Issues and the Extreme Right (paragraphs 37-40). These two subjects were closely related. Recent developments in this area gave cause for concern. The attempts of subversive groups to exploit the situation called for further investigation; the Security Service, the Metropolitan and other Police Forces were already co-operating in this.

Political Terrorism (paragraphs 41-48, as amended). The Group would note that this subject (which excluded Irish terrorism on which there was

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separate reporting) was a matter of continuing concern and one to which significant resources were already devoted.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Chairman's summing up.

3. The Group then considered the extent to which it should be concerned with specific measures to counter subversion. It was not for the SPL to initiate specific measures; the SH Committee should be invited to consider whether there was scope for more activity in this field.

THE CHAIRMAN, summing up this part of the discussion, said it was clear that, while the report they had been examining need not be circulated to SH, there would be advantage in reporting to SH the outcome of their discussions and in seeking their advice on the areas of particular difficulty which had been identified. He would arrange for the preparation of a draft report, which, it might be possible to clear out of Committee.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Chairman's summing up.

Cabinet Office

1 December 1976