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The affidavit of David Todd

Signed before G. STAPLEY, a Commissioner for Oaths,
at the offices of STAPLEY & Co.,
201/3 High Street, East Ham,
London, E.6, on August 16, 1962.

The Affidavit of David Todd

In April I was light-heartedly threatened by Bill Howe, a supporter of the magazine "Keep Left". The threat was not seriously intended and was more or less a joke. In conversation I told members of the Redditch Constituency party about it. They must have treated the matter more seriously than I, at any rate, think it merited, as before the Conference of Young Socialists at Easter 1962, I was asked to make a statement about Keep Left and later told by the Redditch Agent, Mr. Pinfold, to contact Mr. Chamberlain or Mr. Underhill at Transport House on Good Friday of this year.

On Good Friday Transport House was closed when I arrived but after delay I got through by telephone to Joan Underhill (not then known to me). When I told her who I was she seemed to know about me and thought it important I should go round at once. I did so.

At Transport House Joan Underhill told me "they" had been working something up against Keep Left on the previous Thursday. It had, she said, been decided by Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Underhill to get me along, and whilst I was there I heard a telephone message that I was on the way. There was obviously some trouble taken to get me there.

Keith Biddle arrived and showed me a lot of Socialist Labour League material, which he said would make sparks fly.

Then Keith Biddle and I joined Mr. Underhill and Mr. Chamberlain and were asked to say something about the activities of Keep Left. Keith Biddle said I had threatened him. (So I had, but not seriously.) He had laughed it off at the time and not been at all frightened. I mentioned Bill Howe's "threat" to me. Mr. Underhill and Mr. Chamberlain seemed to attach importance—undue importance—to this, but were not interested in Keith Biddle's story about my threats to him except to say later, that that must not be allowed to get to the Press.

Keith Biddle and I were questioned to implicate Liz Thompson, J. Shaw and Ginsberg with the Socialist Labour League. They wanted to know what it was that those responsible for Keep Left had to do with it. They were not satisfied when I said Roger Protz and G. Kennedy were Keep Left, and seemed to want me to say they were connected with the Socialist Labour League, as Keith Biddle had indicated. Mr. Brinham and (I think) Mr. Johnson from Manchester also took a hand in the questioning.

The questioners were doubtful whether the threats were seriously intended or just idle, and wanted us to swear about it. I would not, Keith Biddle said he certainly took the threats seriously and said he was going to the Police by way of demonstrating the fact. Mr. Brinham seemed very pleased at that, and by telephone asked someone—the police, I imagined—to keep an eye open for violence, and keep a watch on us. (Later, at the conference, I noticed a man who was disinterested in the proceedings keeping close to us wherever we went.) Mr. Brinham said he would speak again to whoever it was that was to guard us when it had been worked out where we were to stay—somewhere that Howe would not know about.

We were made much of. Mr. Jones arranged our accommodation and Mr. Underhill said our expenses would be paid; we were to let him know if we needed money over the weekend. Mr. Jones took us away by car, saying we had done well, Keep Left would be proscribed, and people brought to their senses. He took us to a party. There, Mr. Chamberlain was discussing with Page, Collier, Biddle, Charlton, Donovan, Terry, Ray and Spencer (all Young Socialists from the Birmingham area) how to carry out what they had apparently already planned. If each tried to speak about Keep Left at the conference it was agreed, one would be sure to get a hearing. The idea was to press about the

Socialist Labour League but to go gently on the question of violence. Mr. Chamberlain also said that now they had managed to get me to make a statement, they had a strong case against Keep Left. He also said he was not supposed to be biased and couldn't himself do anything, but it would all go through nicely if the 8 mentioned played their part.

In fact, at the Young Socialists Conference, Alex Collier made the complaint about violence when Keep Left was reached on the report but when "Next Business" had been carried, a lot of Birmingham delegates and others went out. I went too. There was Biddle, Cowling, Warburton, Julia Gaitskell and others. There was anxiety about this adverse decision. Cowling said he knew influential people. A party at K.3 Albany was mentioned, and Mr. Chamberlain said something would be done to get round the decision.

At the party at the Albany that night I was introduced as one of the people who had been to Transport House. Everyone seemed to know about this. Mr. George Brown addressed the party about what the Right Wing had to do to kick out the Fascist Left Wingers, and said there was a lad there who wanted to put forward an emergency resolution in the morning: we would all support him. People began drafting resolutions. Paper headed with the address at the Albany where we were, was handed around for the purpose. Two resolutions and who should move them were ultimately agreed upon. There was consideration of what support could be relied upon. It was generally reckoned 55 Branches would be in favour. There was much drinking.

Next morning Mr. Chamberlain said that he and Mr. Underhill had worked out a resolution which the conference would accept, and the other resolutions should not be put forward as they did not stand as good a chance. He said Redditch should propose it. I did not want this changing about, and there was further discussion, Mr. Chamberlain arguing that the resolution favoured by Mr. Underhill was the one best used. It gained the approval of Standing Orders Committee, which, according to what Mr. Chamberlain said when he drove me home after the conference, had been lobbied by Mr. Brinham, who was collaborating with Mr. Austin of the Committee.

As is now known, when Biddle moved the emergency resolution, he concentrated upon threats of violence. His only basis for this was the threats from me, which I had not meant seriously, and which he knew not to be meant seriously. He and I had been together over much of that and the previous day. The question of violence was a farce, but it succeeded in swaying the conference.

I did not at the time really realise how it was being arranged for the Young Socialists Conference to be misled, and only later realised the significance of the offers made to Biddle and myself to "see we lost no money" over this matter, and how the creation of a sense of importance could lead to a distortion of the truth.

I now realise that because of the great exaggeration, to say the least, of the importance of what happened, a completely misleading picture, for which I bear a responsibility, was put before conference, and injustice done to Keep Left. For that reason I have urged that my statement, which was obtained not for the sake of truth but only to be used against "Keep Left", and which I now regret and seek to withdraw, should be disregarded.

I would also like to point out that I was present at the private session of the Young Socialist Conference when the resolution regarding Keep Left was discussed although I gather that I had no right to be there. I was, in fact, given delegate's credentials.

D. TODD, 19-7-1962.