

08 January 2021

Dr. Paul Bishop  
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Via Email  
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Dear Paul,

**RE: The Undercover Policing Inquiry T1P1 Hearing**

I am writing this letter well in advance of the April 2021 hearings, in respect of two matters which arose during the November 2020 hearing. These are the allegation that the MPS has obstructed the Inquiry, and the MPS' ongoing assistance to the Inquiry.

*The allegation that the MPS has obstructed the Inquiry*

As you will be aware, in its written and oral opening statements, the MPS made publicly clear that it welcomed the Inquiry and has dedicated substantial time, effort and resources to it. It also emphasised that:

*From the outset the MPS has been committed, from the Commissioner down, to openness and transparency with the Inquiry. It will continue to provide whatever documentation or information it can, whenever requested by the Inquiry. It will continue to volunteer relevant material it discovers.*

It was apparent from the written opening statements of some of the non-state core participants that they did not accept these assurances by the MPS. The statement of Tariq Ali and others, for example, alleged that:

*The police have used every weapon in their arsenal and spared no expense to obfuscate, obstruct, undermine and delay an open, transparent and fearless public inquiry into undercover policing.*

The MPS sought to counter these views directly in its oral opening statement. Counsel for the MPS said (at D2/P4/L22-P5/L4):

*Sir, having read the submissions of some of the non-State core participants, I wish to be absolutely clear: the MPS has not and will not obstruct or otherwise undermine your public inquiry into undercover policing. The MPS has not and will not improperly delay*

*the work of the Inquiry. On the contrary, the MPS has a strong interest in helping the Inquiry to complete its valuable work as effectively and swiftly as possible.*

However, these further assurances have not been universally accepted. The statement made by Rajiv Menon QC on behalf of Tariq Ali and others, cited above, was repeated “*Notwithstanding that was said on behalf of the [MPS] in opening...*” (D3/P104L6-14). These and similar views have since been widely publicised in mainstream media.

The continuing misconception that the Inquiry is and has been obstructed by the MPS may be understandable given the contentious nature of the issues under investigation, but it is incorrect and it is damaging.

You know that the Inquiry has taken detailed assurance statements, has been granted access to the MPS records and directs its own investigations of them. The Inquiry reviews the material and identifies relevant documents to the MPS which it wishes to publish. Once identified, it takes time to declassify and ensure formerly secret documents can be published as openly as possible. There are several reasons for this. The handling conditions mean transfer of materials cannot be immediate; skill and experience are required to carry out the work; the volume of the material is extremely large; and the MPS is not the only contributor.

The Inquiry knows that the MPS is fully engaged with the disclosure process and has committed extensive resources to meet Inquiry deadlines which have sometimes been very demanding. However, I note without criticism that some of the Inquiry’s own projections (for example those in the Strategic Review) about the time it would take to obtain, digest and analyse material have proved over-optimistic, for reasons unrelated to the MPS. The process has also been slowed by complexities in obtaining documents held by the Security Service; and by limits on that agency’s capacity to review those documents for publication. More recently, the pandemic has understandably affected the rate of work.

The misconception about the nature of the MPS’s participation in the Inquiry is highly damaging for the Inquiry and its work as it foments distrust and cynicism, and erodes public confidence in the Inquiry’s ability to reach independent, fair and truthful conclusions. The misconception is also damaging for the MPS, for which it is important to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and to learn from them, not evade them. Assuring the public and the core participants that the MPS is working openly and in good faith with the Inquiry is an essential component of that process.

As it stands, the Inquiry has not corrected the position (as it could for example have done in Counsel to the Inquiry’s recent disclosure note regarding Tranche 1). I am therefore writing on behalf of the Commissioner to request that the Chairman clarify, for the benefit of the core participants and the public, that there is no basis for the allegation that the Inquiry’s work has been or is being obstructed by the MPS.

#### *The MPS’s ongoing assistance to the Inquiry*

The MPS will continue to afford the Inquiry access to all of the documentation in its possession that bears upon the Inquiry’s investigations. It will also continue to assist the Inquiry in the process of preparing relevant documentation for publication and onward disclosure to the core participants.

Having heard the opening statements, the MPS is mindful that some of the non-state core participants are frustrated by the time it is taking to receive documentation that is specifically relevant to them.

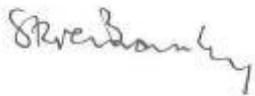
The MPS appreciates the difficult task that the Inquiry has in investigating multiple undercover deployments over a more than 50-year period; and it does not seek to influence the nature or timing of those investigations, which are squarely matters for the Inquiry to determine.

However, if, having considered the views of the non-state core participants, the Inquiry were to reprioritise its investigations and bring forward particular matters in advance of the existing chronological sequence, then the MPS wishes to make clear that it will of course facilitate that change of priorities. That is, the MPS will respond to the Inquiry's work requests in the order required and process for publication whatever documentation the Inquiry identifies as relevant, according to the Inquiry's priorities.

Any reprioritisation may have an effect on the MPS's ability to complete other Inquiry work, as the resources available to the MPS, including experienced personnel, are finite and cannot be further increased. However, within those committed resources, which are substantial, if the Inquiry determines that particular work should take precedence, then the MPS will of course do everything it can to facilitate that decision.

Given the importance of the issues addressed in this letter, I ask that the Inquiry circulate it to all of the core participants.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "S. Bramley".

S. BRAMLEY