

Special Branches

Following the talk we had with Sir Michael Hanley on 13th May we have now to consider -

- (a) what action is needed as a result of the representations made to you by Members; and
- (b) what can be said to the Members, and how and when it should be said.

As regards (a), the talk itself concentrated on the allegations about infiltration of trade unions and on what is done with information obtained by Special Branches in the industrial field. I think the broad conclusions were:

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- (i) We ought not to be too sweeping in anything said about infiltration, because Special Branches are interested in threats to public order, which are not in themselves the business of the Security Service, as well as with subversive activity, which is. But there is certainly no infiltration of trade unions so far as the Security Service is concerned; and, although we have not gone around checking with every chief officer, it would be very surprising if there was any infiltration for ordinary police reasons.
 - (ii) We ought, however, to recognise that Special Branch officers engaged in finding out either about subversion or about threats to public order may very well be thought to be finding out about trade unions. Since the various subversive bodies make it an object of policy to infiltrate the unions - not for information but for influence - and the police may try to

E.R.

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infiltrate the subversive bodies, denials about their interest in the unions may be disbelieved (as I gather they were by Mr. Atkinson).

(iii) In view of the sensitivity of the subject, it would be as well to remind Special Branch officers about the particular need for care and discretion in the industrial field.

The Members expressed fears that information obtained by Special Branch officers about trade unionists might be given either to other trade unionists or to employers. This is difficult ground. We know ourselves that some employers plead to be given warning if known agitators seek or obtain employment with them. The official response has always been refusal, sometimes with a hint that there are unofficial bodies which might help. But when a Special Branch officer is himself seeking help from an employer, or from a union official, it is asking a good deal to expect him to insist invariably that he is engaged in a one-way traffic. Only good and experienced officers can maintain this position and the most that we can do is rub the point home whenever there is a chance.

You agreed that Sir Michael Hanley should find a way of conveying these reminders, at any rate to provincial forces. (The Metropolitan Special Branch do not run agents in the industrial field for the Security Service.) The circular attached, which meets some points I raised when it was in draft, has now been issued.

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A copy of the circular has been sent to the Commissioner, and Mr. Gilbert will see to it that the men in his charge receive the same guidance, so far as it is relevant.

E.R.

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In your meeting with them, the Members made a point about the use of cameras, and shortly afterwards there was a report in the press about a Special Branch officer in Kent who had been seen with a camera at a demonstration on nurses' pay. Clearly there is no reason why the police (whether Special Branch or CID or uniformed) should not use photography where this would be a help in checking crime or disorder, provided that needless provocation is not given and they consider each time whether the value of the photograph is likely to outweigh the risk of adverse comment. To the extent that cameras are used by Special Branches, word with Mr. Gilbert will ensure that the need for discretion is impressed on the users. It is not so easy to convey the same message to other possible police users and I think the best course will be to raise the matter in discussion at the next Central Conference; it was last discussed at a Conference in 1970.

As regards (b), what can be said to the Members is much affected by the Questions recently put down by some (but not all) of them. It seems to me that there is now no need to consider the terms in which you might have written to Mr. Prescott; the answers to Questions will cover all the ground. The Questions are for answer on 20th June, when you are First Order, and we shall be considering them on the basis that you will probably want to take them in a group or groups. We shall put a plan before you in the next few days.

*Not see letter
125 from Mr.
today! He
post.
Prescott
a letter*

On a point of fact about the size of Special Branches: I was right in estimating the Metropolitan Special Branch as about 400, but the strength elsewhere in England and Wales (without specific inquiry) is only about 250, which is less than my guess.

E.R.

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To sum up: we should rely on Sir Michael Hanley's circular about infiltration and on separate guidance about use of cameras; and should use the Questions as the means of dealing with the points raised with you by the Members.

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3rd June, 1974.

Copies: Sir Arthur Peterson
Mr. A.S. Baker