



Box No. 500

To Chief Constables
England and Wales

Your reference

Our reference

Policy File

Date 29 May 1974

rec'd 31/5

Dear Chief Constable

SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES IN INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

1. The Security Service is most grateful for the assistance it receives from Special Branches in the investigation of subversive activities in trade unions, especially at times of industrial dispute. This assistance is provided in accordance with the Terms of Reference for a Special Branch issued on the authority of the Association of Chief Police Officers in June 1970 in England and Wales (and in July 1970 in Scotland).

2. Para 3 of the Terms of Reference, about the tasks of a Special Branch, refers specifically to industrial disputes in the following terms:-

"f. To investigate any subversive background to demonstrations and breaches of public order; and, in consultation with the Security Service, to certain industrial disputes."

This is amplified in the Annex to the Terms of Reference as follows:-

"f. So far as industrial disputes are concerned Special Branch investigations should go no further than is necessary to assist the Chief Officer in the discharge of his responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and to meet any Security Service request for intelligence on the role played by subversive elements, whether individuals or organisations, in the dispute."

.../ 3.



3. You will have noted that the subversive press, and in particular the "Morning Star", recently mounted a campaign calling for an end to "Special Branch spying on unions". This campaign followed a report in the "Sunday Times" on 14 April 1974 about Special Branch contacts with the management of Strachans Engineering in Hampshire.
4. A number of MPs have, as reported in the "Morning Star" on 30 April 1974 and in the "Guardian" on 1 May 1974, expressed their concern to the Home Secretary about the increasing involvement of Special Branches in trade union affairs. They intend to raise the matter further in the House of Commons and to demand an enquiry into the role of Special Branch.
5. The Home Secretary is aware of the Terms of Reference under which Special Branches pursue their investigations into subversive activities in the industrial field. He is also aware of the assistance which Special Branches give the Security Service in this area of enquiry. He is content with these arrangements; but he has asked the Security Service to exercise due care in its own investigations to avoid adverse publicity. Such investigations might be misrepresented as being aimed at the penetration of trade unions rather than the investigation of subversive groups which may be active in industry as in other fields of public life.
6. The Home Secretary has also asked that the Security Service should inform Chief Police Officers of his concern that their investigations to meet the requirements of the Security Service for information on subversive activities in industry should be handled carefully and cautiously so as to avoid publicity.
7. In this connection, it may be helpful to remind you of the distinction we draw between subversion and militancy in industrial disputes in the following definitions:-

"Subversion is defined as activities threatening the safety or well-being of the State and intended to undermine or overthrow Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means.

Industrial militancy is defined as readiness to use or threaten the use of strikes, sit-ins and other forms of aggressive action in the furtherance of industrial disputes and an unwillingness to seek or accept compromise solutions through negotiations, conciliation or arbitration.

.../ Militancy





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Militancy in pursuit of trade union disputes with employers is not subversive unless the motivation and purpose of the militants is primarily political and threatens the parliamentary democratic system. Opposition to industrial policies of the Government of the day is not in itself subversive."

8. It is standing Security Service policy not to pass to non-official agencies, commercial firms or employers' organisations any information deriving from their investigation into subversive activities in industry. It is equally important that Police Forces should not give to their contacts in trade unions, firms or employers' organisations information deriving from official sources about subversive organisations or individuals.

Yours sincerely

Micheal Hanley

Director General

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