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HOME AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE ENQUIRY INTO SPECIAL BRANCHES

Meeting held at 3.00 PM on 7 December 1984 at
Queen Anne's Gate

Present: Mr Harrington - Home Office (Chairman)
Mr Oxford - ACPO
Mr Imbert - ACPO
Mr Buck - ACPO
Mr Hewett - MPSB
[REDACTED] - Security Service
[REDACTED] - Security Service
[REDACTED] - NIO
[REDACTED] - Home Office
[REDACTED] - Home Office

The meeting addressed itself to the importance of consistent evidence being given to the Committee by chief officers and Ministers. It was clear that efforts would be made to drive wedges between accounts given by the various officials. The Chairman advised the meeting that chief officers had been invited to give evidence on 23 January and the Home Secretary on 30 January.

2. The meeting agreed that particular areas in which the Committee may attempt to probe deeper into the activities of Special Branches included the relationship between the Security Service and Special Branches; allegations of burglary by Special Branch officers; authorised and unauthorised telephone tapping; alleged lack of control by chief officers; individual causes celebres over the years; and the Special Branch guidelines.

3. In respect of the relationship between the Security Service and Special Branches it was agreed that it could be stated firmly that the Security Service had no powers to order police action, but that there was close co-operation between the organisations. Witnesses could usefully use the line expressed in Lord Denning's Report in 1963 (Cmnd 2152), paragraphs 273 and 274.

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4. It was agreed that authorised telephone tapping could be neither confirmed nor denied in any particular case, and that this policy would have to be strictly adhered to. In the area of authorised telephone tapping under warrant witnesses could stand on the very strict personal control exercised by the Home Secretary under the arrangements set out in the 1980 White Paper (Cmd 7873), and on the additional safeguard provided by the independent judicial monitor appointed in 1980. In respect of unauthorised telephone tapping, the emphasis would be on the strict internal code of discipline which applied to all police officers, and the control exercised over these officers by senior police officers. The Home Office agreed to keep in touch with those present about progress with the Interception of Communications Bill and give as much advance indication as possible of the timing and content of the associated White Paper.

5. It was agreed that there was no reason why chief officers should not vigorously deny allegations of burglary by Special Branch officers. It would be stressed that these were very serious allegations of criminal offences which ought not to be lightly made, but that any evidence about such activity brought to the attention of the police would be thoroughly investigated under procedures laid down in law.

6. It was likely that various causes celebres would be raised by the Committee. The ACPO representatives said that they would be reluctant to be drawn into commenting on individual cases in other force areas, though they might have to respond to questions about general issues arising out of those cases. The Security Service agreed to circulate an aide memoire to those present listing various cases which had received publicity over the years.

7. The considered view of those present was that the greatest advantage lay in publishing the new Special Branch guidelines without delay. The Home Office agreed to put the views of the meeting to the Home Secretary with a view to seeking his agreement to early publication. It was agreed that the Home Office would keep chief officers in touch with progress on the guidelines.

8. It was agreed that Mr [REDACTED] would continue to attend future hearings of the HASC and keep those present in touch with developments and particular points likely to be raised when they gave evidence. It was also agreed that the Home Office would circulate Mr [REDACTED]'s note of the hearing on 28 November when AMA representatives had given oral evidence together with copies of the organisation's written evidence to the Committee. In addition, the Home Office would provide a list of the Committee members, their constituencies and party affiliations.

Home Office
Queen Anne's Gate
14 December 1984

Circulation: those present
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