



[REDACTED] S/B
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31 March 1983

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New Year

SPECIAL BRANCHES

When a number of us met here on 18 March, we agreed that, rather than produce a formal note of the meeting, I would write to you to summarise the present position on the functions of Special Branches and public references to them. You thought that it might be useful for a copy of my letter to go to each chief constable and, to enable that to be done, I am sending a batch of copies to Brian Morrissey so that, if you wish, he could circulate them on your behalf to your colleagues.

For the record, I should mention that you were accompanied by Brian Hayes, Gilbert Kelland, Colin Hewett and Brian Morrissey, and I was accompanied by Joe Pilling and [REDACTED].

We re-affirmed that the terms of reference circulated under cover of your letter of 15 June 1970, on behalf of the ACPO CID Committee to all chief constables, still applied although it was agreed that you and we would discuss with the Security Service whether some revision of the terms of reference might now be appropriate to take account of developments in the last thirteen years. I shall be in touch with you separately about that.

Since 1970, the definition of subversion was expanded somewhat in a statement by Lord Harris of Greenwich in the House of Lords on 26 February 1975. That definition was endorsed by Mr Brittan on behalf of the present Government in a speech in the House of Commons on 7 November 1979. I attach copies of an extract from Lord Harris's speech, and the whole of Mr Brittan's speech.

In the case of public references to Special Branches, the then Home Secretary's (Mr Rees) speech of 24 May 1978 in the House of Commons included the following passage:

"I have no objection to giving the numbers in the Special Branch. Perhaps that has not been done before. The Metropolitan Police Special Branch numbers 400. There are about 850 officers in other forces in England and Wales engaged on what might be regarded as Special Branch work. About 300 of them are employed at the ports, though not all are Special Branch officers."



[REDACTED]

Since 1978, our advice on behalf of successive Home Secretaries has been that in their annual reports, chief constables should give the number of officers serving in the Special Branch. References to the work of Special Branches should be cast in general terms with specific references only to work in relation to the prevention of terrorism, and aliens and naturalisation enquiries.

I hope that this summary and recapitulation of the present position is helpful.

I am copying this letter to Gilbert Kelland and Brian Hayes, as well as to Brian Morrissey.

Just over

[REDACTED]

G H PHILLIPS