

Mr James Waddell

Meeting between the Home Secretary and Backbench MPs regarding  
the Special Branch and Industrial matters

For the purposes of preparing notes for supplementaries for the Home Secretary's statement on Lennon, you may like to have a note of the main points raised at the above meeting, without waiting for a full note of what went on.

The MPs (Mr. Prescott, Mr. Wellbeloved, Mr. Atkinson, Mr. Skinner and Mr. Sedgmore) expressed fears they felt or had heard expressed regarding the activities of the Special Branch. They considered it necessary for there to be an independent enquiry into the activities of the Special Branch, possibly by the Security Commission, in order to provide a basis for an informed discussion in Parliament of the role of the Branch and the limitations that should be imposed on its activities or on access to the information it collected. The Home Secretary undertook to consider this request and the points raised, but he made it clear that it would be a mistake to assume there was any strong likelihood of his acceding to the request for an enquiry, though his mind was not closed on the subject.

The points are probably best expressed in the form of questions:-

- (a) To what extent do the Special Branch take an interest in civil rights organisations and industrial organisations?
- (b) Do they take photographs, e.g. of demonstrations and lists of names of people of special interest to them?
- (c) To what extent is information obtained by the Special Branch, including such photographs and lists of names, made available to trade unionists or employers? (I should add that the sort of thing under consideration was an employer obtaining information about an employee's activities, other than criminal activities, or some members of a trade union obtaining information about one of the members of their executive.)
- (d) Who decides on the people to be regarded as special threats in the industrial field and therefore worthy of attention by the Special Branch?
- (e) What are the rights of people who might be asked to identify someone photographed, for example, at a demonstration, or to assist the police in some comparable way?
- (f) Why should the police investigate anything in relation to trade unions? Could there be any other reason than to inform the management of expected militancy?

/(g) Could figures

- [REDACTED]
- (g) Could figures be made public for the number of people employed in the Special Branch and the cost of their activities?
- (h) Could there be a public statement of the role and remit of the Special Branch, the theoretical limits on their activities and the process by which they are accountable? (I should add that the Home Secretary made clear that they were police officers accountable as other police officers to the chief officer of their force. He also reminded the meeting of the relationship between chief officers and himself.)
- (i) Is there any infiltration of the Special Branch into the trade unions? (The Home Secretary told the meeting that he was firmly informed that there was no question of infiltration into trade unions directly or indirectly. Mr. Prescott indicated disbelief, and the Home Secretary said that if he had any information to suggest the contrary he, the Home Secretary, would be glad to consider it.)

[REDACTED]

Private Secretary

Private Office  
1.5.74.

[REDACTED]