

PRIME MINISTER

I attach:

1. A brief history of the Special Branch - Flag A
2. Its functions - Flag B
3. Speech being made by the Home Secretary at the dinner - Flag C
4. A list of distinguished guests - Flag D.

You are expected to say just a VERY FEW WORDS, literally how pleased you are to be with them.

Caroline Stephens

28 March 1983

## HISTORY

The Special Irish Branch was formed in 1883 as a direct result of the Fenian outrages of the early 1880s. Lord Cavendish, Chief Secretary for Ireland, and his Permanent Under-Secretary Thomas Burke, were assassinated by Fenians in Phoenix Park, Dublin on 7th May 1882. This acted as a trigger for an outbreak of Fenian activity which followed in London and other parts of the mainland. The Special Irish Branch was so successful in these investigations that consideration was given to disbanding the Branch in 1886. However, it was retained because of the serious security risks involved with the large number of European royalty attending Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1886.

In the 27 years between the Golden Jubilee and the outbreak of the First World War the Branch was busily engaged keeping track of the abundant anarchist activity then an increasingly prominent and dangerous feature of life throughout Europe. Several Heads of State were assassinated and many attempts were made on the lives of others. The advent of war stimulated the War Office into forming MI5 to deal with German spies. Formed in 1909 by an Army officer and retired police officer those early beginnings have grown into the Security Service, which since its inception has had close ties with Special Branch.

From 1917, the date of the Russian Revolution, the work of Special Branch took on a different aspect and the possibility of communist-inspired subversion has occupied much of our time and effort since then. A further dimension was added in the early 1930s with the rise of Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists. Pitched battles between communists and fascists led to the passing of the Public Order Act in 1936 but the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 saw the demise of the fascists and the concentration by Special Branch on counter-espionage for the next five years. After the war the communist threat intensified and large numbers of aliens applying for naturalisation further added to the work of the Branch.

In the early 1950s there was a wave of atom spy cases, resulting in the imprisonment of several British scientists for passing atom secrets to the Soviets. The prosecution of all these cases was undertaken by the Branch.

The 1960s saw the rise of well-organised civil disobedience starting with the Aldermaston Marches by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and later the less innocent activities of the Committee of 100. The late 1960s saw the rise of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign with its attendant public order problems and at length almost complete penetration by various organisations of the extreme left had been effected. Special Branch took due notice of such matters with its responsibility for providing accurate, up-to-date information about public order.

The Metropolitan Special Branch is responsible for operating the National Ports Scheme which has been working in its present form since 1968 and now includes 49 police forces, many trained by us.

A large part of the Branch's work now consists of national collation and dissemination of information about Irish Republican activity and the protection of certain Cabinet ministers and visiting foreign dignitaries.

FUNCTIONS

The Metropolitan Special Branch has a traditional responsibility for co-ordinating the collection of intelligence relating to Irish Republican extremism in Great Britain and is also responsible for affording personal protection to certain Government ministers and other persons under threat and to foreign Heads of State and other distinguished visitors during their stay in this country. Together with the Security Service, MPSB provides training for Special Branch officers of other United Kingdom police forces and has the following important functions:

- (1) Acquiring intelligence to assist in the preservation of public order
- (2) Investigating offences with a subversive or political objective relating to espionage, sabotage and the Official Secrets Acts
- (3) Enquiries relating to the use of firearms or explosives when there is a terrorist or extremist connection
- (4) Naturalisation enquiries (3,524 in 1982) and conducting any prosecutions arising therefrom.
- (5) At sea and airports to arrest wanted criminals and detect offences in transit and gather security and criminal intelligence. There were 91 million passenger movements last year through UK ports, involving 49 police forces taking part in the National Ports Scheme (trained by MPSB). A major responsibility in this area is the enforcement of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In 1982 Special Branches throughout the country detained 230 people under this legislation, 43 of them by MPSB.
- (6) Liaison with European police forces in respect of international terrorism
- (7) Assisting in the vetting of personnel employed in various Government departments.

MANPOWER

403 officers are employed on Special Branch duties in the Metropolitan Police District and 870 officers are employed on Special Branch duties in provincial police forces.

SPECIAL BRANCH CENTENARY BALL: 29 MARCH  
SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE HOME SECRETARY

It is a great privilege for me to have been asked to respond on behalf of the guests at this historic occasion to the welcome which has been extended to us. <sup>that this centenary</sup> It is fitting<sup>ly</sup> should be marked in a way which will remain in the memory of those of us present tonight. I should like to begin by thanking our hosts for their magnificent hospitality.

We have already heard something about the history of special branches. As a complement to this<sup>y</sup> I should like to strike a serious note for a few minutes and look at one or two aspects of the work of special branches today.

There is no doubt that the range of subjects covered by modern special branches and the complexity of the issues with which they have to deal is much greater than at any time in their history. This is partly a result of the increasing complexity and sophistication of society in general, but I think it is also a reflection of the value of the contribution which special branches can uniquely make. They are by their nature a distinctive and flexible resource available to chief officers, and much of their work<sup>y</sup> is concerned with the more sensitive aspects of police operations.

There has been criticism in the past about the activities of special branches and no doubt there will be criticism again in the future. The nature of special branch duties is such that this is probably inevitable. What is important is that a balance should be maintained between the needs of particular police investigations and the established rights and expectations of the citizens of this country. There will always be a certain amount of judgement involved in achieving this balance. It is not something which can be achieved through



for this legislation against the need to safeguard civil liberties. I shall be considering the recommendations over the next few months with a view to introducing a new Bill to replace the current Act. We are already deep in consultation with those most closely concerned with the operation of the present legislation. In the meantime, the Act has been renewed for a further twelve months. But whatever the shape of the new legislation I am sure we shall still depend on the central role of special branches in the operation of the new measures, in the same way as we do now.

Another important special branch duty of which I have first <sup>hand</sup> experience is that of personal protection. This work, while at times routine, requires on occasion very high reserves of courage and skill. We were reminded of this last June when the Israeli Ambassador was the target of shots fired in cold blood. The protection officer's quick and courageous response while himself under fire resulted in the arrest of the three terrorists concerned, who, as you know, were recently convicted and sentenced. This incident is an illustration of the threat from terrorism today, not only from Irish Republican sources, but also on an international scale. The work of special branches in many different ways plays a crucial part in our efforts to counter this evil, a most valuable service to the community at large.

To use a rather different example to highlight the delicate balance of the work of special branches and the critical part it can play in the success of a wide variety of occasions, we have the example of <sup>the visit</sup> to this country of His Holiness, the Pope. The protection arrangements were admirable, paying the greatest attention to the needs of security, without in any way inhibiting or damaging the rapport between the Pope and the public. I am sure the remarkable success of that visit was due in no small part to the sympathy and skill which special branch officers brought to their task.

No-one can tell what will happen during the next hundred years. I should be very reluctant to predict what the equivalent occasion to this, in the year 2083 will be like, or what issues of concern will face our successors. But I think it would nevertheless be appropriate to end by looking to the future well as to the past to thank you all for the very significant contribution you have made in so many ways to the policing of this country and to look forward to the continuation of the tradition which you have established.

SB CENTENARY BALL 29th MARCH, 1983

OFFICIAL GUESTS

Commissioner and Lady

Deputy Commissioner and Lady

Assistant Commissioner 'Crime' and Lady

Receiver of the Metropolitan Police and Lady

Director General Box 500 and Lady

Mr T Forbes, ACC RUC

Lord Forte and Lady

Mrs Gilbert (widow of late DAC'C'(SB))

PERSONALITIES AMONGST PRIVATE GUESTS

HRH Prince Abdullah of Jordan

L Byford, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins, MP

Pete Murray

PRIME MINISTER

Metropolitan Special Branch Centenary Ball :  
Tuesday 29 March

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You are looking in at this Ball: arriving  
at 2215.

They have a Cabaret which is going to last  
an hour beginning at 2300 hours. I have told  
the organisers that you will leave just before  
the commencement so you will be there for  
approximately 45 minutes.

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Agree?

*E.S.*

*Yes - may, it's  
not for Paul  
in Cabaret*

25 March 1983