



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

15 December, 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Michael,

You might have seen that Lance Corporal P.L. Aldridge, of the Intelligence Corps, has been charged with an offence under section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920. This is the section which makes it an offence, among other things, to do any act preparatory to the commission of any offence under the Official Secrets Acts.

The facts of this case briefly are as follows. It was learnt in August 1982 that someone from Aldershot was in touch with the Soviet Embassy. Enquiries narrowed the range of suspects to a group which included Aldridge, and then to a point where sufficient evidence was available to enable his Commanding Officer to summon him. Aldridge admitted that he had been in touch with the Soviet Embassy with the intention of passing secret information, but claims not actually to have passed such information. He was arrested and detained under a holding charge under the Army Act. On 26 November it was decided to put the case in the hands of the civil authorities. On 30 November he was charged under section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920.

The facts of this case have been placed before the Chairman of the Security Commission who takes the view that this is a case in which a reference to the Security Commission would be likely to serve a useful purpose.

/ In this

RM

CONFIDENTIAL

In this case - unlike the Prime case - I am advised that it would be possible to make the reference before criminal proceedings are completed without risk of adverse effect upon those proceedings, provided of course that no announcement of the reference was made until it was appropriate to do so in relation to the proceedings.

I therefore propose, if you agree, to make an immediate reference to the Security Commission; but not to make any announcement of that reference until the proceedings against Aldridge are complete. I understand that it is expected that he will be committed for trial early in the New Year and that it should be possible to have the trial within a few weeks thereafter.

It will be for the Security Commission itself to decide whether to deal with this reference at the same time and with the same panel as the Prime case, or whether to deal with it separately.

Perhaps I could respond to the second paragraph of your letter of 3 December about a possible debate on security in the House. I appreciate that there is a general wish in the House to debate security, but I do not think that it would make sense to have that debate at least until we have the report on the Prime case. Until we have that report, it would be difficult if not impossible for the Government to add anything substantial to what has already been reported to the House. I do not know that this need greatly delay a debate; I know that the Security Commission is seeking to complete its work with all the speed compatible with thoroughness.

Yours sincerely
Raymond S. Helburn



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From the Principal Private Secretary
SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG
CABINET OFFICE

LANCE CORPORAL ALDRIDGE

Thank you for your minute of 14 December (ref. A082/0529). The Prime Minister has written to Mr Foot on the lines attached to your minute, and I enclose a copy of the letter. In consultation with Mr Heyhoe (Lord President's Office), I abbreviated the last paragraph while (I hope) retaining the sense of it..

I am copying this minute to David Heyhoe, with the last paragraph only of the letter to Mr Foot in case Mr Foot raises the point at business questions with the Lord President tomorrow.

C. R. BUTLER

15 December, 1982

088