

Covering SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

I find the attached submission depressing. We seem to me to be making very heavy weather of what was a trivial case, and publication of the Security Commission Report on Miss Ritchie will provide a feast for the salacious appetites of newspaper readers.

I have wondered whether we could avoid publishing the Report at all. But you announced* the reference to the Security Commission and cleared it with the Leader of the Opposition, and I think that you could not forbear from showing it to him. I should expect that the Leader of the Opposition would press for publication and, if this is right, perhaps it is best to volunteer it.

Do you agree?

Are you content that the Security Commission Report should be published as a White Paper on Thursday 28 July?

Do you agree that the written answer (to which I have suggested one or two amendments) should be given in your name on the same day as publication?

F.R.B.

* On checking the announcement I find that it included the words "The Security Commission's findings will be laid before the House to the fullest extent compatible with national security."

22 July 1983

A White Paper seems a bit much for this report. If the Commission agreed, it could be substantially shorter without losing any of the material facts and could then be given as a written reply. In any event

words used in the White Paper.

Ref. A083/2200

MR BUTLER

I attach a submission to the Prime Minister about the Security Commission's report on Miss Rhona Ritchie.

2. There are two points which I would like to make to the Prime Minister but not to repeat in the copies of the submission that go to her colleagues.

3. First, I think that the Security Commission have let both Miss Ritchie herself and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office off pretty lightly.

4. You will see from the report that she led an active and varied sex life, and was pretty open about it. You will also see that she took advice from the British Embassy in Israel as to whether she could allow a relationship to develop between herself and an Israeli official. Embassy officials advised against it. She nonetheless went ahead and had a brief affair with the Israeli official. She did not seek advice before letting her connection with the Egyptian diplomat develop into a sexual relationship. It is very difficult to believe that she did not know what she was doing, though I suppose that she may have thought that she could get from him as much as she was giving to him.

5. As to the British Embassy, I can see that they were in a dilemma. Miss Ritchie's relationships were her business, and those who knew about them thought that she could manage them discreetly. But Miss Ritchie's propensity to have love affairs should have been known to them from her PV report as well as from what was known to some members of the staff. In a relatively small community, particularly in one so close and vulnerable as an Embassy overseas, it is perhaps surprising that the people at the top of the Embassy did not know, or (if they did have some knowledge) did not explicitly warn Miss Ritchie to be careful about the relationships which she formed and not to allow them to be exploited in the way they were.

6. But the Security Commission have reached a view, and we have to take it as it is. As far as Miss Ritchie is concerned, I am inclined to accept the view that she has been sufficiently punished. So far as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is concerned, I have made

I imagine that
in this comment
Sir R. Armstrong
is referring to
intelligence!

clear to Sir Antony Acland my view that they have got off pretty lightly. The last paragraph of the draft statement is an attempt very obliquely to underline this point.

7. The other matter relates to the Leader of the Opposition. The conventions require us to tell the Leader of the Opposition what amendments we have made to a report on grounds of national security. I am not very anxious to send Mr Foot an unamended text,

I think that the best way out of this dilemma may be for the Prime Minister to write to Mr Foot, when we have a final proof of the Security Commission's report as printed, explaining that the text has been very slightly amended in five places to protect particular areas of national security (in fact, the sources of the reports which reached the Security Service); and that, if he considered that it was important to know exactly what those amendments were, the Secretary of the Cabinet would be very glad to wait on him and show him what they were. With any luck Mr Foot might not think it necessary to take advantage of this offer.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

22 July 1983