

SECRETARY'S OFFICE
Ref. A01663
19 APR 1972
PRIME MINISTER
FILE NO.

Subversion

At the Ministerial meeting on industrial policy on 12th April (GEN 92(72) 1st Meeting) you said that you would arrange for separate consideration to be given to the question of subversive activity in society, particularly in the industrial context. We have accordingly arranged a meeting at 11.30 am tomorrow. The Ministers who have been invited to attend are the "nucleus" of GEN 92, i.e. the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary (who has, in addition to his general interest in the subject, Departmental responsibility for IRD), the Secretary of State for Defence, the Lord President and the Secretary of State for Employment. I hope that Mr. Maitland will also find it possible to be present.

The only item before the meeting will be the memorandum by the Security Service which I sent you with my minute of 17th March. In circulating it I have asked Ministers to regard it as for their personal information; and in opening the discussion you may like to emphasise the sensitive nature of the subject in general and of this memorandum in particular.

I hope that the meeting will then follow the precedent of the earlier discussion on industrial policy by providing Ministers with an opportunity to speak their minds freely about the doubts and misgivings as regards subversive activity at which they hint from time to time in wider discussions. But when they have had a chance to say what they really feel on this subject they should perhaps be invited to concentrate on the basic question, which might be formulated as follows. Are we facing a genuinely subversive threat to society in the sense in which the Security Service understand that phrase, namely a deliberate, conscious and organised attempt by a number of identifiable individuals to overthrow Parliamentary democracy in this country? Or have we to try to deal with something much more indefinable and elusive in the form of a pervasive climate of opinion which is opposed in principle to most of the forms of established authority in this country but, although it may be exploited from time to time by individuals concerned to foment particular instances of industrial unrest, is not necessarily in itself a conscious and organised threat to society? I think that most people, having considered the evidence in the memorandum by the Security Service and studied the terms of MI5's "Charter" (which I attach), are driven, however reluctantly, to the latter conclusion. If so, however, certain consequences follow. In particular:-

(a) The "Charter" implies certain limits to the assistance which the Security Service can provide in dealing with the problem with which we are concerned. The Home Secretary will probably seek an opportunity to make these limits clear to his colleagues. Even so, it is for consideration whether, without infringing them, MI5 could perhaps adopt a rather more "aggressive" attitude in this field; and it is possible to detect between the lines of their memorandum that they would not be wholly averse from an invitation to do so.

(b) The Government's main response to the threat, however, must be tailored to the nature of the threat itself, i. e. it must take the form of activity which is as pervasive, oblique and "unattributable" as the influences which it is seeking to combat. Essentially this is a question of trying to change the climate of society by encouraging higher standards of behaviour, by establishing new (or old!) values and by ensuring that what we loosely call "the Government's case" does not go by default. There is a great deal which the Government can do - and are doing - to achieve these aims by perfectly overt means, in particular by their emphasis on policies designed to promote self-reliance and self-respect and by their attitude on issues involving the enforcement of the law. But these efforts could sometimes be supplemented by more covert forms of activity; and after discussion with Mr. Donald Maitland I suggest that Ministers should adopt the proposal at the end of the memorandum by the Security Service and should constitute a small interdepartmental team whose purpose would be to keep subversive developments under review, to improve our information about them and to promote a greater flow of information and guidance to the many bodies - in industry, in the world of the Press and TV and in society at large - who are concerned to expose and to withstand "subversion" but are uncertain about the means of doing so and would welcome discreet guidance in this respect. The group might be chaired by Sir Leslie Glass, who ran IRD some time ago with conspicuous success and would be willing and available to launch this new venture. It should consist of representatives of the Home Office (including the Security Service), the FCO (in the shape of IRD) and the Department of Employment, with the right to call in other Departments as necessary. Mr. Maitland should, of course, be present or be represented at all meetings.

I doubt whether the group would need, or should be given, any terms of reference other than the broad definition of its purpose which I have outlined in the previous paragraph. But it would certainly need Ministerial direction; and it might be most appropriate that it should look for guidance

and instruction to the Lord President, as the Minister to whom you have assigned responsibility for the Government's information services. If this proposal is accepted in principle the Lord President should perhaps arrange an early discussion with Sir Leslie Glass in order to plan a programme of work for the new group; and he might be invited to make a progress report to a resumption of tomorrow's meeting in, say, three months' time.

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18th April, 1972

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General Directive of 27/1/52

DIRECTIVE TO THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
SECURITY SERVICE

1. In your appointment as Director-General of the Security Service you will be responsible to the Home Secretary personally. The Security Service is not, however, a part of the Home Office. On appropriate occasions you will have right of direct access to the Prime Minister.
2. The Security Service is part of the Defence Forces of the country. Its task is the Defence of the Realm as a whole, from external and internal dangers arising from attempts at espionage and sabotage, or from actions of persons and organisations, whether directed from within or without the country, which may be judged to be subversive of the security of the State. In consultation with the Colonial Office, you will assist and advise Colonial administrations in carrying out their parts of the above task. You should arrange to meet appropriate requests for advice and assistance in their own security programmes made to you by Commonwealth or Allied foreign Governments.
3. You will take special care to ensure that the work of the Security Service is strictly limited to what is necessary for the purposes of this task, and that you are at all times fully aware of the extent of its activities.
4. It is essential that the Security Service should be kept absolutely free from any political bias or influence and nothing should be done that might lend colour to any suggestion that it is concerned with the interests of any particular section of the community, or with any other matter than the Defence of the Realm as a whole. You will impress on your staff that the work of the Security Service has no connection whatever with matters of a Party political character and that they must be scrupulous to avoid any action which could be so misconstrued.
5. No enquiry is to be carried out on behalf of any Government Department unless you are satisfied that an important public interest bearing on the Defence of the Realm, as defined in paragraph 2, is at stake.
6. You and your staff will maintain the well-established convention whereby Ministers do not concern themselves with the detailed information which may be obtained by the Security Service in particular cases, but are furnished with such information only as may be necessary for the determination of any issues on which their guidance is sought.
7. You will, of course, consult with other Departments when questions are raised affecting their responsibilities.