

CABINET OFFICE
Ref: A09610
10 JUL 1979
PMO INSTRUCTIONS
PRIME MINISTER



Subversion

I understand that you want to have a further word with me about this subject.

2. In advance of our talk I would like, if I may, to sound one note of caution and then to offer a more constructive suggestion.

3. The caution concerns the role of the Security Service. Its Directive says inter alia:-

(i) "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 to the State."

(ii) "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 lead 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."

The Directive does not define the word "subversive": but, as the brief on subversion submitted with my minute of 4th May said, the definition, designed to reconcile (i) and (ii), which has hitherto been adopted by both Conservative and Labour Governments (and quoted in the House) is as follows:-

"Subversive activities are those which threaten the safety or wellbeing of the State and are intended to undermine or overthrow Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means."

The Directive has remained essentially unchanged through successive changes of Government since 1952. It is, I think, important for the Security Service that it should continue to operate strictly within the terms of the Directive.

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Any departure from this which could be colourably described as political manipulation could in due course have serious implications for the role and effectiveness of the Security Service, especially if there were to be a change of Government and a new Government was looking for an excuse to reduce or eliminate the Security Service's role in counter-subversion.

4. It is also important to make a sharp distinction between intelligence (i. e. what we can find out) and counter-subversion (i. e. what we can do with the information obtained). While the Security Service would no doubt welcome some additional resources on gathering intelligence about subversion, shortage of intelligence is not the main problem. The real question is what use we can make of what we know, and the responsibility for corrective action - unless it concerns an individual in a sensitive post in the Public Service - does not lie with the Security Service. This is perhaps why Sir Howard Smith may have given you an impression of not doing very much about the threat.

5. Turning now to what active steps could be taken to expose and discredit subversive elements, I think you ought to know that the first steps towards this were undertaken by the Conservative Government in 1972-74 but came to an end with the General Election in 1974. Briefly, Sir Patrick Dean was brought back from retirement to oversee the development of methods, including appropriate publicity and exposure, by which certain types of subversive activity could be countered. He worked in close consultation with IRD in the Foreign Office and one or two other key officials. I think you will get the flavour if you read the attached copy of a minute which I sent to the then Prime Minister on 18th December 1973. The Dean Group did not find their task an altogether easy one but they had some successes. With hindsight I think that perhaps we did not at that time distinguish sufficiently between situations which subversives were seeking to exploit but were not of their making and those which were essentially subversive in origin. Be that as it may, I think it would be worthwhile considering whether some new activity of this kind could be started using, for this purpose, someone who would be able to draw on both

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overt and covert information about subversive activities but who would not himself have any line management relationship to, or responsibility for, the Security Service. This would require the services of someone who would be imaginative and inventive in his approach and who would be able to exploit all opportunities to influence the climate of opinion, but who would operate with subtlety and discretion and without attracting attention to his own activities. An apparent Government directed campaign of propaganda could well be self-defeating; but there is plenty of scope for encouraging moderate elements in the unions and elsewhere and for exposing the intentions of subversive element

JOHN HUNT

John Hunt

24th May 1979