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To see

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From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

20th November, 1980

Ref. A03608

Times Article 19th November by Peter Hennessy

Peter Hennessy's article in yesterday's Times represents yet another serious and embarrassing leak. This is not the first which has occurred on civil contingency matters. You will recall his articles on 17th and 18th July, about civil servants being instructed to assess the feasibility of using civilian volunteers to replace striking workers in essential industries. On that occasion it did not prove necessary to mount a formal inquiry, because it was quickly established that the source document was very likely a DOE MINIS return and that the channel to Peter Hennessy was probably through the DOE trade union side.

We are all aware of the damaging effect that persistent leaks can have, not only on the conduct of government business, but also on relationships between colleagues and between officials and Ministers. In my judgment the content and scope of yesterday's article, coming on top of earlier articles about the CCU, leaves me with no alternative to proposing that a full interdepartmental investigation should be mounted to try and identify the source of the leak.

To lead the inquiry I would propose Mr. Denis Payne of the Cabinet Office (who as you know played a major part in the recent Ministry of Defence inquiry). He will be assisted as necessary by John Stevens. We can supplement their efforts later if it proves necessary to do so.

I do not underestimate the magnitude of the task, bearing in mind the number of departments represented in the Civil Contingencies Unit; and I recognise that on the past experience of similar inquiries the prospects of success cannot be rated particularly high. But I do not think that that should prevent us from mounting an inquiry.

/I am

Sir Ian Bancroft, GCB

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I am copying this letter to Douglas Wass, Brian Cubbon, Peter Carey, Frank Cooper, Ken Barnes, Brian Hayes, John Garlick, Kerr Fraser, Trevor Hughes, Ken Stowe, Pat Nairne, Donald Maitland and Peter Baldwin: in other words, to the Permanent Secretaries of all the departments represented on the CCU. It also goes to Jim Nursaw in the Attorney General's Chambers and to Clive Whitmore, No. 10. I propose also to seek the Prime Minister's agreement to include Ministers within the scope of the inquiry.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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