

CONFIDENTIAL

S 03499

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

1. You asked us to investigate the apparent leaks which lead to an article by Peter Hennessy in The Times on 19 November 1980, concerning the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU). A copy is attached.

2. Hennessy has written a number of articles about the CCU; one concerning, principally, Brigadier Bishop, appeared in The Times on 18 November 1980. The timing of his article on 19 November was almost certainly inspired by information which he had got about a meeting of the CCU which was held on 30 October under the Chairmanship of the Home Secretary, and which was attended by Ministers. There is nothing in the article to suggest that he saw a copy of the minutes of that meeting, in which there was no indication that there had been serious differences between Ministers about the use of civilian volunteers during stoppages. (The article was headed "Cabinet Split on use of Volunteers during Stoppages".) The likelihood is that he used the occasion to print stories which he had obtained from contacts in Whitehall over a period of months. Clearly, some parts of the article were based on sound information. Mr Frank Elders of DOE wrote to the Secretary of the Local Authorities Conditions of Service Advisory Board about the use of volunteers in local authority services in April 1980. It was agreed by Ministers in March, 1980 that there were considerable doubts about the practicability and effectiveness of the TA in trade disputes.

3. We are confident that Hennessy's information was gathered in discussion with contacts in Whitehall. Some of the informants would have given away information without being aware that they had transgressed, but at least one must consciously have been indiscreet and irresponsible. Because of the fundamental inaccuracy in the article about there having been a fierce dispute among Ministers, it seems likely that the principal offender was some way removed from high authority. CCU reports and minutes have a wide distribution.

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The minutes of the meeting of 30 October were circulated to 93 named recipients in Departments represented on the CCU. Some of these received more than one copy for distribution in their Departments.

4. In these circumstances we agreed with the major Departments concerned (a list is attached), at a meeting on 13 December 1980 that they would send a questionnaire (copy attached) to officials who had seen a record of the meeting on 30 October. It was further agreed that Hennessy's contacts were unlikely to include very junior staff and it was left to the Departments to decide to whom the questionnaire should be sent. A number of small Departments and Offices whose officials had seen a record of the meeting also used the questionnaire.

5. The results obtained from the questionnaire and from supplementary questioning are now available. Of the officials who completed the questionnaire 27 had met or spoken to Hennessy at some time. Of those, 4 had had contact with him around the time of the article but none had discussed CCU matters with him.

6. The inquiries have produced no lead to the identity of the culprit, or culprits, and there is no likelihood of success if we attempt to continue the investigation. Hennessy and his editor are aware that enquiries were made, and it is possible that his contacts among officials will have taken note and will be more cautious in the future. It is worth noting that in addition to the normal opportunities open to a Times journalist, Hennessy has opportunities to make new contacts when he lectures at the Civil Service College at Sunningdale. For example he lectures to the Middle Management Course on "The Press and the Civil Service".

D H PAYNE
J W STEVENS

9 February 1981