

076
Ref. A07986

MR WHITMORE

1
Prime Minister.
Contract for Sir Ronald
Mason to give this interview?
Yes - he will not have
to avoid the
pitfalls - of
which there
will be
many
net.
KLL
1/1/82

Broadcasts By Civil Servants

Sir Ronald Mason, Chief Scientific Adviser in MOD, has been approached by the BBC to give an interview on the Radio 3 programme called 'Scientifically Speaking'. Their main interest is in the role of senior scientists within Government and it is proposed that the following topics should be covered:

- a. the role of the Chief Scientific Adviser in Government, and MOD in particular;
- b. Sir Ronald's own background and continued links with his research base and the outside scientific community;
- c. Defence R&D, which would probably cover issues such as the proportion of national R&D resources absorbed by defence and 'spin-off' to civil industry.

2. Sir Ronald Mason is the Ministry of Defence's (and the Government's) Chief Adviser on the scientific aspect of defence nuclear policy, and from that point of view it is inconvenient that the request for an interview comes so soon after the announcement about Trident 2. But MOD have reached an agreement with the producer that, if the programme goes ahead, the Department would have the right to 'vet' the recording. They would try to discourage any attempt to open up the question of the Chief Scientific Adviser's role in nuclear issues. An Information Officer would also be present.

3. Sir Ronald is known to have strongly critical views of the MPO's (formerly CSD's) role in the management of Government scientists. He is, however, experienced at handling the media and it would be made clear to him that he would be expected

to maintain the line adopted by the Government in its response to the Holdgate Report and not to anticipate or prejudice the Government's reply to the Report by the House of Lords Select Committee on 'Science and Government'.

4. There is (as always) an element of risk attached to this. But I understand that this is a responsible and serious programme on Radio 3. An interview with Sir Ronald Mason might help in improving the image of Government science, not least because we need to continue to attract good quality people for Chief Scientist posts and also more generally for the scientific Civil Service. I understand that the Secretary of State for Defence is content to let the proposal go forward. On balance I do not wish to advise the Prime Minister to object.

5. I should be grateful if you would seek her views before I respond to Sir Frank Cooper.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

1st April 1982