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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

CROWN AGENTS TRIBUNAL

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute A08410 of 13 May 1982 about the Parliamentary announcement of the publication of the Report of the Crown Agents Tribunal. She would like to publish the report as soon as possible and to announce its publication by a written Answer.

I should be grateful if you could let me have the draft of an Answer which the Prime Minister would give to a written Question on Wednesday 26 May.

AMW

14 May 1982

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Ref. A08440

MR. WHITMORE

cc Sir Douglas Wass
Sir Brian Cubbon
Mr. Cassels
Mr. Kerry
Mr. Peterson

Report of the Crown Agents Tribunal

I sent you a minute earlier this week about the arrangements for publication of the Report of the Crown Agents Tribunal, and in particular the associated oral or written statement.

2. Since I sent you that minute, I have learnt that there would be certain practical advantages in not publishing the Report before Thursday 27th May. This would mean that the introductory oral or written statement, which is to be given 24 hours in advance, should be not earlier than Wednesday 26th May. The introductory statement could be deferred until Thursday 27th May and the Report published on Friday 28th May, if that were thought preferable; but it might be thought objectionable that the Report should be published on the day that the Whitsun Recess is due to begin.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

*(dictated by Sir R. Armstrong
and signed on his behalf)*

14th May, 1982

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Clive

We spoke about this yesterday.
We might get away with a
written answer. If we are to
do so, I need to be able to
confirm timing to the Home
Office tomorrow, so that the
massive document can be
printed with the correct
laying date.

If we do not decide
tomorrow, we may remove the
option of publication before the
Recess.

Prime Minister.

MA 13/4.

Agree to a
written answer just
before the Recess?

13.v.82. JML

Ref. A08410

MR WHITMORE

Crown Agents Tribunal

I ^{4.5.82}minuted you recently proposing Tuesday 25 May or Thursday 27 May for the publication of the Report of the Crown Agents Tribunal, to be announced in Parliament by means of an oral statement by the Prime Minister.

2. You have told us, and I fully understand, the difficulties you see about this. This minute is to explore other ways of handling the matter. There is a strong case for publishing this Report before the Whitsun Recess if possible. The Home Secretary told Parliament in a written answer at the beginning of April that the Report had been received, and the Government could be criticised if there is a longer delay in publishing it. Further delay increases the risk of a leak; and is also very tough on those who are named in the Report.

3. I recommend therefore either an oral statement before the Recess by another Minister, or a written answer by the Prime Minister. If we go for an oral statement, the Home Secretary (the Secretary of State who appoints the Tribunal and to whom its Report is submitted) would seem the obvious choice. But an oral statement by the Home Secretary could encounter, if perhaps to a less extent, the same difficulty of the continuing Parliamentary activity over the Falklands crisis, and might also draw criticism on the Prime Minister for not handling this Report herself. I have not consulted the Home Secretary about this.

4. The alternative is for a written Parliamentary answer by the Prime Minister, perhaps on Wednesday 26 May, which could be duplicated in the Lords. I should not in normal times recommend a written answer as a means of announcing the publication of this Report, but these are not normal times, and the statement will only announce publication and will not comment substantively on the Report. A written answer would have the advantage of avoiding supplementaries and further immediate exchanges in Parliament on a Report on which the Government needs time to decide its fuller response.

5. Whichever the Prime Minister agrees, we will submit a draft nearer the time.

RJA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

13 May 1982