

cc - Mr. Partridge (Home office)  
Mr. Davie

Ref. A086/910

PRIME MINISTERSubversion in Public Life

I have discussed with Permanent Secretaries the proposals in my submission of 6 December for management initiatives to improve the use made by Departments of information about subversives and to take countermeasures. I have asked them to take the necessary action in their Departments and to report progress later this year. This message has been reinforced to their Principal Establishment Officers, together with your point that Civil Service managers should be ready to apply disciplinary sanctions to subversive trouble-makers, where their conduct justifies it.

2. As to subversives above the level of HEO, I have had a check made with seven Departments, including the largest, who between them cover over two-thirds of the total number of known subversives in the Civil Service. The number above HEO level is relatively small. Some have nobody above HEO level. Assuming that these Departments are representative, there are in the whole of the Civil Service less than thirty at SEO level, less than 10 at Principal and Senior Principal level and none above that level. Furthermore, this special check has shown that none of them at these levels are active troublemakers.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18 March 1986



HOME OFFICE  
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE  
LONDON SW1H 9AT

*type mark to PM  
as needed. RA 18iii*

10 March 1986

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London SW1A 2AS

*Sir R Armstrong*

*Mr Partridge got confused over new grade names. AS divided. Do you still need to speak?*

*Dear Robert, ms*

*A word with Partridge. He*

*c- Mr Davie says*

*was due Partridge;*

*Whe also says I do*

*Grade 6 not 5 & do*

*Grade 5. Both should be correct*

OFFICE	
A	2690
11 MAR 1986	
FILING INSTRUCTIONS	
FILE No. ....	

Since you asked Permanent Secretaries on 18 December to take the action agreed at SH's discussion of SPL(85)1, I have explained the position and the background to PEOs at EOM in January, so that they are aware of what has to be done and the importance of sensitive handling as part of good Departmental management. I have also seen individually the few PEOs of larger Departments who were not able to attend that EOM.

PEOs are thus aware that we shall be asking for some feedback in the Autumn, so that we can judge the extent to which the objectives of these new actions are being realised in practice. Meanwhile, I hope that this initiative will have alerted managements in all Departments to the need to be alive to possible subversive actions behind some of their troublesome incidents from now on (eg the DHSS dispute presently being planned in London).

In these meetings with PEOs I have also passed on the Prime Minister's expressed approval for vigorous management action against subversive troublemakers where their conduct justifies it, and I have also mentioned the point about the extent of Ministerial involvement, which will clearly vary between Departments.

I have now launched SPL on the further studies which you asked us to undertake. The timing of our further report will depend on how far we find we can usefully go, but that should become clear soon.

The Prime Minister also asked about the number of subversive troublemakers above the level of HEO in Departments. I am sorry that it has taken a little time to provide the answer but, as you know, we do not have central records in the Security Service or central Departments showing the grades of known subversives, so I have had to check with Departments. In view of the sensitivity and the likelihood of most enquiries of smaller Departments resulting in nil returns anyway, to judge from the information that we assembled during SPL's study, I have restricted my enquiries to the larger Departments and those

represented on SPL. Since these Departments cover more than half the Civil Service and contain two-thirds of the known subversives in it, I am confident that the results given an accurate picture.

My enquiries show that, while there is a significant number of known subversives at HEO level, especially in Departments such as DHSS and DE, the number above that level is very small indeed. The Departments which I have canvassed, which excluded only IR and Customs & Excise of the larger Departments, have revealed 19 known subversives at SEO level, 1 at Grade 6 and 8 at Grade ~~5~~ 7. From this I would deduce that there are fewer than forty in the Civil Service as a whole above HEO level, with fewer than thirty at SEO level and fewer than ten at Principal, and <sup>one</sup> nobody above that level.

What is more, none of them are described by Departments as trouble-makers. This is hardly surprising, because a known troublemaker at that level would be well known to senior management anyway. I can recall only one such case in my time at DHSS, a Principal manager in Scotland some years ago who made such a nuisance of himself in abetting rather than discouraging industrial action that he was moved from running a local office to Central Office where he could be under close control and supervision.

It is also perhaps significant that the majority of the known subversives above HEO level work at HQ. I have been able to find only 1 local office manager, and he is said to cause no trouble. Several of them are in the scientific and technical grades (ie SROs, SSOs rather than SEOs), which again will tend to give them less scope for subversion or troublemaking.

The existence of known subversives at senior level is a cause for concern, but I think the relatively small number, the close eye which is kept on them and the fact that none of them are known troublemakers give some cause for regarding this as not a major source of potential disruption. And our recent enquiries have led the main Departments concerned to have a fresh look at their own people listed.

... I am not sure whether the Prime Minister's letter called for a reply from you on this point. If you feel it does, I attach a draft for your consideration.

*Yours ever,  
Michael*

M J A PARTRIDGE

Draft minute from Sir Robert Armstrong to the Prime Minister

910

Subversion in public life

I have discussed with Permanent Secretaries the proposals in my submission of 6 December for management initiatives to improve the use made by Departments of information about subversives and to take counter-measures. I have asked them to take the necessary action in their Departments and to report progress later this year. This message has been reinforced to their Principal Establishment Officers, together with your point that Civil Service managers should be ~~very~~ ready to apply disciplinary sanctions to subversive trouble-makers, where their conduct justifies it.

As to subversives above the level of HEO, I have had a check made with seven Departments, including the largest, who between them cover over two-thirds of the total number of known subversives in the Civil Service. ~~As one would hope and expect,~~ The numbers, <sup>above HEO level</sup> are relatively <sup>small</sup> ~~low~~. Some have nobody above HEO level, ~~and there seem on this basis to be less than thirty~~ <sup>at</sup> ~~SEOs,~~ <sup>level</sup> and less than ten <sup>at</sup> ~~Principals~~ <sup>Senior</sup> listed for the whole of the Civil Service. Furthermore, this special check has shown that none of them <sup>at these levels are</sup> ~~are~~ troublemakers; since many of them are at Headquarters establishments, where their activities are under the close eye of senior officers, their scope for causing disruption is in any event reduced to the minimum and ~~would very quickly attract notice and management action.~~

Over the seven departments

found none above that level

Senior Principal level

Assuming that these departments are representative, that is the whole of the Civil Service

StP-2751



HOME OFFICE  
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE  
LONDON SW1H 9AT

13 December 1985

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London SW1

cc - Mr. Davie  
Mr R. Barker

CABINET OFFICE	
A	10416
20 DEC 1985	
FILING INSTRUCTION:	
FILE No .....	

*Dear Robert,*

SUBVERSION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Thank you for your letter of 11 December.

... I attach a speaking note for your use in informing Permanent Secretaries of the assessment which has been made and of the management initiative which you would now like them to undertake in their Departments.

I have already been in touch with Box 500 about the further assessments which we have now been asked to make, and I shall be convening a meeting of the SPL Group in the New Year to take this forward, in consultation with the Departments concerned.

In response to the Prime Minister's question about the number of known subversives in the Civil Service above the rank of Higher Executive Officer, we have to hand the detailed information which we established for those Departments represented on the SPL Group for this particular inquiry. We can readily provide information to you about the position in those Departments. It would take a little longer to check the position in other Departments. I would propose to have a word with Box 500 to see what they have readily available, and I will then write to you again on the full position.

I am sending copies of this reply to the other recipients of your letter.

*Yours ever,  
Michael*

M J A PARTRIDGE

SUBVERSION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Speaking Notes for Sir Robert Armstrong

I think we are all aware of some disturbing examples of disruptive activities to some of our most sensitive operations over the past year or so. Some of this disruption has stemmed from genuine grievances, but some of it has been fermented by troublemakers, and some of those troublemakers are known to us as subversives.

After discussing the matter with some of you who have become particularly concerned about the extent of this disruption, I decided to commission an up-to-date assessment of the threat. This assessment has shown that, while the number of known subversives is thought to be of the same order as when we last reviewed the position in 1979, there has been a significant shift since then to the largest Trotskyist groups, and in particular to the Militant Tendency, which has increased from 1,500 members in 1979 to over 6,000 members now. MT is now the largest group after the Communist Party of Great Britain and still growing fast. Taken together, the MT and the Socialist Workers Party now have more members in the Civil Service than the CPGB has.

There is only a very small number of subversives who are active troublemakers in each Department, and the great majority of them are in the clerical or sub-clerical grades. These few subversive troublemakers cause disruption, however, out of all proportion to their number. They have concentrated their main efforts on gaining control of the national and regional executive committees of the two largest Civil Service unions, the CPSA and the SCPS. They have had mixed success in these efforts in recent years, winning and losing control at different times. But they have also shown themselves adept at exploiting real or manufactured grievances, in particular in sensitive key areas of work in certain Departments. This is particularly true of MT and SWP, whose members are much more disruptive than members of the CPGB and less ready to observe established industrial relations procedures and bide by agreements. MT in particular has shown itself adept at increasing its membership during disputes, especially among younger Civil Servants.

The main threat to security in the past has been considered to be the possibility of classified information being transmitted to hostile or potentially hostile foreign powers, and our security and vetting procedures are directed mainly at countering that threat. This remains a real and serious problem, but the vetting processes have been effective in virtually excluding subversives from access to classified information.

Recently, however, a threat of a different kind has assumed significant proportions: that is the threat of the disruption of public business through industrial action directed at areas of non-classified work which are particularly vulnerable or politically sensitive, often at considerable cost to the taxpayer. This new threat to key areas is very different, and the traditional vetting processes are not really directed to dealing with it. The answer must lie in vigorous Departmental management measures directed at the relatively small number concerned, rather than by central rules.

To meet this threat, I should be grateful if Permanent Secretaries could concert with their PEO management action of the following kind:-

- (a) each Department has a Security Officer who should be kept informed by the Security Service of the known subversives working in the Department. Each Permanent Secretary and PEO should ensure that they are kept fully and regularly informed of the identity and location of these known subversives. The Departments represented on the SPL Group have found it very beneficial to go through their lists with the Security Service, to update them and to check their accuracy. I should like to see this done in future on a regular basis, at least every year. The Security Officer should alert the PEO and the Permanent Secretary to any significant changes which occur at any time;

- (b) all Departments should identify their key areas of work which are vulnerable to disruption. This may not be as easy as it seems at first sight. What we are concerned with is areas of work where relatively few people can cause disruption out of proportion to the effort required, and embarrass Ministers by the consequential costs or political disruption caused. Computer operations can be particularly sensitive to this type of threat, but so can other areas, especially those involving contact with the public and the main revenue collecting operations;
- (c) all Departments should review regularly the current threat to their operations and the appropriate management responses to it. The action which each Department can take will obviously vary according to its size, circumstances and procedures. I should like to think, however, that we at least have procedures to ensure that, as far as possible, known subversives were not posted to key areas and that persistent troublemakers, whether subversives or not, are identified and removed from there. That is a tricky management exercise, and easier to carry out with known troublemakers who identify themselves, than with subversives who may work through others. Nevertheless, I think it is important that we should be on the look out to take whatever management initiatives we can to reduce the threat to our operations;
- (d) all Departments should similarly take whatever action they can to ensure that those who are granted facility time off work, whether subversives or not, are using it only for the purpose for which it has been granted and are not abusing it for political or other objectives. I am not here talking about the quantum of facility time, although some Permanent

Secretaries may want to review that, but rather its legitimate use. That calls for sound local management, insisting on the proper use of diaries and knowing what those who have been granted facility time are doing with it on a particular day.

The necessary information will need to be assembled and kept within a restricted circle, and the action taken needs to be seen to be no more than the good and sound management that it is. The operation will require very sensitive handling, especially in getting the right message down to key managers, particularly in large Departments.

I have informed the Prime Minister of the conclusions of our assessment and of the action which we propose to take, but other Ministers have not so far been brought into the picture. It may be that this will not be necessary in many Departments; but there may be others where the Permanent Secretary will feel it right to keep his Minister informed of any management action which is to be taken, in particular if it may lead to any reactions or disruption. I am content to leave that to the judgement of individual Permanent Secretaries.

cc - Mr. Davis  
Mr. Barker

70 WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AS

01-233 8319

*From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service*

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A085/3206

11 December 1985

Subversion in Public Life

You saw a copy of my submission of 6 December to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister has agreed that we should proceed with the management initiative set out in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the minute, and with the further assessments described in paragraph 12. I should be grateful if you could provide me with a speaking note for the first of these purposes.

She has remarked that she thinks that Civil Service managers should be very ready to apply disciplinary sanctions to subversive troublemakers, where their conduct justifies it.

The Prime Minister was somewhat disquieted to learn from paragraph 7 of my minute that there were even a very few subversives in the Civil Service above the rank of Higher Executive Officer. I should be glad if you could let me know whether there is any more information that we can give the Prime Minister about the number and distribution of subversive troublemakers at these levels.

I am sending copies of this letter to all those who attended my meeting on 27 November.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

M J A Partridge Esq CB