

Ref. A083/3310

MR BUTLER

Thank you for your minute of 16 November concerning the letters received by the Chairman of the Conservative Party complaining about leaks. I am afraid that I have not had the opportunity to consult Sir Robert Armstrong, but I am sure he would be generally content with the line that you propose to take.

2. I should perhaps point out that it is not quite true to say that all cases are subject to leak investigations. Occasionally the circumstances are such that it is clear that an investigation would be most unlikely to produce any worthwhile result and would involve a lot of nugatory work.

3. You also refer to the letter which Sir Robert Armstrong sent to Permanent Secretaries, which was itself subsequently leaked and appeared in the press. Although this was seen as a likely development when the letter was written and was drafted with the possibility in mind, I think that it would be wrong to refer to it directly. Nevertheless, you might find it helpful to be able to indicate Sir Robert Armstrong's attitude and you could do so by drawing on the quote that he provided for the MPO Press Office use in commenting on the recent First Division Association discussion paper on leaks. You might say something on the following lines:

"In commenting on a recent discussion paper published by the First Division Association on leaks, Sir Robert Armstrong warmly welcomed and entirely agreed with its clear statement that the unauthorised disclosure of official information by civil servants cannot and should not be condoned and can never be in the public interest."



4. Incidentally, the leak of Sir Robert Armstrong's letter to Permanent Secretaries is an example of a case in which, principally because of its very wide distribution a leak investigation was considered not to be worthwhile.

R P HATFIELD

18 November 1983

CONQUEROR

SECURITY: leak during Fleetw. June 83

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

MR. HATFIELD

The Political Office here have told me that the Chairman of the Conservative Party has received a number of letters complaining about Government leaks and have asked if there is anything of substance which the Chairman can say to the effect that the Government is doing something about this.

Subject to your advice, I have it in mind to suggest to Mr. Sherbourne that the Chairman might say:

- that the Government is extremely concerned about recent leaks;
- that in all cases investigations are undertaken with a view to identifying those responsible and, if identified, taking action against them;
- and that a number of measures have been taken, and continue to be taken, to improve the arrangements and procedures for circulating and handling documents within government with a view to protecting them better, but it would be counter-productive to be specific about these.

This leaves out any reference to the letter which Sir Robert Armstrong sent to Permanent Secretaries after the General Election about the responsibility of all Permanent Secretaries for changing the culture. Although this letter was itself leaked, it was not published, and I imagine that it would be better not to refer to it.

E. E. R. BUTLER

16 November 1983

MR BUTLER

The Chairman of the Party has received
a number of letters complaining about
Government leaks.

I have been asked if there is anything
positive of substance he can say, in
reply, that the Government is doing about
this.

Any advice?

Steven.

Stephen Sherbourne

16th November, 1983

C.F. attached.

*Could I pl. have the file
including the submission ~~the~~ P.M.
received from Sir R. Armstrong just
after the Election.*

*FCRB
16.11*