



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

SUBJECT as:

✓ SECURITY  
leak of  
Belgrano Papers  
(Parting)  
Part 1.

The Office of the Leader of  
the Opposition

September 14th 1984

Dear Prime Minister

It came to my notice over a week ago that senior Foreign Office civil servants had sought to persuade your Government to release full details of the timing and nature of communications with HM Submarine Conqueror and of the deliberations of the War Cabinet in relation to the decision to sink the Argentine warship General Belgrano on 2nd May 1982.

I understand that Ministers have been advised that publication of such details would not compromise national security and that there is no good reason to suppress further or withhold such information. Civil servants who must prepare documents for Parliamentary Answers and other Ministerial statements on this matter are clearly right to believe that they have no duty to obscure information or to present it in a way which could mislead or misinform Parliament and the public. The Observer report of last Sunday gave further indication that civil servants were resentful about the role which they are being required to play in the Belgrano affair. Before writing to you about this matter, however, I wished to satisfy myself about the accuracy of the reports I had received.

I believe you were wrong initially to refuse to establish the independent enquiry into the sinking of the Belgrano which we have continually pressed upon you. I hope that you will reconsider your original decision and accept the advice which you are currently receiving.

Operational confusion in the long-distance transmission of orders and reports in battle conditions is understandable. But the refusal of the Government to acknowledge even the possibility of error is not so easily explained. Since there are now no considerations of national security or 'pressing operational reasons' to inhibit such explanations I trust that they will be quickly and comprehensively published.

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2

September 14th 1984

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP

There is a further matter of very grave concern, the conduct of your Government towards Mr Clive Ponting. There is reason to believe that when the enquiries into the disclosure of documents to my colleague Tam Dalyell and, through him, to Sir Anthony Kershaw, had been completed, it was decided that the action involved was a breach of trust and not of a criminal nature. As you will be aware, that decision followed the long-established convention in such cases.

I understand that the Secretary of State for Defence was notified of the outcome of the investigation and that, despite this convention and despite the fact that senior civil servants intended to follow that convention in the case of Mr Ponting, he overruled their advice and insisted that Mr Ponting be prosecuted under Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act. I can only presume that you endorsed this action either before or after arrangements to prosecute Mr Ponting were begun.

I am informed that further and even more serious allegations concerning the treatment of Mr Ponting will be made by the defence, on which it would not, of course, be proper for me to comment at this stage.

Whilst I welcome the decision, in the wake of the leaking of the documents and other related events, that the Secretary of State will appear before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, that may well be after proceedings against Mr Ponting have begun and the Select Committee's questions will not necessarily relate directly to the treatment which this individual has received.

I hope therefore that you will provide me with a separate and accurate account of the decisions relating to Mr Ponting which were made in the department and by the Secretary of State for Defence.

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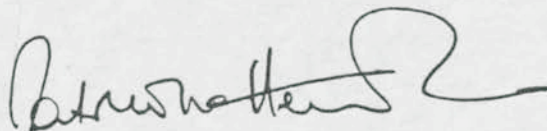
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September 14th 1984

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP

I will not be making this information concerning Mr  
Ponting generally available for the next 24 hours.

Yours sincerely

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Neil Kinnock MP

(dictated by Mr Kinnock and signed in his absence)

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP