

Ref. A09502

MR RICKETT

*In view of the
 high (which clearly is
 of fault - but which was
 did not check) Prime Minister
 (myself should
 review is) Agree X and Y?
 M/S 27/9
 No
 doubt
 no*

In your minute of 1st September to Mr Hatfield you said that Mr du Cann had seen Mr Ian Gow to express his disagreement over the line taken in the Prime Minister's letter to him of 10th August that the Security Commission is not an "associated public body of any Government Department, of a kind which would come within the [Treasury and Civil Service] Committee's remit". Mr Gow has suggested that because of this contention the Prime Minister should withdraw her letter, and that Lord Bridge should reply to Mr du Cann's original request making no mention of whether or not the Commission can be so regarded.

2. Mr du Cann has pointed out that the Security Commission is included in the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's own list of its "associated public bodies". The Assistant Clerk to the Committee wrote to the Secretary of the Commission in 1980 asking for factual information about the Security Commission (and about the Three Advisers); the Secretary (a Principal in the Civil Service Department) complied with that request.

3. It remains my view that the Security Commission is not an appropriate body for investigation by the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, and I think that the Civil Service Department should have taken this point when the Assistant Clerk to the Committee made his inquiries in 1980. The Commission is attached to the MPO (formerly CSD) purely for 'pay and rations' purposes; it is answerable to the Prime Minister as such, not in her capacity as Minister for the Civil Service. It is purely advisory, and has no executive functions. It does not sit continuously, but is activated only for specific inquiries remitted to it by the Prime Minister. But above all the security nature of its activities makes it inappropriate for it to be the subject of Select Committee scrutiny. Lord Bridge, the Chairman, has made clear to me his own view that it would be inappropriate for the Commission to be scrutinised by the Committee, and that he would be extremely reluctant to respond to Mr du Cann's letter, for fear that by doing so he would be admitting that such scrutiny was appropriate and acceptable.



4. I think it possible that Mr du Cann's approach to Lord Bridge may be intended to buttress ideas which he is reported to be harbouring for a Select Committee (to consist entirely of Privy Counsellors) to deal with security matters.

5. All things considered, therefore, I hope that the Prime Minister will not withdraw her earlier letter to Mr du Cann, and that we need not pursue the idea of asking Lord Bridge to send a letter.

6. If this is agreed, the question is how best to handle Mr du Cann. It would clearly be sterile to get into an argument with him about the definition of an "associated public body"; the heart of the matter is that the security nature of the Commission's activities makes it inappropriate for it to be the subject of Select Committee scrutiny. Perhaps the best course would be for Mr Gow to see Mr du Cann again, and say that, while it remains the Prime Minister's view that the Security Commission is not an associated public body of the kind which should come within the Committee's remit, this is perhaps something on which she and Mr du Cann can agree to differ, because the fact of the matter is that the security nature of the Commission's activities would preclude any kind of scrutiny. She acknowledges, however, that the terms of reference and composition of the Commission are matters of Ministerial responsibility, and the Joint Head of the Civil Service will shortly be sending the Clerk to the Committee a memorandum covering those matters and dealing also with the provision of the Secretariat and a list of the cases on which it has advised successive Governments. (The memorandum could probably in fact be ready in time for Mr Gow to hand it over when he sees Mr du Cann).

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

16th September 1982

CONFIDENTIAL



Security
26 AA

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The Prime Minister has seen your minute of 16 September (A09502) about the letter which she sent to Mr Du Cann about the status of the Security Commission.

The Prime Minister has commented that, in view of the point that the Security Commission was contained in a list provided by the Government of bodies sponsored by the CSD, the letter to Mr Du Cann needs revising so as to forestall comments from members of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee that the Government appears to have changed its view.

The Prime Minister has suggested that you and she might have a word about this: perhaps it would be convenient to do so after the business meeting tomorrow.

F.R.B.

30 September 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

AA



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

I have suggested to
Sir Robert Armstrong that he
might have a word with you
about this at the end of
tomorrow's business meeting.

FERS

30.9.