



Ref. A082/0529

MR BUTLER

Prime Minister
Letter attached. I
have cleared the last
paragraph with the
Lord President's office.

Lance Corporal Aldridge

FERB
15.12.

I reported to you on this case in my minute of 29th November.

2. As you know, Lance Corporal Aldridge was in fact charged on 30th November under Section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920 with committing acts preparatory to the commission of offences under Section 1 of the Official Secrets Act 1911.

3. I have placed the facts of the case before the Chairman of the Security Commission. He takes the view that a reference to the Commission would be likely to serve a useful purpose in this case. He also agrees, and the Attorney General is content, that the reference should be made immediately, even though proceedings are pending, on the understanding that the reference will not be announced and Aldridge himself will not be indicated until the proceedings are complete. ^{told} ?

--- 4. I propose accordingly the attached letter to the Leader of the Opposition. You will see that I have taken the opportunity in the last paragraph of suggesting a reply to the second paragraph of Mr Foot's letter of 3rd December about the Ritchie case.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

14th December 1982



DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE RT HON MICHAEL

CONFIDENTIAL

FOOT, MP

You might have seen that Lance Corporal P L Aldridge, of the Intelligence Corps, has been charged with an offence under section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920. This is the section which makes it an offence, among other things, to do any act preparatory to the commission of any offence under the Official Secrets Acts.

The facts of this case briefly are as follows. It was learnt in August 1982 that someone from Aldershot was in touch with the Soviet Embassy. Enquiries narrowed the range of suspects to a group which included Aldridge, and then to a point where sufficient evidence was available to enable his Commanding Officer to summon him. Aldridge admitted that he had been in touch with the Soviet Embassy with the intention of passing secret information, but claims not actually to have passed such information. He was arrested and detained under a holding charge under the Army Act. On 26th November it was decided to put the case in the hands of the civil authorities. On 30th November he was charged under section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920.

The facts of this case have been placed before the Chairman of the Security Commission who takes the view that this is a case in which a reference to the Security Commission



would be likely to serve a useful purpose.

In this case - unlike the Prime case - I am advised that it would be possible to make the reference before criminal proceedings are completed without risk of adverse effect upon those proceedings, provided of course that no announcement of the reference was made until it was appropriate to do so in relation to the proceedings.

I therefore propose, if you agree, to make an immediate reference to the Security Commission; but not to make any announcement of that reference until the proceedings against Aldridge are complete. I understand that it is expected that he will be committed for trial early in the New Year and that it should be possible to have the trial within a few weeks thereafter.

It will be for the Security Commission itself to decide whether to deal with this reference at the same time and with the same panel as the Prime case, or whether to deal with it separately.

Perhaps I could respond to the second paragraph of your letter of 3rd December about a possible debate on security in the House. ~~[I note the Opposition's preference for a general debate on security ahead of the Security Commission's report on the Prime case.]~~ While I appreciate that there will ^{be} a general wish in the House to debate security ~~[when the time is right]~~, ^{but I do not think that} I question whether it would make sense to have ^{that} a debate at least until we have the report



on the Prime case. ^{Until we have that report} Certainly, ~~until the Security Commission~~
~~has reported on that case,~~ it would be difficult if not
impossible for the Government to ^{add} say anything substantial ^{to}
~~about the cases which are under reference to the Security~~
~~Commission.~~ I should therefore see some difficulty in
finding Government time for such a debate ahead of the
Security Commission's report.] I do not know that this need
greatly delay a debate; I know that the Security Commission
is seeking to complete its work with all the speed
compatible with thoroughness.



Security
Aldridge
Nov 82

74 DEC 1982

