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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

19 November 1979

PROFESSOR ANTHONY BLUNT

When the Prime Minister saw the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Attorney General and Sir Robert Armstrong at 2000 last night to discuss the further handling of the Blunt case, they concluded that the Government should offer a full day's debate on the affair on Wednesday of this week. The pressure for a debate was now very considerable, and it was desirable that the Government should retain the Parliamentary initiative which it had seized when the Prime Minister had given her very full reply to Mr. Leadbitter's Question last Thursday. The offer of a debate in Government time would pre-empt Mr. Hamilton's application for an SO 9 debate on which the Speaker would announce his decision the following day. The case for having a full day's debate rather than only half a day's debate was that it was unlikely that all those who would want to speak, including former Prime Ministers, former Home Secretaries and former Attorneys General, would be able to do so if the debate lasted no more than three hours. The Prime Minister would open the debate and the Attorney General wind up. It would be preferable if Professor Blunt gave the press conference which he was proposing to hold before the debate, and it was agreed that Sir Robert Armstrong should see whether there was any prospect of the press conference being held on Tuesday, when he saw Professor Blunt's solicitor, Mr. Rubinstein, the following day about the statement which Professor Blunt was proposing to issue.

The meeting also considered whether the Government should announce its intention to hold an inquiry into the Blunt case. There was general agreement that there were major disadvantages in having an inquiry. Many of the people concerned with the case were now dead, and it was in the nature of security matters that relatively little was recorded in writing. Moreover, any inquiry would have to be held in private and so might be unable to satisfy Parliament and the press that the questions which they had been asking had been properly considered and answered.

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Finally, any inquiry was likely to encourage attacks on the security services, whose confidence would probably be seriously undermined. On the other hand, the pressure for an inquiry of some form was likely to go on growing, even if a full-scale debate took place, and we should probably find that there would be further revelations and allegations made in the press over the coming days and weeks which would reinforce the demand for some kind of investigation. The Government should therefore be ready to agree to establish an inquiry. In that event the investigation might best be conducted by Lord Diplock sitting alone. Such an inquiry would have to be held in secret and its report submitted to the Prime Minister. The Government would then have to decide what should be made public. But before final decisions were taken, the Home Secretary and the Attorney General should together consider further what form an inquiry might take and what its scope might be. The Prime Minister asked the Home Secretary to seek the views of the Lord Chancellor on the need for a debate and for an inquiry.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Bill Beckett (Law Officers' Department) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

CAW

J.A. Chilcot, Esq.,  
Home Office.

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