

Ref: A0704

MR. WHITMORE

I attach a revised version of the draft speech for the Prime Minister to make in the Blunt Debate tomorrow.

*Paragraph deleted and closed under
FOI Exemption. CWayland, 11 March 2014*

3. I have added in square brackets at the end of the passage a draft paragraph about Professor Blunt. The AttorneyGeneral has said that he thinks that it would be unwise for the Prime Minister to use this paragraph. It can be dropped without detriment to the structure of the speech.

4. I am sending copies of this revised version for the comments of those concerned.

*MAV.
RP*

(Robert Armstrong)

20th November 1979



~~history and society need not be regarded as incompatible with working in sensitive areas of the public service.~~ Perhaps, ~~too~~, standards were relaxed, ~~as we would now think misguidedly,~~ ^{because it was} at a time of considerable expansion and recruitment to deal with the wartime tasks of the Service, which were directed against Hitler's Germany.

5. For us today, the important question is: could it happen now? We have learned a great deal since 1940; and procedures are very different today. As the House knows, the positive vetting procedure was introduced after the war, by the Labour Government of the day. The Security Service quite rightly exercises the most special degree of care both in its arrangements for recruitment and in its vetting procedures. One learns not to use the word "never" in politics; but I can say with confidence that I do not believe that any one who shared what we now know to have been Professor Blunt's political views could be appointed to any post requiring regular access to classified information in any part of the public service, let alone to the Security Service.

6. During his period in the Security Service, from 1940 to 1945, Professor Blunt has said that he regularly passed to Russian intelligence anything that came his way which would be of interest to them. We do not know, of course, exactly what information he passed; we do know, however, to what information he had access by virtue of his duties. British interests were ~~no~~ doubt seriously damaged by his activities. ^{but} ~~It is however very~~ unlikely that British military operations ~~or British lives~~ were put at risk. ~~And I can assure the House~~ ^{if you like} that the story that he put the lives of secret agents in the Netherlands at risk is without foundation; he was never in the Special Operations Executive. ~~It is regrettable that that story was not properly checked out before it was published.~~

7. ~~From the time when he~~ left the Security Service in 1945 and resumed his career as an art historian, Professor Blunt ceased to have access to classified information. ~~He himself has said that from 1945 to 1951 he passed no information to the Russians.~~

8. In May 1951 an investigation which had continued for some years at last caught up with Donald Maclean. It was Philby who warned Burgess to tell Maclean that he was about to be interrogated; and Burgess used Blunt, a friend of long standing as well as a fellow agent, as a contact with a Soviet controller



to assist in the arrangements for Maclean's flight to Russia - a journey in which Burgess eventually joined him. On one occasion between 1951 and 1956, Blunt admits that he assisted Philby in contacting the Russian intelligence. He has said that he has had no contact with Russian intelligence since then.

9. The defection of Burgess and Maclean led to the initiation of intense, ~~wide-ranging~~ and prolonged investigations of the extent to which the security and other public services had been ~~penetrated~~ ^{infiltrated} by Russian intelligence. At an early stage in these investigations Professor Blunt came under inquiry ^{This was} as a result of information to the effect that Burgess had been heard in 1937 to say that he was working for a secret branch of the Comintern and that Blunt was one of his sources. Blunt denied this. Nevertheless he remained under suspicion, and became the subject of intense ⁱⁿ investigation. ~~As I said in my answer to the Hon. Member for the Hartlepoons,~~ he was interviewed on eleven occasions. He persisted in his denial, and no evidence against him was obtained. ~~Under his~~ ^{relating to an earlier period} ~~confession~~

10. It was early in 1964 that new information was received ^{relating to an earlier period} which directly implicated Blunt. I cannot disclose the nature of that information; ~~I can,~~ however, ^{but} say that it was not useable as evidence on which to base a prosecution. In this situation the security authorities were faced with a difficult choice:-

- (i) They could do nothing, and hope that further information of a kind which could be used as a basis for prosecuting Blunt would in due course be discovered.
- (ii) They could confront Professor Blunt with the new information, to see if it would break his denial. ^{But - add para 12 over page}
- (iii) ~~They could hope to secure not merely an admission of his own involvement but also his co-operation in their continuing investigations, by confronting him with the new information and, having obtained the authority of the Attorney General, offering him an immunity from prosecution.~~

11. ^{But} As to the first course, the security authorities had already pursued their inquiries for thirteen years without obtaining firm evidence against Blunt: there was no reason to expect or hope that a further wait would be likely to yield evidence of a kind which had eluded them so far.

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12. ~~As to the second course~~, Blunt had persisted in his denial at eleven interviews; the security authorities had no reason to suppose that he would do otherwise at a twelfth. If the security authorities confronted him with the new ~~information~~, and he ~~persisted~~ ^{still} in his denial, their investigation of him would be no further forward and they would be at risk of prejudicing other inquiries.

starting him

13. So they decided to ask the Attorney General, through the acting Director of Public Prosecutions, to authorise the offer to Blunt of immunity from prosecution, if he ~~confessed~~ ^{look} and agreed to co-operate in their further investigations.

14. I should like to pause for a moment on this question of granting immunity, because I think that there may remain some misunderstanding about it. There ~~is of course nothing unusual about a~~ ^{it is not} request ~~to~~ ^{to} the Attorney General ~~for~~ ^{to} authority ~~to offer~~ ^{to} immunity from prosecution in ~~exchange~~ ^{return} for co-operation in the pursuit of another inquiry. It ~~can and does~~ happen from time to time in the course of criminal investigations. The ~~decision is one which~~, under our constitutional arrangements, ~~is~~ ^{the decision} taken by the Attorney General in his capacity as a Law Officer, ~~not as a member of the Government~~. ^{He takes it on the basis of what he decides to do} The ~~decision must be~~ based on a balance of the public interest. He may consult his colleagues, ~~if he~~ thinks it desirable to do so, as to the various, usually conflicting, considerations of public interest which arise. But he ~~need not do so~~; and, if he does do so, he is not bound by their advice or views. ~~the decision is his alone.~~

in his view is best -

15. In this case the then Attorney General ^{Sir John Hobson} decided that it was in the public interest to offer an immunity from prosecution. ~~That was a decision he was entitled to take~~, and I think it can fairly be claimed that it was not in the ~~circumstances an unreasonable or irresponsible decision~~. Prosecution was not ~~then~~ and seemed unlikely to become, an available alternative; confrontation without an immunity was unlikely to produce a confession or willingness to co-operate in further inquiries; and to do nothing at all with the new information, after in effect waiting for thirteen years to get it, cannot have seemed an attractive prospect. ~~The fact is that there is not to this day~~ ^{there is no fresh} any evidence, ~~other~~ than Blunt's ~~confession~~, which could be used as a basis for prosecution

He has provided material in fact about Russian military and economic activities in connection with the Russian Revolution - Philby.

16. So the offer of immunity was made; Professor Blunt confessed; and both at the time and subsequently ~~he~~ has co-operated in the inquiries of the security authorities.

17. After the Attorney General's authority ~~had been given~~ ^{to} for the offer of immunity, The Queen's Private Secretary was invited to a meeting with the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Home Office and the Director General of the Security Service, ^{at which} ~~at which~~ he was told that Professor Blunt was suspected of having been an agent of Russian intelligence, ~~and was shortly to be invited to confess and to co-operate in the inquiries of the security authorities on the understanding that he would be granted immunity from prosecution.~~ ^{but that he provided he} ~~The point of telling~~ The Queen's Private Secretary was of course that Blunt held an ^{was called because} ~~appointment~~ ^{was said} in the Royal Household since 1945, and had been awarded a Knighthood in the Royal Victorian Order in 1956. The Queen's Private Secretary ~~therefore~~ ^{and} asked what action The Queen was advised to take. He was told that The Queen was advised to take no action, ~~and that it was not desirable that Blunt should be required to resign his appointment in the Royal Household or to forfeit his Knighthood.~~ Clearly it would have made little sense to secure Blunt's co-operation in continuing inquiries, by offering him immunity from prosecution, and then, by dismissing him from his post in the Royal Household and stripping him of his honour, not only to put that co-operation at risk, but also to prejudice other inquiries by alerting his former ^{Russian} controllers and other subjects still under investigation, ^{would have risked} ~~to the fact that he had confessed and could well be giving information.~~ ^{as well as those who were providing}

already under

18. I turn now to the question of informing Ministers. ~~Perhaps I could remind the House that~~ relations between the Security Service and Ministers are governed by the Directive given to the Director General by Sir David Maxwell Fyfe on 24th September 1952, which is reproduced in paragraph 238 of Lord Denning's Report ^{(Cmd 2152) of July 1963, para 238} on the Profumo Affair. As Lord Denning said, ^{when} discussing and endorsing the principles embodied in this Directive in a Report which was published only a few months before the event with which I am now dealing:

Lord Denning said



"The Head of the Security Service is responsible directly to the Home Secretary for the efficient and proper working of the Service and not in the ordinary way to the Prime Minister... The Head of the Security Service may approach the Prime Minister himself on matters of supreme importance and delicacy, but this is not to say that the Prime Minister has any direct responsibility for the Security Service... If the Director General of the Security Service is in any doubt as to any aspect of his duties - as, for instance, when he gets information about a Minister or a senior public servant indicating that he may be a security risk - he should consult the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary will then have to take responsibility for further action."

19. Mr. Speaker, I ^{can} ~~am able to~~ tell the House that in the ^{case of Prof. Blunt -} ~~affair in question~~ the Director General of the Security Service adhered scrupulously to the duties laid upon him. I have here in my possession a copy of two notes which he made at the time. ^{He had a meeting} ~~The first records a conversation which he had with the Home Secretary on 2nd March 1964, in the course of which he told the Home Secretary (having first spoken to his Permanent Secretary) about the new information implicating Blunt, and indicating that he would be discussing with the Director of Public Prosecutions how to ^{conduct} ~~handle~~ the interview with Blunt, given that the Security Service's interest lay in getting intelligence ^{as possible about} ~~rather than bringing a~~ ^{Soviet prosecution} ~~prosecution~~. The Home Secretary drew his attention to the need to inform The Queen's Private Secretary. ^{e/with notes on what he said} ~~The second note records a meeting which the Director General had with the Home Secretary and his Permanent Secretary on 17th June 1964,~~ in which he reported that Blunt had admitted spying for the Russians throughout the war when he was serving in the Security Service.~~

20. ~~These contemporary records clearly conflict with Lord Brooke's recollection of what he was told. I have naturally told him of this, and have arranged for him to see the records concerned. He has with characteristic honesty accepted that his recollection must have been at fault and that the records must be accepted as a true account of what he was told.~~

The Home Secretary ~~at the time~~ ^{has had the opportunity} of the day. Now Lord Brooke has had the opportunity to consult the ^{press} ~~records~~ ^{which record these meetings}.



The papers also show

21. ~~It has also been confirmed from the contemporary documents~~ that when the Attorney General took his decision to authorise the offer of immunity from prosecution he knew that the Home Secretary had been made aware of the matter.

22. There was therefore no failure on the part of the Security Service to carry out their duty to inform the Home Secretary of these matters. It was ^{for} the Home Secretary's responsibility to decide whether the Prime Minister should be informed. ~~To those who know Lord Brooke, a man of the most scrupulous integrity and conscientiousness, it would be surprising if he did not do so, even if neither of them now recollects that he did.~~ *There is no record on this particular point. Neither Lord Brooke nor Lord Home can recall anything like matter.*

23. In the light of these events I see no need to change the principles governing the relationships between the Security Service and Ministers, as set out in the Denning Report. I think it right, however, that there should be a clear understanding among all those concerned about how we expect those principles to be put into effect. I have accordingly agreed with my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Attorney General as follows:-

- (i) The Director General should report to the Home Secretary ^{when} ~~when~~ he ^{receives} ~~gets~~ information about a present or former Minister or senior public servant ^{indicating that he is or may be} ~~who may or may not have been~~ a security risk, unless circumstances are so exceptional that he judges it necessary to report direct to the Prime Minister.
- (ii) When the Director General has ~~so~~ reported to the Home Secretary, it is the Home Secretary's responsibility to inform the Prime Minister (or to make sure that he is informed) ~~and he should in every case do so unless there are absolutely overriding reasons why he should not.~~
- (iii) If the Attorney General is asked to authorise a grant of immunity from prosecution in a case involving national security, he should satisfy himself that the Home Secretary is aware that the request has been made, and ^{that he} ~~has~~ had an opportunity to express ^{his} ~~any~~ view ^{as to what he} ~~which he may wish to express~~ upon the balance of public interest ^{involved.} In cases of especial doubt or difficulty the Attorney General or the Home Secretary, or both, may wish to see



that the Prime Minister is given a similar opportunity. ~~The Attorney General and the Home Secretary should always be informed when an offer of immunity, has been made and what the outcome is, it is the responsibility of the Home Secretary to decide whether the Prime Minister needs to be informed, with the assumption that that should be done unless there is good reason to the contrary.~~

~~I hope and believe that that is what would happen nowadays. By formulating it in that way and telling the House that I have done so, I hope that I have ensured that in future that is what will happen.~~

24. ~~Successive Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries since the change of Government in 1964 have all been informed about the position. I have not of course seen the submission made to my predecessors, nor do I know what their reactions were. I am not responsible and will not try to answer for what they did or did not do. If, however, I may speak from my own experience when this was first put to me soon after taking office, one was not being presented with a new situation which required a new decision. One was being presented with an existing state of affairs, and what one had to consider was whether there was good reason - some change in the circumstances, for instance - which required one to consider taking a different decision from that which, evidently, one's predecessors had taken. It is clear that my predecessors thought it right not to bring about a change in the situation which was presented to them. What has led me to take a different decision now has of course been a change in the circumstances: the publication of Mr. Andrew Boyle's book, and the subsequent naming of Professor Blunt, which has destroyed the benefits for continuing investigations of continuing to live with the situation created by the decisions reached in 1964.~~

25. ~~As I indicated in my statement, the matter was brought to the attention of successive Attorneys-General in 1972, June 1974 and June 1979. This was for the purpose of informing them of the immunity that had been given and to seek their agreement about the legal position in respect of the confession which had been obtained. As to other evidence, apart from the confession, none was, and to this day none is, available. There are matters however which my right Hon. and Learned Friend the Attorney General will deal with later in the debate.~~



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26. It has been suggested that I should not have given authority for Professor Blunt's legal adviser, to be warned the day before that I was going to make the statement I made in answer to the Hon. Member for the Hartlepool. I do not understand this. Had there been any question of prosecuting Blunt, of course there would have been no advance ^{notice} warning - and, ^{indeed as intended} come to that, probably ^{no statement either.} As it was, since there was no question of prosecution, there was no question of enabling Blunt to escape justice.. It was surely a matter of elementary consideration to enable his legal adviser to prepare Professor Blunt, who is now elderly and not in good health, and who has after all co-operated with the security authorities in their inquiries, for what would without warning have been an unexpected and severe shock.

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27. It has been alleged that Professor Blunt was given an unofficial tip-off, some hours before the official warning to his legal adviser, to enable him to pack his bags and flee the country. That is of course nonsense, as can be seen from the fact that he has not fled the country and says he has no intention of doing so.

28. Mr. Speaker, what are the questions to which we in Parliament should now be addressing our minds in the light of this ^{case} affair? They are surely these:
(i) Have the investigations into Russian intelligence penetration of our public services been as thorough and as effective as we should wish them to be?
(ii) Have the necessary changes been made, so as to safeguard against repetitions of what went wrong?

29. I have myself received reports of the investigations that were ^{followed} started after the defection of Burgess and Maclean and have continued ever since. I can assure the House that they have indeed been extremely thorough. They have looked closely and deeply into the position of all those who have at any time been named in connection with this affair. Of those who have been looked at, many are now dead. Many others have left the public service, either on or before retirement. There is nobody remaining in the public service who is still under suspicion. Of course it is not absolutely impossible even now that some information may in the future come to light which implicates someone who has



not so far been or is not now under suspicion; but it is by now very unlikely, and I do not believe that the only sort of inquiry that would be possible would make it any more likely.

30. Clearly the public services ^{we} ~~remains~~ an attractive target for Soviet penetration, and the Security Service especially so. The Service is very conscious of that ^{danger.} indeed, in the light of all that has happened it ~~is desirable~~ and not at all surprising that it should be. Procedures for recruitment, vetting and monitoring members of the public services who have ~~or are likely to have~~ access to classified information have been much extended and improved. I must not say that these precautions are guaranteed 100 per cent proof against penetration; ^{of course nothing can be absolute} I will say that I think that they ^{in a democratic society, it is always} come as near to that as is reasonable to expect if we are to retain the standards of a liberal, humane and democratic society. ^{possible that there will be use freedom to discuss freely - we must do everything we can to prevent}

31. There is one other point which I should make. I am well aware that at least some of those who have been critical of some aspects of the way in which they thought this affair has been dealt with are motivated not by a desire to make sure that the lessons of the past are applied to the improvement of security for the future, but by a desire to expose the security authorities to sniping attack, to undermine their morale, to divert their attention from their main task, and thus to reduce both the effectiveness of the security authorities and the protection of the country from the threats of espionage and subversion. ^{We must}

32. Because the Security Service has by its nature to operate in secret and cannot defend itself, it is vulnerable to that sort of ill-intentioned and ill-founded criticism, sometimes from people who should know better. It is of course the duty of Ministers to satisfy themselves that the Security Service operates both efficiently and scrupulously within the letter and spirit of its Directive. My Right Hon. Friend, the Home Secretary and I accept that duty and we are accountable to this House for the discharge of that duty. We also have a duty to protect the Security Service's morale and effectiveness, and to defend it from unfounded or ill-intentioned criticism.

33. The Service has been the subject of a certain amount of attack in recent years. The last case I remember was in the summer of 1977. That caused my predecessor to look into the allegations that were made, and to issue a statement on 23rd August 1977 to say that he was satisfied that the allegations were



unfounded and to express his confidence in the Service. I am glad to be able to express my confidence in it. I believe that it does a difficult job, and a job of great importance for the preservation of our democratic society from the risks of espionage and subversion, with a high degree of professional skill and competence, and a proper sense of professional dedication which avoids the obvious dangers of improper excess of zeal. So long as it continues to satisfy me that it is conducting itself in that manner, it can count on my support.

34. Mr. Speaker, there is one final point I should like to make before I sit down. It is this. Nothing can excuse Professor Blunt's disloyalty to his country in the now fairly distant past. It is true that he has for many years been protected from its consequences; but he has had to live with himself and his knowledge of it; now he has to live with the public disgrace. But he confessed what he did; co-operated in the inquiries of the security authorities; unlike some of those who were associated with him in his disloyalty, he has not run away; and he has made it clear that he wishes to stay in this country and follow his calling, in which he is a man of unchallengeable distinction who has given much and has more to give. Without wishing to excuse what he did in the past, his present conduct seems to me to be courageous and dignified. I commend to the House the thought that, once the hysteria that we have seen these last few days has subsided, he should be left in peace to get on with his work.

MR. WHITMORE

I attach notes for the Prime Minister's speech in any Parliamentary debate there may be on the Blunt affair. They are, I know, too long; but they may serve as a quarry from which she can draw the material she needs.

If the Prime Minister agrees, I should like to circulate copies of the draft for comments tomorrow morning to those whose comments will be needed.

Robert Armstrong

18 November 1979

Mr. Speaker, the statement that I made about the case of Professor Blunt on 15 November in reply to the Hon. Gentleman the Member for the Hartlepoons was a very full one - unusually so, if I may be allowed to say so, for a statement on security matters. I make no apology for that. As events had turned out, I thought that the House was entitled to as full an account of the matter as I could give. That means that, for various reasons which will become clear in the course of my speech this evening, there is not a lot which I can add to that account. I hope, however, to deal with some of the questions to which it has given rise.

2. Some here said that I should have chosen to give my account as an oral statement. The fact was that the Hon. Gentleman had put down a Question for Priority Written Answer. I had no wish to duck or postpone an answer. As the House will recall, we had important statements from the Despatch Box on Wednesday and Tuesday last week. Moreover what I had to say on the Blunt case was long and detailed, and perhaps easier for Hon. Members to apprehend from a written text than from an oral statement. In the circumstances it seemed to me that I should not be lacking in courtesy or respect to the House if I gave my statement as a Written Answer to the Hon. Gentleman's Question. I was of course well aware that Hon. Members would have plenty of opportunities to ask me supplementary questions, either on the Order Paper, or when I answer Oral Questions, or in a debate, if one were to be arranged.

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3. As I said in my answer, Professor Blunt admitted that he had been recruited by Russian Intelligence when he was a don at Cambridge before the war. Only he could tell us why he allowed himself to be recruited, and I do not propose to take the time of the House in speculating about the reasons: that would take us deep into questions of psychology and social history. As we know, he was not the only man of that generation at Cambridge who not only avowed Marxist views but also persuaded himself or was persuaded to become an agent of Russian intelligence.

4. Then in 1940 he joined the Security Service. To us today it seems extraordinary that a man who had made no secret of his Marxist beliefs could have been accepted for secret work in any part of the public service, let alone the Security Service. But that is with the benefit of hindsight. Perhaps it was easier then than now to believe that the espousal of the Marxist interpretation of history and society need not be inconsistent with loyalty to one's country. Perhaps, too, standards were, misguidedly, relaxed at a time of considerable expansion and recruitment to deal with the wartime tasks of the Service.

5. For us today, the important question is: could it happen now? We have learned a great deal since 1940; and procedures are very different today. As the House knows, the positive vetting procedure was introduced after the war, by the Labour Government of the day. The Security Service quite rightly exercises the most special degree of care both in its arrangements for recruitment and in its vetting procedures. One learns not to use the word "never" in politics;

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But I can say with confidence that I do not believe that any one who shared what we now know to have been Professor Blunt's political views and personal tendencies could be appointed to any post requiring regular access to classified information in any part of the public service, let alone to the Security Service.

6. During his period in the Security Service, from 1940 to 1948⁵, Professor Blunt has said that he regularly passed to Russian intelligence anything that came his way which would be of interest to them. We do not know, of course, exactly what information he passed; we do know, however, to what information he had access by virtue of his duties. British interests must have been seriously damaged by his activities. But it^{is} perhaps of some comfort to think - though it in no way excuses his conduct - that it is very unlikely that British military operations or British lives were put at risk. And I can assure the House that the story that he put the lives of Dutch secret agents at risk is without foundation; he was never in the Special Operations Executive. That was a straight case of mistaken identity.

7. From the time when he left the Security Service in 1945 and resumed his career as an art historian, Professor Blunt ceased to have access to classified information and ceased to be a current security risk. He has said that he engaged in no activity with or for Russian intelligence on his own account, between 1945 and 1951, though he had occasional meetings with Russian intelligence officers between 1945 and 1947, when he acted as a courier for Burgess. We have no reason to disbelieve these statements.

8. In May 1951 an investigation which had continued for some years at last caught up with Donald Maclean. We believe that it was Philby who warned Burgess to tell Maclean that he was about to be interrogated; and that Burgess used Blunt, a friend of long standing as well as a fellow agent, as a contact with a Soviet controller to assist in the arrangements for Maclean's flight to Russia - a journey in which Burgess eventually joined him. On one occasion between 1951 and 1956, he assisted Philby in contacting the Russian intelligence. He has said that he has had no contact with Russian intelligence since then; we have no reason to disbelieve him.

9. The defection of Burgess and Maclean led to the initiation of intense, wide-ranging and prolonged investigations of the extent to which the security and other public services had been penetrated by Russian intelligence - investigations which continue to this day. At an early stage in these investigations Professor Blunt came under inquiry, as a result of information to the effect that Burgess had been heard in 1937 to say that he was working for a secret branch of the Comintern and that Blunt was one of his sources. Blunt denied this, adding that he had understood that Burgess was an agent of British intelligence, and in that belief had given him some assistance. Nevertheless Blunt remained under suspicion, and became the subject of intense investigation. As I said in my answer to the Hon. Member for the Hartlepoons, he was interviewed on eleven occasions. He persisted in his denial, and no evidence against him was obtained.

10. It was in March 1964 that new information was received which directly implicated Blunt. I cannot disclose the nature of that information; I can, however, say that it was not useable as evidence on which to base a prosecution. In this situation the security authorities were faced with a difficult choice:

- (1) they could do nothing, and hope that further information would in due course be discovered to corroborate what they had received;
- (2) they could confront Professor Blunt with the new information, to see if it would break his denial;
- (3) they could hope to secure not merely an admission of his own involvement but also his co-operation in their continuing investigations, by confronting him with the new information and offering him an immunity from prosecution.

11. As to the first course, the security authorities had already pursued their inquiries for thirteen years without obtaining firm evidence to justify their suspicions of Blunt: there was no reason to expect or hope that a further wait would be likely to yield evidence of a kind which had eluded them so far.

12. As to the second course, Blunt had persisted in his denial at eleven interviews; there was no reason to suppose that he would do otherwise at a twelfth. If the security authorities confronted him with the new information, and he persisted in his

denial, their investigation of him would be no further forward and they would be at risk of prejudicing other inquiries.

13. So they decided to ask the Attorney General, through the acting Director of Public Prosecutions, to authorise them to offer Blunt immunity from prosecution, if he confessed and agreed to co-operate in their further investigations.

14. There is of course nothing unprecedented about a request to the Attorney General for authority to offer immunity from prosecution in exchange for co-operation in the pursuit of another inquiry. It can and does happen, not infrequently, in the course of continued investigations. The decision is one which, under our constitutional arrangements, is taken by the Attorney General in his capacity as a Law Officer, not as a member of the Government. The decision must be based on a balance of the public interest, and he may consult his colleagues, if he thinks it desirable to do so, as to the various, usually conflicting, considerations of public interest which arise. But he need not do so; and, if he does do so, he is not bound by their advice or views: the decision is his alone.

15. In this case the then Attorney General decided that it was in the public interest to offer an immunity from prosecution.

X { His reasons for so deciding were not recorded; but } whether or not with the benefit of hindsight one agrees that it was the right decision, it was a decision he was entitled to take, and I think it can fairly be claimed that it was not in the circumstances an unreasonable or irresponsible decision. Prosecution was not

then and seemed unlikely to become, an available alternative; confrontation without an immunity was unlikely to produce a confession or willingness to co-operate in further inquiries; and to do nothing at all with the new information, after in effect waiting for thirteen years to get it, cannot have seemed an attractive prospect.

16. So the offer of immunity was made; Professor Blunt confessed; and both at the time and subsequently has co-operated in the inquiries of the security authorities.

17. The Queen's Private Secretary was told that Professor Blunt had confessed to having been an agent of Russian intelligence. Blunt was not required to resign his appointment in the Royal Household, and he retained the Knighthood in the Victoria Order which had been conferred on him. It has been suggested that this was a wrong decision, but I do not think that, viewed in the circumstances of the time, it was an unreasonable decision to have taken: it would have made little sense to secure Blunt's co-operation in continuing inquiries by offering him immunity from prosecution, and then, by dismissing him from his post and stripping him of his honour, not only to put that co-operation at risk, but also to prejudice other inquiries by alerting his former controllers and other subjects still under investigation to the fact that he had confessed and could well be giving information.

18. If the matter had been put to the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary of the day, they might well have approved that decision, and I do not think that they would have been wrong to do so. But -

/ and here I

and here I come to what is for me the most inexplicable aspect of the whole affair - it appears that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were not informed either that he was to be offered immunity or that, as a result of the offer, Blunt was revealed as a self-confessed spy. What is more, as far as we know, the Attorney General was not told of Blunt's confession.

19. As I say, I find it very difficult to account for this. I do not suppose that we shall ever get to the bottom of it. I can assure the House that there are no records which throw any light on the matter. Of course in dealing with security matters many matters are, quite rightly, not put in writing; and of course ^{some of} those principally concerned are dead. But there is nothing in the record which remotely suggests that there was a deliberate decision to hide the facts from Ministers. Such a decision, if taken for discreditable reasons, would have entailed in effect a conspiracy, because there were of course a number of people who knew. Those who knew Sir John Hobson, as I did myself, know him to have been a scrupulous and honourable man: it is not credible that he should have lent himself to a plot to keep information from his Prime Minister. Moreover a decision by the head of the Security Service to pursue a policy of deliberate concealment for discreditable reasons would have been incredibly foolish, because a moment's thought would have been enough to show that it would be bound to come out sooner or later, and perhaps quite soon.

20. It was not as if Ministers were uninterested in these matters. The defection of Philby had revived interest in the investigations which began after the defection of Burgess and Maclean. It is on the record that the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Attorney General were among those present at a meeting very early in 1964, before the information implicating Blunt was received, at which they were briefed about the range and progress of the investigations. I understand that Lord Brooke has now said that Blunt's name (though not the decision to offer him immunity) was probably mentioned to him in the course of general conversations with the Director General of the Security Service. If he had been told of the suspicions, what was to be gained by suppressing the fact?

21. So, if one accepts the theory of deliberate and ill-intentioned concealment, one has to accept the hypothesis that those concerned were not only deliberately and dishonestly failing in their duty but were also very foolish. I suppose it is possible; I do not think it is very likely.

22. What other explanation can there be? I suppose that there could have been a judgment but, in order to avoid the risk of compromising Blunt's co-operation, knowledge of his confession should be strictly confined to those who really needed to know, and that did not include Ministers. That would in my view have been an error of judgment, but it would at least be understandable and not dishonourable. Or it could, I suppose, have been muddle: everyone of those concerned might have assumed that someone else would inform Ministers, and for some reason nobody checked to see if it had been done. One could speculate endlessly: I do not believe we shall ever know. All that I can say

/is that,

is that, if it was (as I believe) not a matter of deliberate and ill-intentioned concealment, then it was one of considerable misjudgment or negligence.

23. Once again, the important question for us today is: could the same thing happen today? I can assure the House that all of those concerned have learnt a great deal from the lessons of these events. Procedures both inside the Security Service and in its relations with Ministers have been reviewed and tightened.

24. I understand that since those days successive Prime Ministers have all taken a close interest in their responsibilities for security and for the affairs of the Security Service. Certainly I am doing so myself.

25. The relationship between the Home Secretary of the day and the Security Service has also become much closer: not only does the Home Secretary of course deal personally with all applications for letter or telephone interceptions, whether from the Security Service or the police, but he also receives regular and frequent reports and briefings from the Director General. My understanding is that this was no less true of my Right Hon. Friend's predecessor than it is of himself.

26. The present Director General, most of whose career has of course been spent in another public service, has done a great deal, building on foundations laid by his predecessor, to improve the Service's awareness of the political dimensions of its work, while of course maintaining both its technical efficiency and its tradition of operating strictly within its directive. /I have myself interviewed the

/Director General

Director General again in the last few days, and I believe I can state with assurance that it is exceedingly unlikely that the failure to inform Ministers in 1964 would be repeated today.

27. As I have said, The Queen's Private Secretary was informed in April 1964. It has been suggested that The Queen may not have been informed. Clearly she was not informed by her Prime Minister, if he did not himself know. I cannot say whether she was informed by her Private Secretary, or by subsequent Prime Ministers: I would not ask or expect either The Queen or any of those gentlemen to breach the strict confidence which governs communications between The Queen and her Private Secretaries and between The Queen and her Prime Ministers

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Wayland, 11 March 2014

28. I understand that successive Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries since October 1964 have all been informed about the position. I have not of course seen the submissions made to my predecessors, not do I know what their reactions were. I am not responsible and will not try to answer for what they did or did not do. If, however, I may speak from my own experience when this was first put to me soon after taking office, one was not being presented with an existing state of affairs, and what one had to consider was whether there was good reason for some change in the circumstances, for instance - which required one to consider taking a different decision from that which, evidently, one's predecessors had taken. It is clear that, for whatever reason, my predecessors chose not to precipitate a denouement. What has led me to take a different decision now has of course been just such a change

/of circumstances:

of circumstances: the publication of Mr. Andrew Boyle's book, and the subsequent naming of Professor Blunt, which has destroyed the potential benefits for continuing investigations and continuing to live with the situation created by the decisions reached in 1964.

29. As I indicated in my statement, the matter has been reviewed by successive Attorneys-General in 1972, June 1974 and June 1979. These reviews were not for the purpose of considering whether to go back on the offer of immunity. That offer had been made on certain conditions which were accepted and honoured, and were by that nature irrevocable. It is not possible to go back on that. The only purpose of the reviews was to consider whether there was any new evidence, not obtained directly from or as a result of the confession, which could be used as a basis for a prosecution without reference to the confession. On every occasion the conclusion has been that there is no such evidence.

30. It has been suggested that I should not have given authority for Professor Blunt's legal adviser to be ^{named} ~~named~~ the day before ^{but} ~~but~~ I was going to make the statement I made in answer to the Hon. Member for the Hartlepoons. I do not understand this. Had there been any question of prosecuting Blunt, of course there would have been no advance warning and, come to that, probably no statement either. As it was, since there was no question of prosecution, there was no question of enabling Blunt to escape justice. It was surely a matter of common courtesy and consideration to enable his legal adviser to prepare Professor Blunt, who is now elderly and not in good health, and who has after all co-operated with the security authorities in their inquiries for the last fifteen years, for what would without warning have been an unexpected and severe shock.

/31. It has

1. It has been alleged that Professor Blunt was given an unofficial tip-off, some hours before the official warning to his legal adviser, which enabled him to pack his bags and flee the country. That is of course nonsense, as can be seen from the fact that he has not fled the country and apparently stayed in London until after I had made my statement.

32. Mr. Speaker, the Government has carefully considered the suggestion that there should be some kind of inquiry into all these matters. I understand and respect the reasons for that suggestion. But we do not think it right or necessary to act on it. In coming to this decision we have had three considerations very much in mind:

(1) As I have indicated, in dealing with security many matters are, quite rightly, not committed to writing. As a result, the written records do not provide anything like a complete or balanced picture.

(2) Many of those principally concerned are dead. Others are getting on in years, and over such a long period memories are inevitably fallible and selective.

(3) Because of the nature of the material, the inquiry would have to be held in private, and would be unable to disclose much of the evidence on which its conclusions were based.

33. The main purpose of an inquiry would be to apply an independent and judicious mind or set of minds to two questions:

/(1) Have the

(1) Have the investigations into Russian intelligence penetration of our public services been as thorough and as effective as we should wish them to be?

(2) Have the necessary changes been made, so as to safeguard against repetitions of what went wrong?

34. I have myself received reports of the investigations that were started after the defection of Burgess and Maclean and have continued ever since. I can assure the House that they have indeed been extremely thorough. They have looked into the position of a considerable number of people. Of those who have been looked at, some are dead, and many others have left the public service, either on or before retirement. Those few who after so many years, still remain in the public service have all been cleared. There is nobody remaining in the public service who is still under suspicion. Of course it is not absolutely impossible even now that some information may in the future come to light which implicates someone who has not so far been or is not now under suspicion; but it is by now very unlikely, and I do not believe that the only sort of inquiry that would be possible would make it any more likely.

35. Clearly the Security Service remains an attractive target for Soviet penetration. The Service is very conscious of that: indeed, in the light of all that has happened it is desirable and not at all surprising that it should be. Procedures for recruitment, vetting and monitoring members of the Security Service have been much extended and improved. I must not say that these precautions are guaranteed 100 per cent proof against penetration; I will say that I think that they come as near to that as is reasonable to expect if we are to retain the standards of a liberal, humane and democratic society.

36. And, as I have already said, I am satisfied that both procedures and attitudes have changed so markedly since 1964 as to make it in the highest degree unlikely that there could be a failure to inform Ministers of a development so important as the confession of someone who had acted as an agent for Russian Intelligence.

37. There is one other point which I should make before I leave this question of an inquiry. I am well aware that at least some of those who suggest an inquiry are motivated not by a desire to make sure that the lessons of the past are applied to the improvement of security for the future, but by a desire to expose the security authorities to sniping attack, undermine their morale, divert their attention from their main task, and thus reduce both the effectiveness of the security authorities and the protection of the country from the threats of espionage and subversion.

38. Because the Security Service has by its nature to operate in secret and cannot defend itself, it is vulnerable to that sort of ill-intentioned and ill-founded criticism, sometimes from people who should know better. It is of course the duty of Ministers to satisfy themselves that the Security Service operates both efficiently and scrupulously within the letter and spirit of its directive. My Right Hon. Friend, the Home Secretary and I accept that duty. We also have a duty to protect the Security Service's morale and effectiveness. For that reason I should not wish to subject it to an inquiry of the kind suggested, unless I was satisfied - as I am not - that such an inquiry was necessary and would serve some useful purpose of security.

39. The Service has been the subject of a certain amount of attack in recent years. The last case I remember was in the summer of 1977. That caused my predecessor to look into the allegations that were made, and to issue a statement on 23 August 1977 to say that he was satisfied that the allegations were unfounded and to express his confidence in the Service. I am glad to be able to express my confidence in it. I believe that it does a difficult job, and a job of great importance for the preservation of our democratic society from the risks of espionage and subversion, with a high degree of professional skill and competence, and a proper sense of professional dedication which avoids the obvious dangers of improper excess of zeal. So long as it continues to satisfy me that it is conducting itself in that manner, it can count on my support.

40. Mr. Speaker, there is one final point I should like to make before I sit down. It is this. Nothing can excuse Professor Blunt's disloyalty to his country in the now fairly distant past. It is true that he has for many years been protected from its consequences; but he has had to live with himself and his knowledge of it; now, now he has to live with the public disgrace. But he has made a full confession of what he did; he has continued to co-operate in the inquiries of the security authorities; unlike some of those who were associated with him in his disloyalty, he has not run away; and he has made it clear that he wishes to stay in this country and follow his calling, in which he is a man of unchallengeable distinction who has given much and has more to give. Without wishing to excuse what he did in the past, his present conduct seems to me to be courageous and dignified. I commend to the House the thought that, once the hysteria that we have seen these last few days has subsided, he should be left in peace to get on with his work.



From the Secretary of the Cabinet

Mr Whitman

Sir Robert Armstrong is correct.

He understands that the P.M.
may feel bound to use A3 if
asked a direct Question. There
would however be much to be
said for keeping this for the
debate.

M.V.

27.

Sir Robert Armstrong

NOTE OF POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARIES AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS

This is a consolidated and numbered list of supplementaries. The formal Minister will have it by his own questions this afternoon, though you are hoping to deal with supplementaries by reference to the debate tomorrow. Only Q3 + Q8 are read: the answers are heard on your days. The new information that the Home Secretary's involvement. Are you content? full 20th

"Cover-up"

Q1. Why has there been a "cover-up" of this matter until it was brought out into the open by publication of the book?
A. I can only answer for the situation as I found it. But immunity was given to Blunt and he has since been a source of useful information; the Government could hardly therefore take the initiative in exposing him. Others who knew or suspected were no doubt deterred by the risk of proceedings for libel.

Q2. [Any questions about why Ministers or others did or did not act in the manner they did?]

A. The statement gives an account of what happened. I cannot answer for the reasons for what was done or not done under previous Administrations.

Q3. Which Ministers knew about Blunt's confession?

A. The Home Secretary was told at the time of the confession, but there is no evidence to show that the Prime Minister, now Lord Home, was informed. Since October 1964 I understand that successive Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries have all been told of the position.

Q4. Was Blunt protected by former colleagues in the Security Service?

A. Colleagues of Blunt who were interrogated in the course of investigations to which I have referred co-operated fully.

Q5. Is it not the fact that Goronwy Rees informed the authorities in 1951 that Burgess had told him that Blunt was a Russian agent? Why was no action taken at the time?

A. Mr. Rees was the source of the allegation made to the Security Service in 1951 that Burgess had said that Blunt was one of the sources used by Burgess for his work for the Comintern. That allegation was thoroughly examined in the course of the prolonged investigation of Blunt from 1951 onwards, but, as I have said, no supporting evidence was obtained until Blunt confessed in 1964.

Q6. Why was Corporal Berry prosecuted and Blunt not?

A. Decisions to prosecute are for the Attorney General. But I would remind the hon. Gentleman that there has never been any evidence which would sustain a charge against Blunt, other than his own confession which was obtained on a promise of immunity from prosecution.

The Palace

Q7. Was the Palace informed about Blunt's record?

A. The Queen's Private Secretary was informed in 1964,

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Q8. Was The Queen told in 1964?

A. Communications between The Queen and Her Private Secretary are always a matter of strict confidence.

Q9. Why was Blunt allowed to continue to hold a post in the Royal Household after his past relationship with the Russian Intelligence Service was known?

A. Blunt's position in the Royal Household, which was unpaid, involved no access to classified information and no risk to security. Following a promise of immunity from prosecution he had confessed and co-operated with his interrogators. The security authorities felt that it was desirable to avoid taking any action which might have put at risk his willingness to continue to provide useful information.

Q10. Why did the Government of the day not tell Buckingham Palace about their suspicions and interrogations between 1951 and 1964?

A. I cannot answer for previous Administrations. Knowledge of these suspicions was in fact confined to a very few people in the security authorities; wider dissemination could presumably have put at risk their investigations. As my reply of 15 November to the hon. Member for Hartlepool made clear, Blunt had no access to classified information and was not a security risk after 1945. It is in any case questionable whether it would have been right to disseminate or act upon suspicions which could not be proved and had been strenuously denied.

The Confession

Q11. What was the nature of the new information that provoked Blunt's confession?

A. This cannot be disclosed.

Q12. Did Blunt confess to recruiting other spies for the Russians or did he name any others whom he knew to be Russian agents?

A. As I have said in my statement, in addition to making his confession, Blunt has co-operated with subsequent interrogations and has provided useful information, which has made it possible to take action to remove some possible security risks. There was, however, nothing which could be used as evidence for the purposes of bringing charges. It would not be in the public interest for me to go into detail on this.

Q13. Was Blunt the "Fourth Man"?

A. Let me put it this way: like Burgess, Maclean and Philby, he was a Russian spy.

Q14. How did this case differ from the case of George Blake, where the evidence against him was based on his confession?

A. Blake's confession was not induced by an offer of immunity from prosecution. There was not thought anything to be gained by such an offer in that case.

Q15. Why was the case of Blunt never referred to the Security Commission?

A. I cannot answer for previous Administrations. But it has to be remembered that Blunt did not confess until 1964, nearly twenty years after he left the Security Service. Security procedures in all the relevant services had already been extensively reviewed and overhauled in the light of the defections of Burgess and Maclean, and later of Philby, and there would have been little point in a further review of events and procedures of twenty years or more earlier. It could also have been considered that a reference to the Security Commission would be likely to frustrate the main objective of granting Blunt immunity and securing a confession: that of getting from him as much information as possible to assist other inquiries with which the Security Service was concerned.

/The overriding

The overriding consideration was the need to discover as much as possible about the extent of RIS penetration. For this Blunt's co-operation was indispensable.

Blunt's Activities

Q16. What kind of material did Blunt pass to the Russians as a member of the Security Service from 1940 to 1945?

A. The information to which Blunt had access in the course of his duties in the Security Service was not such as would, if disclosed to the Russians, have been likely to prejudice British military interests or to have put British lives at risk.

Q17. Was it Blunt's help that enabled Burgess and Maclean to defect before Maclean could be interrogated?

A. No. It was Philby's warning that led Burgess and Maclean to defect when they did, though Blunt assisted in the arrangements through his old contacts with Russian intelligence.

Q18. Did Blunt use information obtained from the Security Service to warn Burgess and Maclean?

A. No. The evidence is that Burgess told Blunt that Maclean was under suspicion.

Q19. Did Blunt help Philby to defect?

A. No.

Q20. When did Blunt cease to be a Russian spy?

A. Blunt has said that he has had no contacts with the Russians since 1956. We have no information to the contrary.

Q21. What criminal offences did Blunt commit?

A. That is not for me to say. Only a Court of Law could decide; and the authorities are constrained from preferring any charges in view of the immunity which was granted.

/ Blunt's Circle

Blunt's Circle

Q22. Did Blunt occupy a flat with Lord Rothschild during the War?

A. He lived during the war with others in a flat of which the lease was held by Lord Rothschild. Lord Rothschild was not himself living in the flat during that period.

Q.23. Did Burgess, the present Lady Rothschild and Lady Llewelyn-Davies share this flat with Blunt?

A. Yes. Both Lady Rothschild and Lady Llewelyn-Davies have given the security authorities an account of their acquaintance with Blunt and Burgess, and have co-operated fully in investigations.

The Fifth Man

Q24. Does the Government accept the identification of the "Fifth Man" suggested in Boyle's book?

A. We have no evidence to support any allegation that Dr. Wilfred Mann behaved as "Basil" is said to have done, and we have no reason to doubt the truth of Dr. Mann's reported statement to the Press that the allegation is without foundation.

Q25. Is it true that a senior British Government official stationed in Washington, having spied for the Russians, was detected by the CIA and "turned" by them into a double agent for the CIA, without the knowledge of the British authorities?

A. No. We are satisfied that there is no truth in any part of this allegation.

Q26. Have the United States authorities been consulted about the allegations about "Basil" [the Fifth man]?

A. In such matters we do not comment on our exchanges with foreign authorities.