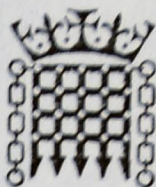


FROM DENNIS CANAVAN MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

9

22 November 1979

HM The Queen
Buckingham Palace
London

Your Majesty

As you can see from the enclosed extracts from the official Parliamentary Report, I and several other members of the House of Commons have tried in vain to obtain a simple unequivocal answer to a question which we have put to several Ministers and ex-Ministers, including the Prime Minister herself, namely whether you were informed in 1964 of Mr Anthony Blunt's confession.

I am sure that you appreciate the great public concern about the fact that a self-confessed traitor not only continued to be a senior member of the Royal household but actually received another Royal appointment in 1972.

In Parliament, it has been stated that the Home Secretary at the time was informed and successive Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries since 1967 were informed. It has also been stated that your Private Secretary was informed and that "The Palace" was informed.

I would be most grateful if you would clarify this matter by letting the public know whether you personally were informed and, if so, when you were informed.

Yours faithfully

Dennis Canavan

Dennis Canavan MP

28 NOV 1979

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Published Papers

The following published paper enclosed on this file has been removed and destroyed. Copies may be found elsewhere in The National Archives.

House of Commons Hansard, 21 November 1979,
Columns 402-520 "Mr Anthony Blunt"

Signed Wayland Date 11 March 2014

PREM Records Team

9

23rd November, 1979.

I am commanded by The Queen to thank you for your letter of 22nd November, 1979. The Attorney-General explained in the House of Commons on Wednesday 21st November (Hansard Column 516) the position in relation to communications between Her Majesty and her Private Secretary, and there is nothing which I can add to that statement.

SIR PHILIP MOORE

Dennis Canavan, Esq., MP.

DEPARTMENT/SERIES <i>PREM 19</i> PIECE/ITEM <i>120</i> (one piece/item number)	Date and sign
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Security

MS
23/11

Parliament by ANDREW ALEXANDER



THE AFTERMATH of the Commons debate on the Blunt affair turned out to be a tense and bad-tempered ten minutes in the House yesterday when it looked as if Mr Speaker Thomas and certain Labour Left Wingers were in for a showdown.

The row, however, was not about spies but parliamentary procedure.

The easy way to explain or skate round it would be simply to say that there was a procedural muddle on Wednesday night and that Labour back-benchers who wanted a vote on the Government's handling of the Blunt affair were ignored by the Speaker.

However, for those who would like to know the fuller, unabridged, ever-so-slightly technical version, here goes:

The debate on the Blunt affair took place, for procedural reasons on a Government motion to adjourn the House. (But it did not actually want to adjourn the House, you must understand).

To the alarm of some Labour back-benchers, the Government minister winding up the debate had shown no inclination to sit down as the clock crept towards 10 o'clock which is the hour when motions turn into, so to speak, procedural pumpkins and automatically fail.

So Mr Willie Hamilton, Labour MP for Central Fife, had jumped up at 9.59½ p.m. and moved 'that the question be now put'.

Embarrassed

The Speaker duly put the question (that the question be now put); and when the question was agreed to without dissent, proceeded to the main question (that the House do now adjourn). Are you with me? The Speaker proceeded to the usual formula: 'As many as are of that opinion say Aye'. The Labour back-benchers looked suddenly bewildered. It was a Government motion, so presumably you shouted Aye to oppose the Government. On the other hand, perhaps the Government did not actually want to pass its own motion since there was still another small debate to come.

So the Speaker's query was greeted from the Labour back benches with a mixture of 'Aye', 'No' and even 'Search me'. Since the Government side seemed to be in a state of almost equal confusion, the Speaker said he would start all over again.

'As many as are of that opinion say "Aye";' he intoned. 'Aye' shouted some Labour MPs, now catching up.

To the contrary, "No" went on the Speaker. 'No' came the Government roar.

'I think the Noes have it,' called out the Speaker.

'Aye' shouted some Labour voices meaning No, the Noes did not have it. (Are you still with me?)

Now at this point the Speaker should have called a division, because some Labour MPs were still dissenting (that is they were shouting 'Aye,' even though Government MPs were loudly assenting, i.e., crying 'No' if you see what I mean). But he did not call a division. He declared the motion to adjourn defeated and went on to next business.

It was this which Mr Hamilton raised in the Commons yesterday. The Speaker was clearly embarrassed by what had happened.

However, he had to tell MPs that the moment to raise any complaint was at the moment of dispute, not now. Besides, he had listened to a tape and the 'Ayes' were only just audible.

And he had been in the Chair for three minutes after the end of the main debate before handing over to the Deputy Speaker.

Mr Hamilton, however, to say nothing of Mr Skinner, Labour MP for Bolsover, had also got hold of the Westminster tapes and both were satisfied that their voices were audible. As indeed they were.

Inflammable

Mr Skinner, saturnine and suspicious, rose to address the Chair.

He referred to the fact that the Speaker had 'disappeared' before MPs could approach him. It was not a particularly provocative remark by Mr Skinner's standards but the Speaker was in an inflammable mood.

There was a limit to what he was going to put up with from the honourable gentlemen, he barked (loud Tory cheers). He had had to endure much over the years from that quarter, he went on.

Mr Skinner glared back. Some MPs held their breath. Was the long-rumoured show-down or shoot-out between Sheriff Thomas and the notorious Skinner gang about to take place?

Mr Skinner slowly rose to his feet again. But he was coming peacefully—well fairly.

He had listened to those tapes and thought the dissenting voices audible. Perhaps the Speaker had attached little significance to them, he added cryptically, because there was such a massive consensus between the two Front Benches?

It looked as if the row was over. But then the wild and woolly Mr Canavan, Labour MP for West Stirling-shire, demanded also to be heard on the same Point of Order.

The matter was closed, the Speaker told him curtly. 'No vote, now no Point of Order,' raged Mr Canavan and marched straight out of the Chamber.

The Speaker, after a moment's deliberation, announced coldly that if another MP walked out on him that way, he would 'name him', i.e., suspend him.

Tory MPs responded with another warm and sympathetic cheer. A good dose of Willie Whitelaw's 'glass-house' treatment—that was what these fellows needed.

H. R.

CLIVE

New Questions in
today's Order Paper

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER 1979

out of
order!

Mr. Robin F. Cook: To ask the Prime Minister, if she will list the security and intelligence services and persons in support of them, and the terms of reference of any such bodies. (PW)

MJ
20/x1

Mr. Robin F. Cook: To ask the Prime Minister, whether in the light of Clause 14(1) of the Protection of Official Information Bill (Lords), she will now answer questions on the security and intelligence services. (PW)

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Prime Minister, whether Mr. Anthony Blunt is in receipt of any pension from public funds, in respect of his public services. (PW)

Mr. Michael Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, how many persons were questioned as a result of suspicions aroused in the light of the Burgess-Maclean affair; how many of these worked in the Civil Service; what action was taken as a result of these questionings; and how many persons were asked to leave the Civil Service. (PW)

Mr. Michael Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, if she will publish the guidelines currently operated by the security services in respect of their relations with Ministers. (PW)

Mr. Tony Marlow: To ask the Prime Minister, what is the policy with regard to the employment of homosexuals within the security services. (W)

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER 1979

Mr. Arthur Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister, whether it was on her instructions that the Cabinet Office gave prior information to the solicitors of Mr. Blunt of her intention of making a statement concerning his confession of being a spy; in how many cases in the past such action has been taken; why it was done in this case; and whether she will make a statement. (ORAL)

Mr. Michael Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, if she will take steps to ensure that deals proposed by the security services with persons suspected of grave security offences or any similar matters are in future brought to her personal attention for her own decision. (PW)

/CONTD.

15. 13.
Mr. Michael Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, in how many other cases in the last 20 years deals have been made by the security services, as in the Blunt affair.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service, whether he will publish a detailed list of the Civil Service and Government appointments held by Mr. Anthony Blunt, his salary and/or grading; what pension rights have been or are being paid; and whether he will publish the total of public funds paid to him.