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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

10 May 1985

Dear Mr. Owen,

As one Privy Counsellor to another, I have to say that I was surprised and disappointed at your naming Sir Antony Duff during your question following my statement on security this afternoon.

As you are well aware, there is a longstanding convention that the Director General of the Security Service, like his counterpart in the Secret Intelligence Service, is not publicly named by the Government. I was not therefore able to comment on this part of your question.

I doubt whether you would have acted in this way while you were in office as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. The breaking of such conventions by people of standing encourages others to ignore the rules which protect the confidentiality of our security services. In addition to increasing the personal risks to the people involved, the long term results are severely damaging to the operations of those services and to the national interest.

This is a strictly confidential letter.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

Beltaroy



THE RT HON DR DAVID OWEN MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

10 May 1985

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Margaret Thatcher

Thank you for your letter and I can only apologise. I had thought following the way that the whole issue has been reported in the press, not just in the initial front page story in the Sunday Times, but in repeated references since, that you had broken with the convention and were making the appointment public in the case of the Director General of Security Services. I was obviously in error and I hope you will convey to Tony Duff my regrets.

Incidentally, while on the subject I gather that you have also not avowed the existence of the intelligence service. It was certainly again my impression amidst the controversy over GCHQ that you had changed the policy and were now avowing the service but I gather this is not so. Though I must say that it is very hard to keep to this policy since the GCHQ was avowed as in the Prime case. However, I will try to respect that, since as you will know I took the same view as you when you were consulted in Opposition, that it was better not to avow even though everyone knew.

Again my apologies.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Owen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Owen

Bettaney

Security Office

Bettaney

CONFIDENTIAL

File
22
JH



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

13 May 1985

The Home Secretary will remember that, when the Prime Minister had a word with him and Sir Brian Cubbon after the Bettaney statement, she said that she would take up with Dr Owen the latter's naming of Sir Antony Duff during Supplementary Questions on the Statement.

This is to let you know that Dr Owen has apologised, saying that he was under the misapprehension that the appointment had been announced; and he has asked the Prime Minister to pass on his apologies to Sir Antony Duff.

Since the exchange of letters is marked "Personal and Confidential" I am not distributing copies of it; and the Prime Minister said that she had no intention of making it known in public that she was taking the matter up with Dr Owen. I should be grateful, therefore, if you could ensure that the confidence is preserved.

I am copying this letter on the same basis to Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir Antony Duff.

E. E. R. BUTLER

Hugh Taylor, Esq.,
Home Office