



01-405 7641 Extn

ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE

LONDON, WC2A 2LL

PRIME MINISTER

1. Sir Robert Armstrong has sent me a copy of his minute to you dated 6th October on the question of the scrutiny of powers of entry and I would like to make the following comments upon it.
2. I regret my delay, but due to a number of factors I did not see it until very recently and of course wished to discuss it with the Attorney General before writing this minute.
3. The essential feature of the present system is that in addition to whatever is done within the Department concerned, every change in powers of entry is vetted personally by a senior Minister outside the Department. The essence of the proposals is the abandonment of that concept of special and personal ministerial responsibility in this field.
4. That follows from the provisions of para 5 of the proposals. The phrase:- "A Home Office Minister will have responsibility for the arrangements for considering all proposals in the Home Office", has been chosen expressly for the purpose of ensuring that such a Minister will not be obliged, nor yet expected, to look at each such proposal himself, and in substitution for a provision included by R.A. in an earlier draft specifically for the purpose of ensuring that he would be so obliged. (It is to be inferred from the correspondence that the result might well be that the Home Office Minister himself would not see more than 5% of such proposals).
5. In my view/<sup>that,</sup>- representing a deliberate and significant lessening of Ministerial responsibility in this field - would be a backwards and regrettable step.
6. If you were to decide that that step should nevertheless be taken, the rest of the proposals would I think follow. If, on the other hand, it was your wish to maintain the present type

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and degree of ministerial responsibility, there would still arise the question of whether a Home Office Minister should take it over from me. On that:-

- (a) it seems clear from the correspondence that the Home Office would not welcome this additional task for one of its Ministers (and I think that whoever does it one Minister should do it all);
- (b) it seems to me that there are at least some grounds for saying that a Law Officer is specially suited and equipped for the task, e.g.,
  - (i) the traditions and standing of his office must assist him in the performance of the task;
  - (ii) some of the provisions are so complex that a lawyer of the standing of a Law Officer may have the best chance of spotting the real consequences of what is proposed in each case;
  - (iii) it seems to me to be in line with the general duties of Law Officers, that the task of calling upon administrators to justify such infringements on the liberties of the subject should be entrusted to and carried out by one of them;
- (c) it is implicit in R.A.'s minute that some people take the view that this is not a suitable job for a Law Officer because
  - (i) it is suggested that "the S.G. is ... taking policy and political decisions rather than giving legal advice" - but of course except where I give the 'go-ahead' I do not take decisions, I simply ask people to justify the measures they propose and if I cannot reach agreement with them they must seek a decision from the appropriate Cabinet Committee;
  - (ii) that a Law Officer's job is only to give legal advice - but I venture to doubt that;

/(iii) that



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(iii) that this additional task adds to the load of this Department - but I do not think there is any evidence that this means that other work suffers although it clearly increases the work load of the professional officers.

7. Clearly what is required first at this point is a decision on the basic issue to which I have referred in paragraphs 3 and 4 above. If you were to decide that the present system should be retained and that I should continue to do this task, I would think this a good point at which to take stock of the position. We have had some 18 months of experiment and I have not heard any suggestion of any serious defects in the system we have evolved. But a tidying up and restatement would I think be timely.

8. I am copying this to Sir Robert Armstrong but not to anyone else. The Attorney General of course has a copy.

H.P.  
/

Law Officers' Department,

14 October, 1982.

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LONDON, W.C.2A 2LL



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Power of entry?

Prime Minister

Although we were trying to  
them.

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You should also see  
Sir Robert Armstrong's personal  
minute to me at flag A.  
Content with Sir R. Armstrong's proposals if Mr.  
Whitelaw and Mr. Jenkin agree?  
FRB

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PRIME MINISTER

I am not very  
happy  
with these proposals  
at all.

8. 10

I spoke to you at the beginning of the year about the arrangements for scrutinising proposals for legislation to confer new powers of entry on public officials.

2. In 1979 the National Federation of Self-employed made a number of objections to the existing provisions for powers of entry of public officials into business premises. You invited Mr. David Mitchell to investigate these objections. One of the recommendations made in Mr. Mitchell's report was that the Law Officers should be asked to scrutinise any future proposed powers of entry. This recommendation was accepted, and the Law Officers have been doing this ever since. I understand that the Solicitor General has been the Law Officer who has undertaken this responsibility.

3. The arrangement has given rise to certain problems. Though proposals for conferring new powers of entry require legislation, and may on occasion raise issues on which specifically legal advice is required, the issues which determine decisions are primarily administrative, policy and political rather than legal. The Solicitor General is in this respect taking policy and political decisions rather than giving legal advice. The work which the Law Officers' Department is asked to do in support of this function is therefore different in kind from the rest of its work; and, as the Department is very small, this work is apt to divert its officers (most of whom are professional lawyers) from their main work in support of the Law Officers in their legal advisory role.

4. The Solicitor General has undertaken this work willingly, and would be content to continue to do so. It is clearly important and valuable that proposals for new powers of entry should be closely scrutinised at political level; and I think that the Solicitor General feels that the present arrangements enable him to supply a degree of close and critical political supervision which the previous arrangements did not provide. With the benefit of hindsight, however, it appears that the Solicitor General may have been given a task which is not strictly appropriate to the Law Officers and for which the Law Officers' Department is not properly resourced.



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5. I have therefore been examining with the relevant Departments, including the Law Officers' Departments in Scotland as well as in England, alternative proposals for vetting proposals for new powers of entry which would ensure that the "Mitchell principles" were applied, that administrative and political considerations were given due weight, that legal advice was sought where appropriate, and that the work was done by a Department resourced to do it properly without undue diversion of effort from other matters.

6. Proposals for powers of entry are already scrutinised by the Home Office, for local and private Bills as well as for public ones. It would make sense to bring together all the scrutiny responsibilities in one Department which should also be responsible for consulting others as necessary. I think that the Home Office (in Scotland the Scottish Home and Health Department) is the proper location for such a responsibility, and can deal with the policy and administrative issues for which the Law Officers cannot be expected and would not normally be asked to take responsibility.

7. After consultations with the Home Office, the Department of Industry, the Law Officers' Department, the Scottish Office and the Lord Advocate's Department, I should like to recommend the attached proposals for your approval. I believe that the proposals, and specifically the procedures in (3), (5), (6) and (8) provide for proper political supervision at each stage. I understand that the Attorney General, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Lord Advocate have already indicated that they are content with the proposals, subject to your approval of them. The Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Industry can also be expected to agree. The Solicitor General is not, I think, persuaded of the need for change: he enjoys his involvement in this work, and he feels that the present arrangements provide a necessary degree of explicit Ministerial involvement in decisions about the introduction of new powers of entry. But he will of course accept your decision.

8. If you approved revised procedures on these lines, we should promulgate them in the "Guide to Legislative Procedures" which is currently being revised by the MPO and should be issued to Departments early in the autumn. As this

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Guide deals only with primary legislation, a circular would be issued drawing the attention of all concerned to the new procedures and the fact that they were to be applied equally to subordinate legislation. No public announcement of the change would be required; we have never declared that the central scrutiny role was to be exercised by the Solicitor General.

9. I am copying this minute to the Home Secretary, the Secretaries of State for Industry, for Northern Ireland, and for Scotland, the Attorney General, the Solicitor General and the Lord Advocate.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of the letters 'R' and 'A' in a stylized, cursive script.

Robert Armstrong

6th October 1982



SCRUTINY OF POWERS OF ENTRY - PROPOSED PROCEDURES

1. It should continue to be the duty of the Home Office to scrutinise all Bills (public, local or private) for proposals to create or re-enact powers of entry for the police or public officials in England and Wales, and in Great Britain or the United Kingdom as a whole. The Scottish Home and Health Department should have a similar duty in respect of exclusively Scottish Bills, and of UK and GB Bills creating or re-enacting powers of entry exercisable in Scotland. The Northern Ireland Office should have a similar duty in respect of exclusively Northern Ireland Bills and Orders in Council, and of UK Bills creating or re-enacting powers of entry exercisable in Northern Ireland. References in the procedures below to the Home Departments should be construed accordingly.
2. In their scrutiny of Bills and proposals the Home Departments should have the duty of applying the "Mitchell" principles - broadly the need to minimise the constraints and burdens which powers of entry can impose on the owners or occupiers of premises.
3. A Department should not propose new powers of entry in legislation for which it is responsible without the specific agreement of its Ministers.
4. Any proposal for new powers of entry contained in a private Bill should also be referred to Ministers by the Department responsible for considering the Bill.
5. A Department should, after obtaining the agreement of its Ministers, consult the appropriate Home Department(s) on any proposal, whether in a public or a private Bill, to create or re-enact powers of entry, whether into business or private premises, for the police or public officials. A Home Office Minister will have responsibility for the arrangements for considering all proposals in the Home Office; similar arrangements will be made in the Scottish Home and Health Department, which will arrange for clearance as appropriate by a Scottish Office Minister, and in the Northern Ireland Office.
6. The Law Officers must also be consulted (through the Law Officer's Department or the Lord Advocate's Department as appropriate) by the Department concerned, if there is any question requiring legal advice in connection with proposals for creating or re-enacting powers of entry.
7. Departments should initiate such clearance of proposals with the Home Departments and, where appropriate, the Law Officers at as early a stage as possible.
8. Proposals for creating new powers of entry should be specifically noted when a memorandum is put to the relevant Cabinet Committee for policy clearance; they should not be included in such a memorandum unless they have been agreed with the appropriate Home Department(s). Any proposals for new powers of entry arising after policy clearance should be cleared in correspondence with the relevant Ministers (members of the Cabinet Committee which gave policy clearance and others concerned), and the correspondence should make clear that the proposals have been approved by Home Department Ministers.

Home Affairs. Rights  
of Entry, Pt 2