

1949
NEW ZEALAND

HOLMES CASE

STATEMENT CONCERNING THE ACQUISITION OF CERTAIN PAPERS
RELATIVE TO

Laid upon the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave

On the afternoon in question I was returning to Parliament Buildings from the Terrace when I saw one of the motor-cars of the Department—a Film Unit car—parked alongside the steps leading to the Terrace. It was obviously not locked because the windows were down, and it was apparent that the back seat was piled with camera gear—camera, tripods, &c.

The time when I first saw this vehicle would have been about 5 p.m.

I left the Buildings again at about 6.15 p.m. to have a meal in the city and returned to the Buildings after 7 p.m. The motor-car was still there.

I was then very concerned because I had had occasion many times previously to comment on misuse of Government vehicles by the Film Unit, and, on this particular day, had mentioned to the acting head at the Film Studio that I was satisfied that vehicles had been used improperly, on this day in particular. I had pointed out to him that one vehicle apparently had been used, for instance, to convey a member or members of the staff to the city, concerning the suggested stopwork meeting at Miramar.

I had also had occasion, some months previously, to make a special investigation and report on the use, and misuse, of Government vehicles by Film Unit members.

With this in mind I decided that if the car was left neglected—and, to my mind in such a way as to be a case of gross carelessness—I would take the camera gear out of it and see that action was taken against the person leaving it.

I had some dealings with some members of the Press Gallery soon after 7.30 and I finally left the last of them in the corridor leading out to the Bowen Street entrance. I remember mentioning that I was concerned about the car and the gear. I went to the car at approximately 9 to 9.20 p.m. and, taking the camera and a portfolio case from the back seat, took them to the office of my department in Parliament Buildings.

The portfolio case was not identifiable from the outside in any way. It was of a type common, and similar to those used in official work. There was no indication that it was a private satchel. I opened it to seek evidence as to the identity of the person using it. It contained about nine or ten items—mainly groups of papers associated with the work of the Film Unit and the Department. As I remember it, there was one letter—addressed to Mr. Holmes—two or three magazines and the departmental papers.

The thing that did immediately attract my attention was a large Government office writing pad which belonged to me. It had in it—starting from the top page—my own notes on the Royal Tour organization, dealing with every place to be visited in New Zealand and setting out where contacts had been made and with whom in public relations work.

I did not know how it had come into the possession of the owner of the satchel. I looked at it and in it. Following the many pages of my own notes were drafts of telegrams which I immediately recognized as the words of telegrams that had been read out by Mr. Holmes at a meeting at Miramar. Then, the telegrams were read as coming from various members of the Film Unit who were working away from Wellington. Then, following these, were other drafts of what appeared to be resolutions and lists dealing with staff divisions.

Also with the writing pad, written on departmental paper, was the unfolded letter which was later published.

The letter astounded me. It revealed immediately to me just how “engineered” the whole trouble had been in the Department.

I contacted the Chief Clerk who was next senior to me in the office at the time. He had been to Miramar during the trouble there. I showed him the papers and the letter. I gave him the satchel and we discussed what action to take against the person concerned. During this time he opened the second half of the satchel—which I had not done—and produced from it the Communist membership card and other documents referred to later by Mr. Nash.

I said that I would hand the documents over to the police and they could then discuss them with the Acting Prime Minister.

I had nothing to do with the incident throughout the discussion that then followed. I did not hear of it again until the copies of the papers were given to me to distribute to the Press.