

Prime Minister

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MS

AUTOMATIC KNIGHTHOOD FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE LAW SOCIETY

1. I refer to Robert Armstrong's Minute to you dated 10th January.
2. I find myself in respectful agreement with the Lord Chancellor, who is opposed to any change being made at the present time.
3. In order to be President of the Law Society, it is necessary to have served on the Council of the Law Society for at least 15 years. That membership involves giving up a very considerable amount of time to the profession's Governing Body.
4. As you know, the Presidency of the Law Society alternates between a solicitor practising in London and a solicitor practising in the provinces. My experience (I qualified as a solicitor in 1962) has been that the holder of the Office of President has to be a person of exceptional quality.
5. Somehow the Law Society has got wind of the possibility that you are contemplating a change in the existing practice. John Bowron, the Secretary General, came to see me two months ago, as I reported to Robin Butler at the time. He said that the Law Society (predictably) would resent, deeply, any change and pointed out that Judges receive knighthoods automatically on appointment, that there are many more Honours available to barristers than to solicitors and that this is not the time to give the impression that the so-called junior branch of the profession should be "devalued" in this way.

(2)

6. I hope, therefore, that you may feel able to support the Lord Chancellor and the Law Society about this.

14.1.83

IAN GOW

cc, Robin Butler

Prime Minister

Ref. A083/0056

PRIME MINISTER

Agree that an automatic knighthood should be given to the President of Law Society in 1983 and 1984 ~~but not~~ but not thereafter; that the CBE for the President of the Scottish Law Society should be treated similarly; and that the Council of the Law Society should be so informed?

My predecessors have been concerned for some time about the ~~the~~ practice of awarding an automatic knighthood each year (in the ~~the~~ Birthday List) to the President of the Law Society. 13.1.

2. Over the years we have tried to limit strictly automatic awards and particularly those for holders of short-term posts. Apart from the GBE for the Lord mayor of London, the President of the Law Society is now the only appointment for one year which automatically counts for a knighthood (the President of the Confederation of British Industry gets a KBE; but he serves a two-year term). Some time ago we were successful in reaching an agreement with the Lord Mayor that the Aldermanic Sheriff should forego his automatic knighthood in favour of awards (mostly at a lower level) going to officials of the City Corporation who had given good services over a number of years.

3. At some stage I think that we should try to bring this about with the solicitors. If the automatic knighthood were withdrawn, then there would be more scope for recognising the good services of solicitors who had not necessarily served as President.

4. While the Lord Chancellor appreciates the arguments in favour of discontinuance, he is against any change being made, certainly at the present time. His relations with the Law Society are delicate in a number of respects, in particular in that he is having to introduce controls over the remuneration of solicitors and barristers which are arousing considerable hostility among practitioners. The legal profession feels itself embattled and the subject of criticism (much of which is, in the Lord Chancellor's view, mistaken and unfair). He is not anxious to do anything at the present time which would tend to diminish the profession's prestige.

5. If, despite these arguments, you decide that the change ought to be made, the Lord Chancellor would wish two points considered:

- (i) The change should not be made immediately, in the sense of depriving the current holder of the office or his successor of the expected knighthood; and

(ii) The Council of The Law Society should be informed authoritatively, though not necessarily publicly, of the change.

This would mean that the holders of the post would receive knighthoods in June 1983 and June 1984 but not from June 1985 onwards.

6. The holder of the similar post in Scotland receives an automatic CBE. If you agree that the automatic knighthood for the President of the Law Society should be abandoned in 1985, then it would follow that we should treat the Scottish postholder similarly.

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

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

10 January 1983