

UK: Britain becomes police state

An opposition minister who has frequently embarrassed the Labour government by disclosing information that the government has tried to keep secret has been arrested, his homes in London and Kent and his office in Parliament have been raided by forces including anti-terrorism police. His alleged offence? Leaking information.

Damien Green found out that the British Home Office employed some 5,000 illegal immigrants, including a government driver and some in a variety of security functions. He also found out that Home Secretary Jaqui Smith had told Prime Minister Brown that a rapid decline in economic conditions may lead to civil unrest. And he told Britain these important things. He says it's transparency in the democratic process, and that the British public have the right to know.

Others disagree: although Brown's office denies any prior knowledge of the action, it is highly unlikely that the action by the police was not in some way prodded by someone in Government.

It is quite likely that the decision to arrest Green and invade his homes and office - usually sacrosanct - was not communicated to Brown's office so that it was deniable. But the hand of Government involvement is difficult to deny.

Arresting a senior member of parliament is a very big deal. And revealing information is situation normal. After all, Labour politicians routinely release all manner of information: just last weekend, details of the November "pre-budget report" - which turned into a heavyweight budget statement with substantial policy shifts - were revealed by the government itself several days in advance.

The Labour Government's habit has been to criticise foreign governments if such things happen overseas.

"Aiding and abetting misconduct in public office" is the offence that Green is accused of. Green spent nine hours in a police station, interviewed for just one. A government employee who allegedly passed information to Green was also arrested. Reportedly, the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, was told in advance as was the leader of the opposition, David Cameron. Therefore there is suspicion that the Government's senior officers were either informed or, to provide the opportunity for denial, not informed. But there are also reports that the investigation arose out of a complaint from The Home Office.