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Confidential Filing

Collective Responsibility

CABINET

MAY 1979

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
<del>8-5-79</del>							
12-7-79							
7-11-84							
12-11-84							
<p>PREM 19/1173</p>							

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MEMBERS OF THE CABINET SECRETARIAT

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Attribution of Views to Individuals  
In Minutes of Meetings

The general rule on the attribution of views to individuals in minutes of meetings of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees is set out in paragraphs 15-20 of the Guide to Minute Taking.

2. That lists a number of cogent reasons for minimising the attribution of views to individual persons. In present circumstances the risk of unauthorised disclosures, which may embarrass individual Ministers and impair collective responsibility, constitutes a further powerful reason for limiting attribution as narrowly as possible.

3. Members of the Secretariat are therefore asked, in writing minutes of Cabinet and Cabinet Committee discussions, to interpret the rules as follows:

a. As a general rule the only parts of a minute which should be attributed are the opening statement or statements of the issue by those who have circulated memoranda for discussion and the summing up. The summary of important points made in discussion should be impersonal - ie should not attribute views to persons.

b. When a speaker is not content to accept the decision of a Committee and requires reference to a higher Committee or to the Cabinet, and for this purpose formally reserves his



(or his Minister's or Department's) position, the statement of his position may be attributed. Dissent in Cabinet should not be attributed unless the speaker has asked for it to be registered as a prelude to resignation.

c. It may, very exceptionally, be necessary to attribute views to persons when a specifically departmental view has been put forward, or when a suggestion has been made to safeguard a departmental interest, or when there is a conflict of interest between two Departments; but whenever possible the minutes should record these matters without attribution to persons.

d. Exceptions to the general rule should be made only on the authority of the senior Secretary in a secretariat; and any cases of doubt should be referred for decision to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

4. The Guide to Minute Taking will be amended accordingly in its next revision.

Signed ROBERT ARMSTRONG

12 November 1984

Cabinet May 79

Collective responsibility





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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ATTRIBUTION IN CABINET AND CABINET COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Prime Minister discussed with you this morning your minute of 2 November (A084/2937).

BF | The Prime Minister said she would be grateful if you could look again at your draft minute to members of the Cabinet Secretariat with a view to tightening the rules about attribution and also to shortening the records of Cabinet and Cabinet Committee discussions. In particular, the Prime Minister thought that there should not be attribution apart from exception (1) in your minute when a discussion ended in a collective decision. Reservations should only be attributed to particular Ministers if they were exercising their right to take the issue to another Committee or to Cabinet or, in the case of Cabinet, the dissenting Minister had indicated his intention to resign.

9 November 1984



FOL 84

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Attribution in Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Minutes

Thank you for your minute of 2 November (A084/2937).

The Prime Minister has commented that she would like to discuss this with you, since she feels that some of the rules are still not fully in accordance with the principle of collective responsibility. She has made the following comments against exceptions to the non-attribution rule:

- (i) Accepted.
- (ii) She does not favour recording a specifically departmental view or a suggestion to safeguard a departmental interest since, once a decision is taken, such a suggestion is overtaken by the collective decision.
- (iii) The Prime Minister considers that there will often be a conflict of interest between two Departments and that this is what discussions are intended to resolve: she does not therefore think that a conflict of interest between two Departments should be attributed to the Departments concerned.
- (iv) Similarly, the Prime Minister does not believe that reserving a Minister's decision or a formal statement of dissent should be recorded in circumstances when a collective decision is

/taken

RESTRICTED



taken, since the collective decision again overtakes the statement of dissent.

Perhaps we may put this on the agenda for one of your business meetings with the Prime Minister in the near future.

E. E. R. BUTLER

7 November, 1984



Prime Minister

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Ref. A084/2937

MR BUTLER

*We must discuss  
some of the  
flaw of  
collection of  
responsibility*

Content with the  
instruction to Cabinet Office  
Secretaries which Sir Robert  
Armstrong proposed to  
circulate?

FERB  
5.11.

Attribution in Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Minutes

The Chancellor of the Exchequer queried the extent to which expressions of view had been attributed to individual Ministers in the minute of the discussion in OD on 22 October of Tornados for Turkey (OD(84) 11th Meeting, Minute 1).

REF.

2. The general rule is that the opening statement on an issue (incorporating a precis of the memorandum under consideration and any supplementary points made by the Minister presenting it) and the summing up are the only parts of the minute which are attributed to an individual Minister, and that other parts of a minute should be impersonal (ie no attribution of views to particular Ministers). The guidance given to Secretaries envisages exceptions to the non-attribution rule:

✓ (1) when more than one memorandum has been circulated, in which case an opening statement on each memorandum is attributed;

(2) when a specifically departmental view has been put forward, or a suggestion has been made to safeguard a departmental interest;

*Not if agreed by the decision - otherwise the dept's interest will be part of the decision*

(3) where there is a conflict of interest between two Departments; **NO**

*NO this goes against collective decision*

(4) where a speaker reserves his (or his Minister's) position or formally registers dissent (this applies in Cabinet only if the dissenting Minister indicates his intention to resign).

3. In the particular minute in question there were four attributions: to the Minister for Trade, the Minister for Defence Procurement, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth





Office, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The first two attributions were covered by the general rule and the first exception: both the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Defence had sent out minutes on the subject (though neither of them was present at the meeting). It is arguable that the other two attributions fell within the second and third exceptions, and indeed the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were already on record in a minute, though that was not formally one of the minutes which the Committee had before them. But the minute of the discussion could clearly have been written without these two attributions.

4. In contemporary conditions, given the prevalence of leaks, it is clearly important to interpret the rules strictly. I therefore propose to issue an instruction to Secretaries of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees as in the draft attached.

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

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

2 November 1984





DRAFT MINUTE FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG  
MEMBERS OF THE CABINET SECRETARIAT

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Attribution of Views to Individuals in  
Minutes of Meetings

The general rule on the attribution of views to individuals in minutes of meetings of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees is set out in paragraphs 15-20 of the Guide to Minute Taking. It can be summed up as follows:

As a general rule the only parts of a minute which should be attributed are the opening statement or statements of the issue by those who have circulated memoranda for discussion and the summing up. The summary of important points made in discussion should be impersonal - ie should not attribute views to persons.

It may exceptionally be necessary to attribute views to persons beyond this:

- (1) when a specifically departmental view has been put forward, or a suggestion has been made to safeguard a departmental interest;





- (2) when there is a conflict of interest between two Departments;
- (3) when a speaker formally reserves his (or his Minister's or Department's) position or formally registers dissent.

2. The Guide to Minute Taking lists a number of cogent reasons for minimising the attribution of views to individual persons. In present circumstances the risk of unauthorised disclosures, which may embarrass individual Ministers and impair collective responsibility, constitutes a further powerful reason for limiting attribution as narrowly as possible.

3. Members of the Secretariat are therefore asked, in writing minutes of Cabinet and Cabinet Committee discussions, to adhere as closely as possible to the general rule, and to make exceptions only in cases of strict necessity. Exceptions to the rule should be made only on the authority of the senior Secretary in a secretariat; and any cases of doubt should be referred for decision to the Secretary of the Cabinet.



PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet

I understand that at Cabinet tomorrow you would like to put something on record about mutual trust between colleagues and also between Ministers and their senior Advisers; and additionally say a word about diaries. I suggest that you might speak on the following lines:-

"As my colleagues know, I shall be circulating the usual document giving guidance to Ministers on procedural matters. This is largely a book of reference for Private Offices, though there will be a few points that I shall be drawing to the attention of Ministers specifically.

There is however one thing where we ought to set a spirit and tone of our own from the very outset and where I think it is right to ask for full Cabinet endorsement.

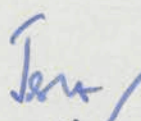
We are going to work as a team with a clear sense of purpose.

This means that we must maintain the strictest standards of confidence in Cabinet and between members of the Cabinet, and also in and between all members of the Government. ~~No doubt we shall have our arguments from time to time. but we shall have them privately and will not damage our own good name by advertising them publicly through leaks or gossip. The last Government had a bad record in this respect and we shall set a different standard.~~ The principle of collective responsibility will be absolute.

Furthermore, just as we will maintain confidence among ourselves, I think we have a right to expect and to extend confidence between Ministers and their senior Advisers. Whatever we may decide to do about the principle of deliberate open Government, we must do all we can to avoid the unauthorised leaking of confidential information. The Head of the Civil Service will be making the same point to Permanent Secretaries.



This leads me to a rather different point. I am not keeping a diary myself: and I hope that no member of the Cabinet will keep a diary of his Ministerial experiences or start writing his memoirs while he is still in Government. If anyone feels differently about this, perhaps they would consult me, although I think I know what my answer will be.

  
John Hunt

9th May 1979



PRIME MINISTER

INFORMAL MEETING OF CABINET: TUESDAY 8 MAY AT 1420

In this folder are:-

1. A speaking note on the lines you requested.
2. A structured list of your Administration showing the full Ministerial teams for each Department.
3. The draft Queen's Speech in the form in which you last saw it (but of course it will have been revised since in the light of Mr. Whitelaw's meeting with his colleagues).
4. A copy of the letter I have issued to all Departments setting out your instructions on Special Advisers which I attach in case one of your colleagues thinks it appropriate to get on to this subject. I attach also a copy of the letter I sent about the appointment of Parliamentary Private Secretaries, for the same reason. I suggest that if these matters are raised you cut the discussion short by saying that you have already issued instructions which they will have in their Departments.
5. Sir K. Berrill's 'strategy' paper.
6. Summary and timetable of Urgent Economic Issues.
7. List of Committees.
8. Questions of Procedure attached - *diaries and broadcasts flagged*

K.R.S.

8 May 1979



CABINET : TUESDAY 8 MAY

POINTS TO MAKE

Cabinet Government

Cabinet Government can only work if there is complete confidence and trust between colleagues. We can only take sensible decisions here if we can speak in complete frankness and if we can be confident in the knowledge that the privacy of the discussions will be respected.

That means that there must be no leaks, and no gossip. In Cabinet we shall discuss what we intend to do and we shall reach decisions. Then those decisions will be announced. There must be no lobbying between decision and announcement and there must be no dissension from the principle of collective responsibility.

That in turn means that there must be no record kept at this table other than the official one. No-one should be keeping a diary or working on his memoirs.

The Administration

The tone of this Administration must be to reduce the area of Government, not to increase it. In every Department there will be activities which can be cut and should be cut. The electorate expects nothing less of us. Everyone in your Department must be clear that we are going to be rigorous in our examination of all Government activities.

Our aim must be to reduce substantially the cost of government and at the same time to achieve the best possible administration - run by fewer people, certainly, but by people who are well paid, whose morale is high and who give first class value for money to the public.

These things are not opposites. Economy and efficiency go together. All those with whom you are going to work in your Department must be clear that this is our basic approach.

/For example



For example, we should aim to cut the number of departmental circulars going out by two-thirds. I shall judge Ministers by their success in reducing expenditure and cutting waste.

Sir Derek Rayner

To this end I have appointed Sir Derek Rayner as a part-time adviser to assist Departments in promoting efficiency and eliminating waste. His approach will be to work with departmental Ministers in carrying out this task in their own Departments. He himself will probe into detail on some particular issues, but he is there to help rather than to interfere, and will act with our full support.

His approach will not be a negative one. His task will be to promote the best things in Government as well as to improve the worst; and you should follow the same path.

He will also be especially interested in Quangos. All of you should therefore immediately look at the Quangos for which you are responsible, and ask yourselves whether they are necessary at all, and if so, whether they have to be as big as they are now.

His appointment will be announced after this meeting.

Cabinet Committees

We ourselves can set an example in cutting down on unnecessary work by avoiding the proliferation of Cabinet committees. I intend to do this by setting up only a few key committees.

Once you have made this point, it will be much better not to whet appetites by going into greater detail, since Ministers will immediately want to know whether they themselves will be members of the most significant committees; you have noted elsewhere that you regard total secrecy about Cabinet committee membership and organisation as being unnecessary, but whatever the eventual public stance going into detail tomorrow would only lead to pressures.7



I make this point now so that there will be no misunderstanding. And let me say that if we can cut down on time spent in committees, it will give Ministers greater opportunity to spend their time constructively elsewhere.

#### The Queen's Speech

The State Opening of Parliament will be on Tuesday 15 May. A draft of The Queen's Speech is already being considered by a small group under the chairmanship of the Home Secretary. They met for the first time this morning. A revised draft will come before Cabinet on Thursday. We must ensure that the Speech reflects the tone of the Government which I have already described: actions not aspirations, efficiency of Government and freedom for the individual under the rule of law.

#### Questions of Procedure

You will be receiving detailed guidance from the Cabinet Office on many aspects of Ministerial procedures. It will be accompanied by a summary, which you should note carefully. You should refer to the detailed version as necessary and ensure that the rules are observed by your junior colleagues as well as yourself. Separate guidance is coming round about Ministerial travel and the appointment of Special Advisers.

#### Press Interviews

One aspect of the Rules of Procedure which is already relevant is the need for Ministerial television and radio appearances to be cleared with the Press Secretary at No. 10. Some members of the Cabinet have already been broadcasting, and very splendidly too. But it is important that from the outset the rules should be observed. [See the attached note from Mr. James.]



?Summing Up after Discussion

We must be absolutely clear about our philosophy and strategy. All the pressures will be aimed at diverting us from it. It will be essential for us to monitor progress continually. As a first step, I have asked my own political staff at No. 10, and the CPRS, to prepare reports after every three months comparing our strategy and our progress. Those of you who have Political Advisers should use them in this capacity as well. We must stick to our guns.

K.R.S.

7 May 1979



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