

PREM 19/2201

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OCTOBER 1981

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PREM 19/2201



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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Press Secretary

10 July 1987

Dear Prof. Stephenson,

Thank you for your letter of June 26. I am sorry for the delay in responding.

You are quite right in understanding that I took exception to your "Viewpoint" in The Independent just before the election was announced.

My concern did not, however, stem simply from your giving wider currency, without checking, to the entirely erroneous and wholly unsubstantiated allegation in the Duncan Campbell film that I "actively disregarded" the distinction between the service of Government and party interests during the 1983 election.

This, I fear, is routine practice by journalists these days. The prevailing conspiracy theory of Government eliminates any need to check allegations.

My concern stemmed rather from your personal endorsement of Campbell's reported allegations - again without checking - in two ways:

- "As we go into the campaign there is one other new factor. It is the now extraordinarily powerful and central position of Mrs Thatcher's press secretary, Bernard Ingham. Traditionally, once an election campaign was off and running a rigorous distinction was {sic} attempted between the press and publicity requirements of Government and those of party".
- "They canned a second Duncan Campbell film in the Zircon series, which alleged Bernard Ingham actively disregarded this distinction during the 1983 election. Will there be more tell tale signs this time of the Government machine being used for party political ends?" {My underlining.}

It is perfectly clear from this that you did not, in The Independent, "simply assert a straight and incontrovertible fact, namely that the BBC had made a programme in the Zircon series,

that included an allegation about you and the 1983 General Election campaign and that the BBC at a late stage canned it". You did much more than that - you took as read my alleged transgression notwithstanding my earlier denial of it in The Guardian.

Against this background, I find it difficult to work up much enthusiasm for continuing to brief the students of your Graduate Centre for Journalism.

John Smith
Bernard Ingham

BERNARD INGHAM

Professor Hugh Stephenson

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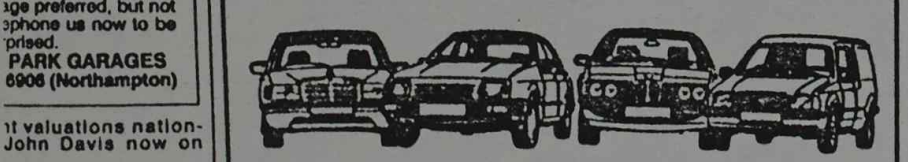
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As we go into the campaign

Man 6. 1987
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Hugh Stephenson

Mr Stephenson is professor of jour-
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NEWSFILE

**So who is ITV
designed for?**
TO WHAT extent do advertisers

**All-night viewing
turns teacher off**

THE PROSPECT of 24-hour



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Graduate Centre for Journalism
223-227, St. John Street

Director: Professor Hugh Stephenson

Mr Bernard Ingham,
10 Downing Street.

26 June 1987

Dear Bernard Ingham,

I gather indirectly that you were put out by something I wrote in *The Independent* in May in advance of the election, in which I made reference to your position and influence.

My guess is that you thought I should contact you before making any "allegation" about you and that it is poor journalistic practice not to do so. But in the context of what I was writing I was simply asserting a straight and incontrovertible fact, namely that the BBC had made a programme in the Zircon series that included an allegation about you and the 1983 General Election campaign and that the BBC at a late stage canned it.

I hope despite this that you will continue from time to time to see our students, because I think that on average they are high quality. And, as you will see from the list at the back of our enclosed 10th Anniversary Newsletter, they do mostly seem to go on to steady jobs in journalism.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh Stephenson

ps. I shall try to get you to lunch in the autumn.

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NEWSFILE

All-night viewing
turns teacher off

THE PROSPECT of 24-hour

Ingham the mouth

12.4.87
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What Mrs Thatcher thinks, Bernard Ingham says, and as her press secretary, confidant and disciple, he is now one of the most powerful men in the country

Ho, ho. So that's your game. You're not going to get me down that road. What a confounded nerve you lot have. It's quite obvious there isn't another story around. Misleading? Economy with the truth? Dammit, if there was ever a misleading source, it's Fleet Street. And day after day. And you're certainly not economical with it. It passes my comprehension how you lot think you can waste my time talking about something I haven't got responsibility for. You must be out of your tiny Chinese minds if you think I'm going to take that bait.'

The voice booms round a draughty eyrie at Westminster. The accent is Yorkshire flat, with a growl of the Wharfe in spate. A glowering hunched figure sticks out a defiant jaw and invites his audience of bemused journalists to light another short fuse.

Bernard Ingham, Downing Street press secretary, image-minder for Mrs Thatcher and the longest-running act in 'No 10's history, is at it again.

At a Christmas party in the same room only a year before, the Prime Minister had propelled her official spokesman through a well-lubricated crowd of ministers and journalists, purring: 'Bernard's marvellous... Isn't he marvellous?... He's great... He's the greatest...'

Few could have envisaged that scene being played when a cryptic press notice on September 10, 1979, announced that an Energy Department under-secretary in charge of the 'Save It' campaign was being hoisted to Whitehall's top propaganda post.

It all started with a 20-minute interview between the most powerful Tory for a generation and a former industrial correspondent who once carried a Labour Party card and had enthusiastically served Tony Benn at the Energy Department. From that unlikely beginning an extraordinary partnership has blossomed.

Ingham has embraced Thatcherism to the

point where their minds are almost interchangeable. He admires her energy, identifies with her goals, and is totally devoted to playing a major part in the unique story of the first woman occupant of Downing Street.

A clue to the fusion of this alliance lies in the fact that Ingham was also entranced by working for the only other woman to leave a benchmark in Whitehall during the past couple of decades – the fiery Barbara Castle – when she was running the Employment Department. Maybe it's a sort of reverse chauvinism, but Bernard has been fascinated by the way in which his female bosses have manipulated and exploited the male of their political species. And he has been rewarded with the total devotion of both women.

Fleet Street's scrapbook on Ingham portrays a bluff, amiable, intelligent Yorkshireman, good-humoured and constantly telling stories against himself. He nurtures the bluff Yorkshire image, is a follower of Rugby League, and likes few things better than milking the cows on his brother's farm. One man who knows him describes him as 'a closet farmer'.

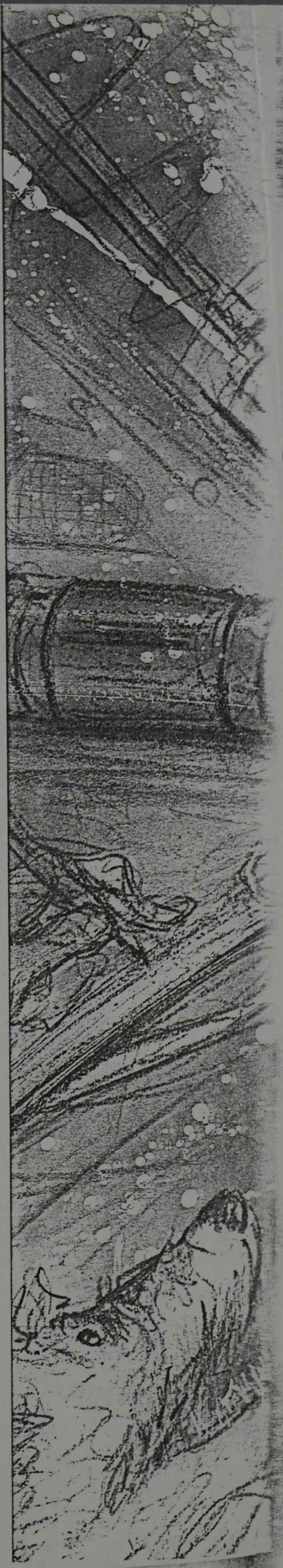
The image is one many ministers and civil servants would recognise as only part of the personality. Like his political mistress, Ingham is a street fighter, conspiratorial and a born natural in Whitehall's dangerous art of lifemanship.

Let there be no mistakes, Bernard Ingham is a very powerful man. Ministerial careers have wilted, civil servants seen promotion prospects turned to dust as a result of Ingham's judgments in the privacy of Mrs Thatcher's study. He will chew up a senior minister with the same clarity and vehemence he uses on a journalist who gets it wrong. Junior ministers are known to walk in fear and trembling of him. 'Volcanic – but bearing no grudges' is his own characterisation of his brittle temper.

It is not only his temper however which makes him so formidable. For if Sir Robert 'economic with the truth' Armstrong is the boss of ▷

REPORT BY CHRISTOPHER DOBSON

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS BURKE



◁ Whitehall's civil servants as head of the Cabinet Office, Ingham is probably the most influential.

His is the voice at Mrs Thatcher's shoulder. After Denis, he is the man with whom she first discusses the affairs of the day. People in power need cronies not necessarily brilliant in their own right but who have unique opportunities to influence events. And that is the position Bernard Ingham enjoys. Lord Whitelaw, Deputy Prime Minister, hardly moves without consulting him. Other ministers seek his advice – and his favour.

He has, moreover, built up 'Ingham's Mafia' throughout the information departments of the ministries. Possessively loyal to those who work for him, he makes sure they go on to better things. His men and women now occupy positions of power in every nook and cranny of the Whitehall information set-up.

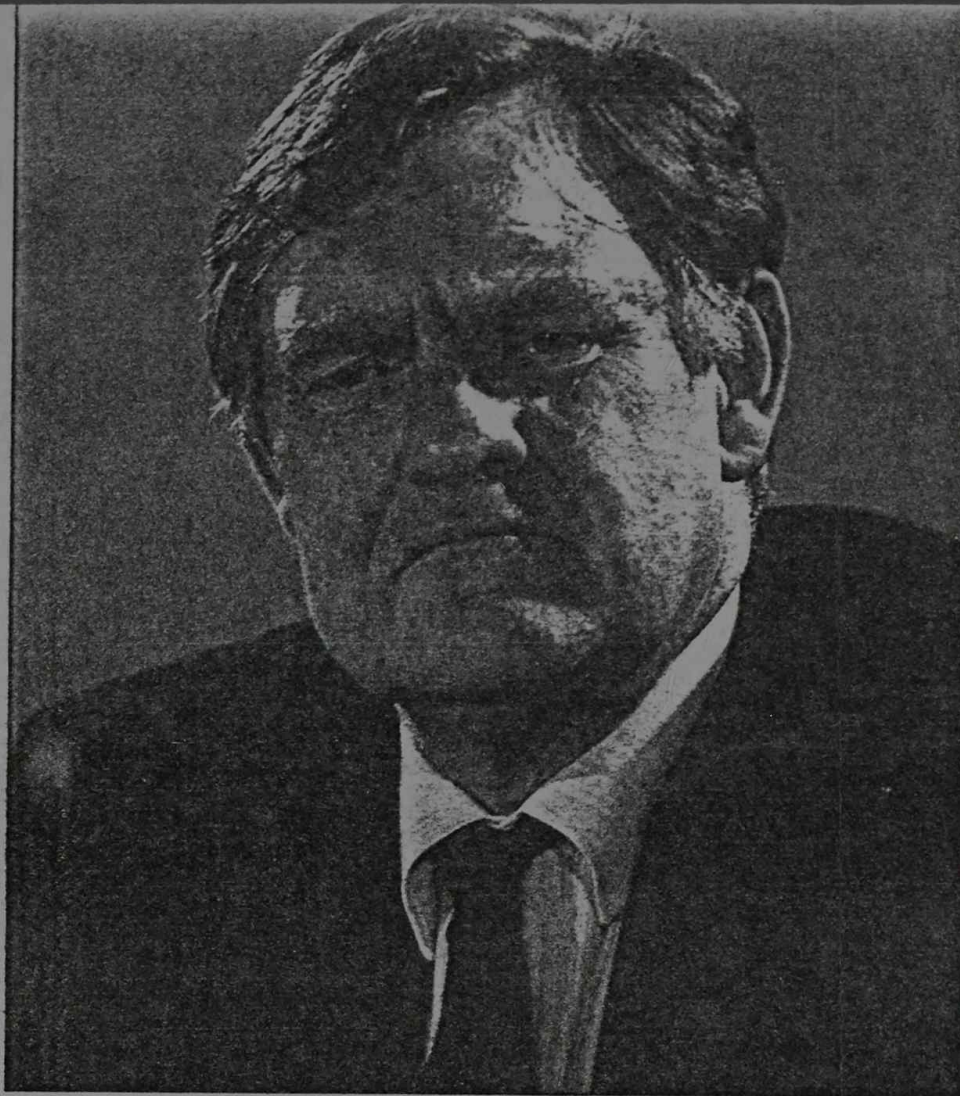
He should know when a mouse squeaks in Whitehall. That he admits he does not is one of his more endearing qualities. He subscribes totally to the cock-up theory of politics. And Bernard has seen plenty of cock-ups.

The most notorious of them was the Westland affair. This was the time he cautioned Mrs Thatcher to play it cool. But it didn't work out that way. There were major casualties on both sides. Leon Brittan was forced to resign and it was a time when Mrs Thatcher seemed vulnerable and Ingham seemed destined for the firing squad.

The Ingham day is the Thatcherite work-ethic in action. He is reading the newspapers in the spacious bow-fronted office that softens the angular corner of No 10 by 7am each morning having already listened to the early news on the car radio as he drives in from his home in Purley, Surrey. Mrs Thatcher also listens to the news in her flat over the office. And they swap the political flavour of the day at 9am.

If all is peaceful she plunges into a hectic round of briefings, Cabinet committee meetings and parliamentary work while Bernard turns to a pyramid of paper work. He may be finished by 9pm or midnight. But in an emergency he will never be far from her side and he stays as long as is necessary.

He was at his most effective in his crisis role during the Falklands conflict when he gave political correspondents first-class briefings, thus enabling their editors to make some sense of what was going on – something they were unable



Ingham on Ingham: 'Volcanic but bearing no grudges'

to do with the abysmal briefings given by the Ministry of Defence.

He has been married for 30 years to a former policewoman, Nancy, whom he met covering a court case as a local reporter. Their son is following in his father's footsteps as a journalist.

As a 'Whitehall widow', Mrs Ingham knows all about the job coming first. She also has all the Yorkshire grit of her husband. Three years ago she was among pedestrians knocked down by a runaway lorry. Four hours later the fire brigade discovered a badly injured but conscious woman under the wreckage. 'Well, I knew from experience they would have to reach me sometime,' was her cool comment to her distraught husband.

Like all the occupants of his chair, Ingham walks a verbal minefield twice a day when briefing journalists. A casual word, a slip of the tongue, a misplaced nuance could precipitate trouble and charges of treachery.

A Wilson press aide cost the country £250 million in reserves and an emergency Budget by casually suggesting the government had no immediate plans for dealing with a burst of financial jitters.

Edward Heath's press secretary unwisely remarked that the arrest at Heathrow of a Miss Leila Khaled during a Palestinian hijack was a local police matter. It was an error put into its proper political dimension by the subsequent destruction – in part to secure Miss Khaled's release – of three airliners at Dawson's Field in Jordan.

Ingham himself fell into a trap two years ago during another financial emergency with the grim assertion that 'We are not throwing good money after bad'. It needed a hasty public reassurance from the Chancellor insisting that was precisely the government's intention, to stop sterling

tobogganing down the foreign exchange markets to an all-time low.

Ingham's success in accurately reflecting the mood and outlook of his boss, of encapsulating in words her gut instinct, has only been witnessed twice before at Downing Street since the war: Harold Evans could almost sense – and relay – which side of the bed Macmillan got out of, and Joe Haines had a genius for getting inside Harold Wilson's skin.

Ingham is not a softly, softly operator. A radio ham picked up his shortwave radio threats during her visit to the Falklands when he was browbeating ITN into sharing film footage with the BBC when they had acquired a scoop: 'What do you think we're doing this for . . . your convenience? It's the last time you ever get to see the place. . .'

During a weekend trip to Vancouver, Ingham was almost shut out of a private meeting by a huge Canadian Mountie. As he barged his way through the plainclothes man Ingham spat out: 'I am the Prime Minister's press secretary. . . and you had better watch it.'

'Watch it' is now the password for Ingham's regular audience of lobby journalists in a sulphurous dispute on whether he should go public with his briefings like the White House.

Two newspapers have broken off relations with No 10 until Bernard gives up his anonymous status as 'official spokesman' and his off-the-record briefing tradition. He has fought ferociously against a move which would strip off the veneer of neutrality all civil servants are supposed to adopt in handling the affairs of their chiefs.

'I am not a public figure,' he says, 'therefore I offer guidance unattributably.' This will not wash with journalists who in their efforts to prise information from him taunt him into paroxysms of fury.

Bernard Ingham gives as good as he gets. He once said that one of the debilitating afflictions of most journalists was their 'conviction that the government is . . . chronically up to no good, not to be trusted and conspiratorial.' This, he argued, 'so sours and contaminates the judgment of otherwise competent journalists as to render them pathetically negative, inaccurate and unreliable.'

There is a peerage for Ingham at any time should he feel he has had enough at No 10. His knowledge of the energy field alone would have half a dozen oil or chemical giants clamouring to have such a lord on the board. Yet it is hardly conceivable that Mrs Thatcher will allow him to go if she does pull off the election hat-trick. **YOU**

MR WICKS
CHIEF WHIP

REPLY TO THE GUARDIAN

The Editor of The Guardian has written to me as attached, following a meeting I had with Jim Naughtie, their Chief Political Correspondent, earlier this week.

I attach my draft reply. My aim is to present my position in the most positive light and to make it as difficult as possible for Preston to use the letter to revive the flagging Lobby story.

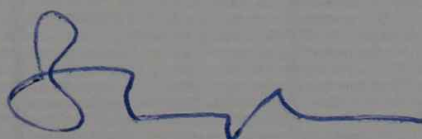
If he does, it would be my intention to release the correspondence to the Lobby.

I think it better not to rise to the bait in his last paragraph. But if your advice were to be more robust, I could substitute the last paragraph of the draft with this:

"I shall not respond to the latter part of your letter except to make two points:

- i. I have argued the case for retaining the Lobby system elsewhere, and The Guardian has published it; and
- ii. your remarks serve only to confirm my view that, paradoxically in view of their free way with abuse, denigration and cheap-jack juvenalia, journalists seem uncommonly sensitive souls."

I would be grateful for your views overnight so that I can send off my reply on Friday afternoon on my return from Yorkshire.



BERNARD INGHAM
19 February 1987

DRAFT

Peter Preston Esq
Editor
The Guardian
119 Farringdon Road
London EC1R 3ER

19 February 1987

Thank you for your letter of February 18.

My position is very clear. It was my practice throughout my seven years in this job up to October 1986 to deal with all journalists without discrimination. I would still be pursuing that policy but for your action, following the lead of The Independent, in unilaterally deciding to single out the Chief Press Secretary at No 10 for entirely discriminatory treatment.

Overnight, I found, as a result of your dictat, that my deputy and I, apparently alone among all our Civil Service colleagues, were unacceptable sources for The Guardian when collectively briefing correspondents as a group.

I rapidly discovered, however, that we would be an entirely acceptable source - and an unattributable one at that - in individual contacts with The Guardian's Lobby staff outside group briefings. And, as your pages since October have occasionally shown, you regard me as an eminently acceptable source when you can pick up second hand accounts of what I am supposed to have said to the Lobby collectively.

You should not be surprised, since you are normally pretty hot against other forms of discrimination, that I regarded this as an unsatisfactory situation. I saw no reason why I, or the post I occupy, should be treated in this discriminatory way. Consequently, I made it clear that I would not in future be available a la carte, as it were, to The Guardian's Lobby staff.

I would, however, be fully available to them without discrimination - and without recrimination - immediately your discrimination against me ended. That remains the position. I am surprised you find any cause for complaint.

I should add that we have not, as a matter of absolute principle, refused to deal with general queries from The Guardian, but we shall not permit this service to be abused.

So far as the trip to Moscow is concerned, we have so far 56 bids for 24 press seats on the Prime Minister's 'plane. There are going to be a lot of disappointed people and I am afraid that The Guardian will be one of them.

Again, I am surprised that you should ask for such tour facilities when you would find it virtually impossible, within the confines of a VC10, to maintain your selective discrimination against me when dealing collectively with Lobby journalists.

It might be worth adding that I did tell Jim Naughtie that we would, if we could, help The Guardian in other ways to get to Moscow to cover the Prime Minister's visit.

I shall not respond to the latter part of your letter except to say that I have argued the case for retaining the Lobby system elsewhere and The Guardian has published it.

BERNARD INGHAM

THE GUARDIAN

119 FARRINGDON ROAD
LONDON EC1R 3ER

Telephone 01-278 2332
Telex 8811746/7/8 (GUARDN G)
Registered in England No. 908396

From the Editor

Registered Office 164 Deansgate
Manchester M60 2RR
061-832 7200
Telex 668920 (evnews-g)

18th February, 1987.

Dear Bernard,

I write in the wake of your informal discussion with Jim Naughtie last night in order to clarify two points. Jim informs me that in future:

1) Neither you nor your staff - as a matter of blanket instruction - will respond to Guardian queries of any nature ever again. I'm not talking about matters raised during your lobby meetings. I refer only to questions of the kind routinely addressed to Press Officers across Whitehall. I should be glad of your formal confirmation of that position.

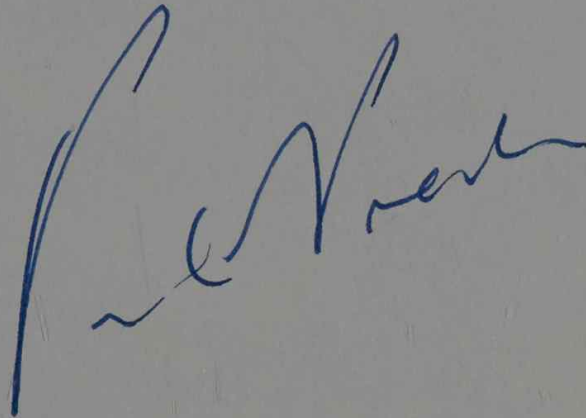
2) That full coverage of events of potential international significance - like the Prime Minister's forthcoming Soviet visit - are also declared off limits to The Guardian. You told Jim last night that, for example, there was no point whatsoever in our pursuing our application to accompany Mrs Thatcher on her plane to Moscow next month. I should be glad of formal confirmation of that too. It would save us all a good deal of redundant work.

On a more personal level I have to say how much I regret the individual anger, with added vituperation, that you seem continually to display towards this paper, and towards members of its staff. We have sought only to bring about some modest measure of reform in a system which we feel would benefit from it. We haven't - I haven't - constantly denounced you in public or in private. During the past four months we have been conscious of the need not to precipitate emotional scenes or difficulties - by, for instance, asking one of our staff to attend your lobby briefings. We have also, as you well know, repeatedly drawn a careful distinction between mass lobby briefings - where we feel a Downing Street spokesman or source should be clearly identified - and individual dealings between journalists and sources, which are an inevitable fact of life everywhere in the world.

Continued.....

I am distressed that such simple points and distinctions seem to be perpetually misunderstood. I should welcome your immediate clarification of the two specific points raised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Ingham", written in a cursive style.

Mr Bernard Ingham



CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

01-270 0101

From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

TH
TH
Ref. A087/449

c - Mr. Wicks
M.
18 February 1987

Thank you for your letter of 12 January.

The report from The Guardian to which you refer did not include my further letter to Mr Sedgemore, in which I made it clear that I did not in any way accept the interpretation which he had sought to put upon my earlier letter.

I should share your concern about anything which suggested that the Civil Service was becoming politicised, but (as my first letter to Mr Sedgemore made clear) I do not think that the incident to which you refer carries any such connotation. Your concern arises, of course, from a background briefing, and there is consequently no precise record of what was said. But, as I indicated in my letter, I do not believe that the exchange was unlike the kind of exchange that has occurred with successive No 10 spokesmen over the years, and under various governments.

On the general point, I am on record in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee with the view that the Civil Service is not being politicised; and that has also been the view of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee itself, of the Government in its response to the Committee's Seventh Report of 1985-86, and (I was glad to see) of a report recently published by the Royal Institute of Public Administration.

I cannot go along with your apparent view that these matters are not the subject of public discussion. On the contrary, I think that there is as much public discussion of them as at any time I can remember, if not more. Apart from the memorandum of guidance which I issued two years ago, there have been reports from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and

/from the Defence

Professor Peter Self
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street

from the Defence Committee of the House of Commons, Government responses to these reports, contributions by the First Division Association and the Royal Institute of Public Administration, and many articles published in various journals and periodicals. I welcome that discussion, and I believe that it has helped to clarify the issues.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

GOVT. MACH: Lobby System. Oct. 1981



CCBT ✓

B+

Content well
this. I am.

Ref. A087/372

MR WICKS

NLU
16-2 attap

Thank you for your minute of 28 January
about the letter which I have received from
Professor Peter Self.

2. I think that it is a little difficult to
exclude any reference to the particular incident
which gave rise to Professor Peter Self's
concern. I wonder whether you and Mr Ingham
would be content with the revised draft reply
attached.

RTA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

cc. Mr Ingham

12 February 1987

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO

Professor Peter Self
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London
WC2A 2AE

Thank you for your letter of 12 January.

The report from The Guardian to which you refer did not include my further letter to Mr Sedgemore, in which I made it clear that I did not in any way accept the interpretation which he had sought to put upon my earlier letter.

I should share your concern about anything which suggested that the Civil Service was becoming politicised, but (as my first letter to Mr Sedgemore made clear) I do not think that the incident to which you refer carries any such connotation. Your concern arises, of course, from a background briefing, and there is consequently no precise record of what was said. But, as I indicated in my letter, I do not believe that the exchange was unlike the kind of exchange that has occurred with successive No 10 spokesmen over the years, and under various governments.

On the general point, I am on record in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee with the view that the Civil Service is not being politicised; and that has also been the view of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee itself, of the Government in its response to the Committee's Seventh Report of 1985-86, and (I was glad to see) of a report recently published by the Royal Institute of Public Administration.

I cannot go along with your apparent view that these matters are not the subject of public discussion. On the

contrary, I think that there is as much public discussion of them as at any time I can remember, if not more. Apart from the memorandum of guidance which I issued two years ago, there have been reports from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and from the Defence Committee of the House of Commons, Government responses to these reports, contributions by the First Division Association and the Royal Institute of Public Administration, and many articles published in various journals and periodicals. I welcome that discussion, and I believe that it has helped to clarify the issues.

GOVT MACH: Lobby System Oct 8





bc 81

RM

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute of 26 January to Mr. Ingham about the letter which you have received from Professor Peter Self.

I am certain that your reply to Professor Self would receive publicity. We therefore need to guard against saying anything which would prompt into action again the ever-ready pen of Mr. Sedgemore. I do have to say that I believe the third paragraph and the first sentence of the fourth paragraph might do just that. Could I suggest that the letter should omit this material. I think it reads very well without them.

N.L. WICKS
28 January 1987

RM

The London School of Economics and Political Science

(University of London)



*Can I see the
Guardian report?
- linked*

Houghton Street,
London WC2A 2AE

Telephone: 01-405 7686

Telegrams: Poleconics, London

Telex: 24655 BLPES G



Revised

Sir Robert Armstrong, K.C.B., C.V.O.,
Secretary to the Cabinet,
Cabinet Office,
Whitehall,
LONDON S.W.1.

c - Mr. Wilson

12th January, 1987.

Dear Sir Robert,

I am writing to you out of concern about the apparent politicisation of the Civil Service. As a teacher of Public Administration and with a father who was a distinguished Civil Servant (Sir Albert Henry Self), I always used to defend vociferously the integrity and impartiality of the higher Civil Service in Britain, but this support cannot stand up to the degree of partisan involvement in party politics reported in the correspondence between yourself and Brian Sedgemore in The Guardian of 6.1.87. If this report is accurate, the involvement of the Civil Service with such highly partisan and vaguely attributed remarks will in my view only further undermine the traditional status and role of British administrators and thereby strengthen the case for following the American model of politicising all top appointments.

British Civil Servants seem to have overdone their legendary pragmatism, with the result that they have no clear purpose or ethics to appeal to so as to defend or justify their role. In this situation erosion by political pressures and expediency becomes all too inevitable. I have found the Civil Servants in Australia and Canada and in some OECD countries where I have been a consultant more willing to discuss and think about their responsibilities and ethics within the public service than seems to be the case here. Although I shall myself be abroad all this year (but back in 1988), I am writing this letter to urge upon you the importance of developing a discussion of these issues incorporating contributions from academics. The Department of Government here as well as the Royal Institute of Public Administration would be a good centre for this enterprise. Otherwise I feel the repute of the Civil Service will continue to slide.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Self

Professor Peter Self

c.c. Professor George Jones
Professor William Plowden, RIPA.
Dr. Rosamund Thomas, Wolfson College, Cambridge.

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO

Professor Peter Self
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London
WC2A 2AE

Thank you for your letter of 12 January.

The report from The Guardian to which you refer did not include my further letter to Mr Sedgemore, in which I made it clear that I did not in any way accept the interpretation which he had sought to put upon my earlier letter.

I should share your concern about anything which suggested that the Civil Service was becoming politicised, but (as my first letter to Mr Sedgemore made clear) I do not think that this incident carries any such connotation. It is difficult to be sure exactly what happened, on an occasion which was off the record; but, as I indicated in my first letter to Mr Sedgemore, the question put to Mr Coe appears to have been not dissimilar to the kind of question which has been put to successive No 10 spokesmen over the years, and under various governments; and the answer would appear to have been an accurate reflection of the attitudes of Ministers. It was perfectly clear to all concerned that Mr Coe was not expressing a personal view. What was of course different from previously was that, though the briefing was on "lobby" (ie unattributable) terms, two newspapers failed to honour those terms. Clearly, if that became the rule rather than the exception to the rule, that would have considerable implications for relations between Government spokesmen and Lobby journalists.

The Government's view on the duties and responsibilities of civil servant who act as departmental press and information

officers was set out in paragraph 29 of its response to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's Seventh Report of 1985-86 (Cmnd 9841). On the general point, I am on record in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee with the view that the Civil Service is not being politicised; and that has also been the view of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee itself, of the Government in its response to the Committee's Seventh Report of 1985-86, and (I was glad to see) of a report recently published by the Royal Institute of Public Administration.

I cannot go along with your apparent view that these matters are not the subject of public discussion. On the contrary, I think that there is as much public discussion of them ^{as} ~~than~~ at any time I can remember, if not more. Apart from the memorandum of guidance which I issued two years ago, there have been reports from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and from the Defence Committee, Government responses to these reports, contributions by the First Division Association of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, and many articles published in various journals and periodicals. I welcome that discussion, and I believe that it has helped to clarify the issues.



Ref. A087/152

MR INGHAM

cc Mr Wicks

You will have seen Mr Sedgemore's further letter about "Mr Jim Coe and the Constitution", my reply, and Mr Sedgemore's riposte to the effect that my reply was "unacceptable and unnecessarily evasive". I think that the correspondence has to stop there. If I tried to answer Mr Sedgemore's questions, we should be drawn into a morass of further questions and answers.

2. But you will be aware that I remain uneasy about the episode. No doubt we are in this situation because the newspapers breached the unattributability convention for Lobby briefings. We are, I fear, in a situation where we cannot count on this not happening again. However that may be, I think that what was said went beyond what is appropriate or fitting for a Civil Service spokesman, as that was defined in the Government's response to the Seventh Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee in July 1986. It is one thing for a Civil Service spokesman to explain and defend the policy of the Government: it is another for him (or her) to comment on the policies of the Opposition, and yet another thing to comment on the policies or views of the Leader of the Opposition (or any other member of the Opposition, come to that).

3. It seems to me, therefore, that it would be both right and wise to make it a general rule that the No 10 spokesman at the Lobby should not answer questions or make comments on the policies or positions of the Opposition or of particular members of the Opposition, or on the views of the Government or of Ministers on such policies and positions. If such questions are asked, even for unattributable answer, the answer surely has to be "You must ask Ministers that question."

4. I hope that this minute will not be regarded as being intended to be critical of Mr Coe. I recognise that the possibility of his being asked the question he was asked was foreseen, and that he was authorised to answer it in the way he did.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

19 January 1987

AR
NEA

to see the

cc - Mr. Wicks
Mr. Ingham
Mr. Court.



70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A087/77

8 January 1987

Thank you for your letter of 4 January. *at flay*

I do not think that there is anything that I can usefully add to my letter of 23 December, save to say that I do not in any way accept the interpretation which you are seeking to put upon it.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Brian Sedgemore Esq MP
House of Commons

Gov. Mach: The Lobby System Oct 1981



NEA to see the

F

By Ingham.

A. Wicks R

Sedgemoor
of the
Hill

I agree with this response.

Ref. A087/44

NLU

MR INGHAM

5.1

c Mr Wicks

Mr Brian Sedgemore MP has responded to my letter of 23 December with a further letter posing a number of questions.

2. I doubt whether there is anything to be gained by becoming drawn into further correspondence, and if you agree I propose to reply briefly on the lines of the draft attached.

RIA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

7 January 1987

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO
BRIAN SEDGEMORE MP, HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thank you for your letter of 4 January.

I do not think that there is anything that I can usefully add to my letter of 23 December, save to say that I do not in any way accept the interpretation which you are seeking to put upon it.



From Brian Sedgemore MP



CABINET OFFICE
A 66
5 JAN 1987
FILING INSTRUCTION
FILE No.

111EA to see

2. CF

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

PC cc Mr Ingham

N.C.W.

4 January 1987

Dear Sir Robert,

cc- Mr Court
Advice please
Mr Hewes
Mr Wilson
Mr Wicks

East
6/1

MR JIM COE AND THE CONSTITUTION

Thank you for your letter of 23 December. I did find it helpful because although brief it was the first direct admission that what the Independent and the Guardian had reported did in fact take place.

I must confess though that I was saddened to receive your confirmation of the role in which civil servants find themselves. As I understand it you are saying in your capacity as Head of the Civil Service that there is now a system in operation, of which you approve, whereby civil servants acting on behalf of unnamed Ministers (in circumstances where no collective Ministerial view has been expressed either in Cabinet or in a Cabinet sub-committee or at other meetings) directly involve themselves in Party politics at the level of personal abuse. That is a confirmation on your part of a sad decline in the integrity and moral practices of the civil service.

Your letter raises a number of questions which I'd be grateful if you could answer:

How does Mr Coe or Mr Ingham know the views of Ministers on these subjects?

Do Ministers ring in to 10 Downing Street or do their individual Press Offices send in reports?

If some Ministers think Neil Kinnock is fit to be Prime Minister and some don't what gives Mr Coe or Mr Ingham the right to express any collective view on the matter?

If Mr Coe and Mr Ingham speak for the "government" on these issues, as Mr Ingham has said they do, what system exists whereby they can know the views of Ministers, particularly where personal abuse is involved?

Continued



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

-2-

I look forward to your reply.

I'm copying this correspondence to the Rt Hon Neil Kinnock MP and to the Clerk to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee.

Yours

sincerely

John Giddens

Sir Robert Armstrong
Head of the Home Civil Service
70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS



cc Mr Wicks
Mr Ingham

70 WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AS

01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A086/5582

23 December 1986

R29/9

Your letter of 23 November was waiting for me on my return from Australia, and I have since looked into the matters which you raise.

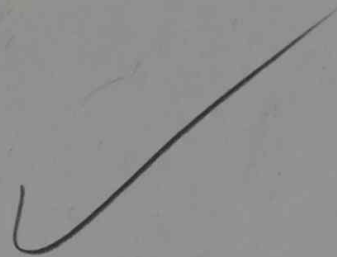
There is little that I can add to the letter which the Prime Minister sent to you on 26 November. Under successive Governments it has by no means been unusual, at the regular background briefings given to Lobby journalists by Downing Street spokesmen, for questions to be asked about the attitudes as well as the policies of Government, and for the spokesmen to give appropriate guidance. I understand that, on the occasion in question, a direct question was asked, and that the answer given was an accurate reflection of the attitude of Ministers on the question raised. It was not in any sense a personal attack.

Brian Sedgemore Esq MP
House of Commons

Ref. A086/3564

MR INGHAM

MR WICKS



--- We discussed last week how I might reply to the letter (copy attached) which Mr Brian Sedgemore sent me on 23 November about the Lobby briefing on 21 November.

2. As I said, I do not think that I can just rest on the Prime Minister's reply of 26 November to the letter which Mr Sedgemore sent to her on the same date.

--- 3. I should welcome your comments on the draft attached. If possible, I should like to send it off before I go away for Christmas.

4. I wondered whether to add an additional sentence at the end of the draft, which would have read:

"Nonetheless I have reminded those concerned of the Government's view of the role of press and information officers, as stated in paragraph 29 of the Government's reply to the Seventh Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee."

In some ways it would be convenient to include this sentence; but I fear that it might only invite further argument with Mr Sedgemore.

5. I am sending a copy of this minute to Mr Wicks.

RTA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

22 December 1986



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

23 November 1986

Dear Sir Robert

MR JIM COE AND THE CONSTITUTION

I am writing to you in your capacity as Head of the Home Civil Service and enclose a copy of a letter which I've sent today to the Prime Minister. I'm sorry to bother you at what I know must be a painful and critical time for you but the issue of compromising civil servants as has happened in the case of Jim Coe, who works for the Prime Minister, is a serious one. And in any event it arises out of the case which has taken you to Australia.

However Jim Coe's position is if anything more hazardous and parlous than yours. In his case the constitution has been breached, sadly, while you were away.

I look forward to your return and for action on this matter to safeguard civil servants in the future.

Yours sincerely
Jim Deagenore

Sir Robert Armstrong
Head of Home Civil Service
Cabinet Office
Whitehall
London SW1

23 November 1986

Dear Margaret,

MR JIM COE AND THE CONSTITUTION

In my capacity as a former civil servant, a Member of Parliament and a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service I was astonished to read (Guardian and Independent 22 November) that Mr Jim Coe, a civil servant, launched a vulgar party political attack at a Lobby meeting held on 21 November against the Rt Hon Neil Kinnock MP, Leader of the Opposition. It is wholly unacceptable and unconstitutional for a civil servant to indulge in party politics at the level of the slurry pit and launch personal attacks on members of opposition parties. The blame for this sorry state of affairs lies partly with Mr Coe but mainly with yourself as I understand that you authorised Mr Coe to make his statement. If you wish to attack Neil Kinnock clearly you should do this yourself and not ask civil servants.

However desperate you may feel about your role in the spy scandal case that does not warrant your calling in civil servants to make statements clearly designed to help the Conservative Party rather than deal with the security of the realm. The affair raises the question of where Mr Coe's loyalty lies - to the Conservative Party or the government. Clearly you have compromised Mr Coe's position to such an extent that he could not serve as a civil servant under a future Labour government - unless Neil is even more of a saint than his closest friends believe.

As you know the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has suggested that political appointees not civil servants should carry out the kind of duties which you have assigned to Mr Coe. That being so I shall raise the issue with the Committee tomorrow. In the meantime I would welcome your assurance that you will not place civil servants in the invidious position in which Mr Coe now find himself, thanks to a Lobby system that has broken down.

Continued

-2-

I shall be writing personally to Mr Coe asking for an explanation of his actions. Normally I would not dream of writing personally to a civil servant but if people like Mr Coe wish to enter the party political affray then they must answer for themselves.

I'm copying this letter to Mr Coe and to Neil Kinnock.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Y
MP
P
M

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

c c The Rt Hon Neil Kinnock MP
Mr Jim Coe, Deputy Press Secretary

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO
BRIAN SEDGEMORE ESQ MP, HOUSE OF COMMONS

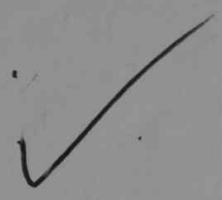
Your letter of 23 November was waiting for me on my return from Australia, and I have since looked into the matters which you raise.

There is little that I can add to the letter which the Prime Minister sent to you on 26 November. Under successive Governments it has by no means been unusual, at the regular ^{budget} briefings given to Lobby journalists by Downing Street spokesmen, ~~which are of course traditionally on an unattributable "Lobby" basis,~~ for questions to be asked about the attitudes as well as the policies of Government, and for the spokesmen to give appropriate guidance. I understand that, on the occasion in question, a direct question was asked, and that the answer ^{given} was not in any sense a personal attack - ~~which would have been of course entirely out of order~~ - but an accurate reflection of the attitude of Ministers on the question raised. *It was in no sense a personal attack.*





Mr Wicks



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Press Secretary

David Hughes Esq
Secretary
Parliamentary Lobby Journalists
Press Gallery
House of Commons
London SW1

27 November 1986

Jim Davis,

Thank you for your note of November 26 about the breach of Lobby rules last Friday. I much appreciate the spirit in which you write.

I feel I must write to you because of an account I have had of the Lobby's consideration yesterday of my complaint. My understanding is that in the course of your discussion exception was taken to the "political" nature of Jim Coe's response to a question on Friday about Ministers' views of the handling of the MI5 case by the Leader of the Opposition. The implication of the point was that members of the Lobby were justified in breaking their rules if they felt that a reply given by a No 10 spokesman was, in their judgement, politically "offside".

First, I think we should be clear about Jim Coe's reply. He responded to a direct question which we had, not surprisingly, anticipated about Ministers' views. We speak for Government which is composed of Ministers.

But whether or not the reply was onside or offside is neither here nor there. What matters is the Lobby's approach to its own rules.

And the implication of the point raised in discussion, as reported to me, is that those rules should be so elastic as to permit members to cast them aside when they get a reply to a question they have raised which they don't like. If that were so, then it would mean not merely that the Lobby held its own rules in contempt; or even that it had chosen anarchy; it would mean that it had taken on the role of censor.

It may well be that this notion was raised only in a forlorn attempt to justify a breach of trust for which you apologise on behalf of the Lobby. Whatever the reason, I think you should be aware that I regard the argument as unacceptable as it is unprincipled.

BERNARD INGHAM

PARLIAMENTARY LOBBY JOURNALISTS

Press Gallery
House of Commons
London, S.W.1.

Copy to N. Weeks
D. Mac Naughtin
R. Smith
T. Nelson
return

November 26 1986

Bernard Ingham Esq
Press Secretary
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Bernard,

Thank you for your letter of November 24. The Lobby Committee is as concerned as you are over the breach of Lobby rules last Friday. We would like to apologise both to you and to Jim Coe for what happened. The incident illustrates something that has been evident for some time - that the Lobby is no longer secure and that the mutual trust on which it depends has broken down. While in no way wishing to duck the issue posed by last Friday's breach, we would point out that the whole question of how the Lobby conducts itself - and polices itself - is at the heart of the inquiry into Lobby practice currently being undertaken and which we hope to conclude within the next week or so. We hope that the report of that inquiry will address this and related issues in a way that enables a good working relationship to be resumed.

Yours sincerely

David Hughes.

David Hughes
Honorary Secretary



SLH

cc RTA
BI + JC
LPS
MA

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

26 November 1986

Dear Mr. Sedgemore

Thank you for your letter of 23 November.

I am not prepared to comment on what may or may not have been said at unattributable briefings. I would only observe that spokesmen, when asked questions about Ministerial views, seek as far as possible to give accurate guidance.

On your remarks about the proceedings concerning the Peter Wright case in Australia, I refer you to the answers I gave in the House yesterday.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Shafter

Brian Sedgemore, Esq., M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

23 November 1986

Dear Margaret,

MR JIM COE AND THE CONSTITUTION

In my capacity as a former civil servant, a Member of Parliament and a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service I was astonished to read (Guardian and Independent 22 November) that Mr Jim Coe, a civil servant, launched a vulgar party political attack at a Lobby meeting held on 21 November against the Rt Hon Neil Kinnock MP, Leader of the Opposition. It is wholly unacceptable and unconstitutional for a civil servant to indulge in party politics at the level of the slurry pit and launch personal attacks on members of opposition parties. The blame for this sorry state of affairs lies partly with Mr Coe but mainly with yourself as I understand that you authorised Mr Coe to make his statement. If you wish to attack Neil Kinnock clearly you should do this yourself and not ask civil servants.

However desperate you may feel about your role in the spy scandal case that does not warrant your calling in civil servants to make statements clearly designed to help the Conservative Party rather than deal with the security of the realm. The affair raises the question of where Mr Coe's loyalty lies - to the Conservative Party or the government. Clearly you have compromised Mr Coe's position to such an extent that he could not serve as a civil servant under a future Labour government - unless Neil is even more of a saint than his closest friends believe.

As you know the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has suggested that political appointees not civil servants should carry out the kind of duties which you have assigned to Mr Coe. That being so I shall raise the issue with the Committee tomorrow. In the meantime I would welcome your assurance that you will not place civil servants in the invidious position in which Mr Coe now find himself, thanks to a Lobby system that has broken down.

Continued



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

-2-

I shall be writing personally to Mr Coe asking for an explanation of his actions. Normally I would not dream of writing personally to a civil servant but if people like Mr Coe wish to enter the party political affray then they must answer for themselves.

I'm copying this letter to Mr Coe and to Neil Kinnock.

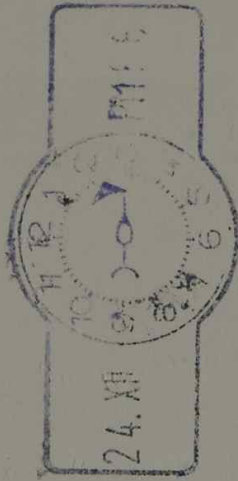
I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours

Ris

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

c c The Rt Hon Neil Kinnock MP
 Mr Jim Coe, Deputy Press Secretary



BOITE DE COMMERCE
LONDON W.C.2



Prime Minister ²
to note

10 DOWNING STREET

N.C.W

21.11

From the Press Secretary

LORD PRESIDENT

I attach for your files a note of my meeting
with the Lobby inquiry team.

BERNARD INGHAM
20 November 1986

mt

cc: Lord Privy Seal
Chief Whip
Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr Wicks

LOBBY INQUIRY

MEETING AT NO 10 DOWNING STREET, THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER 1986

Present:

Mr B Ingham	Chief Press Secretary	10 Downing Street
Mr J Coe	Deputy Press Secretary	10 Downing Street
Mr C Moncrieff	Press Association)
Mr D Hughes	Sunday Times) Parliamentary Lobby
Mr P Riddell	Financial Times) Journalists
Mr G Jackson	Thomson Regional)

Mr Ingham gave the members of the Lobby inquiry a note (attached) setting out the Government's views on the Lobby system. In doing so, he said that the note was not intended for publication, but he accepted that the inquiry team could circulate it to their members and that this might well lead to publication.

Asked by Mr Moncrieff if the point lying behind the final paragraph of the Government's note was that the Lobby rules should be properly enforced, Mr Ingham said that this was indeed the case. Over the years the Lobby's rules of non-attribution had become more honoured in the breach. This erosion had occurred gradually. But over and above this there was a more general journalistic problem of disclosure of sources. It was not simply that the non-attribution rule had become eroded but that, during the teachers' dispute, for example, some correspondents had told the Department of Education and Science what No 10 had said in the Lobby briefings, no doubt with the objective of persuading the DES to be more forthcoming still. There was

evidence that guidance given by No 10 Downing Street was freely given to Ministers and no doubt Opposition parties.

Mr Ingham said that he felt that the media wanted it both ways and he was deeply depressed by the hypocrisy inherent in the willingness of some Lobby members to receive guidance from him one-to-one on Lobby terms while objecting to receiving it collectively in formal Lobby briefings.

Mr Riddell said that the position on non-attributable guidance was not clear. Phrases such as "Whitehall sources", "Westminster sources" and "Government sources" had on occasions become more specific, eg "Downing Street sources". This might well be because of the extent of the turnover in Lobby membership and the number of young journalists who were joining it. He suggested clarification was called for.

Mr Ingham said that the high turnover and relative inexperience of members of the Lobby might be a factor. But he thought that some people who had no doubt what Lobby terms meant had deliberately set out to weaken the unattributable system in this way. As far as he was concerned, the term non-attributable meant that the source should not be disclosed. It was unacceptable for newspapers to use "Downing Street says," or similar phrases. But he recognised that in briefings abroad he had sought to preserve as much of the system as possible by suggesting to those who felt the need to source his guidance that the term "British sources" would be acceptable. In that spirit at home he could therefore live with "Government sources" as a term which was at once accurate and general - ie non-specific.

Mr Riddell wondered whether there was scope for identifying Downing Street on certain occasions.

Mr Ingham said that sometimes the Press Office 'did go on-the-record'. He instanced the occasion when there were erroneous allegations that the Prime Minister had indulged in share dealings. On that occasion No 10 Press Office issued a number of on-the-record statements. However, No 10 made very few announcements beyond appointments, details of the Prime Minister's visits abroad and, of course, Answers to Parliamentary Questions.

Given that the Chief Press Secretary was predominantly in the business of guidance - and not of announcing policy developments which was the business of Cabinet Ministers - he found it difficult to see how else to proceed.

Moreover, he was against introducing two grades of briefing - one "Government sources" and the other more specifically "Downing Street" since this would only make for confusion, which in turn would promote the very erosion of the Lobby's rules he was anxious to preserve. It would, however, be important not to leave the Lobby worse off than the generality of media when guidance was issued as from No 10 on press briefings.

Mr Ingham said that if the Lobby decided to confirm its rules and then some members set out to break the system by quoting him on the basis of information obtained from PA tape or elsewhere, a very serious situation would arise.

Mr Riddell said he could not see what anyone could do if The Guardian and The Independent chose to identify sources from agency copy.

Mr Ingham agreed that it was impossible to stop correspondents feeding off agency material or prevent them attributing, rightly or wrongly, guidance to him on the basis of agency copy. We could only await developments, if any, on that. But if that situation arose, it would create

a problem for the Lobby as well as for the Chief Press Secretary.

Mr Riddell inquired how that would arise. Mr Ingham said that in that event a minority of members of the Lobby who, on present evidence, had no objection in principle to Lobby briefings other than those given by the Chief Press Secretary would be placing in jeopardy a service offered to the majority of members of the "club". They would consequently present the "club" with a serious problem

Mr Riddell asked how the Chief Press Secretary would treat individual approaches to No 10 Press Office by any member of the Lobby who chose to ignore his Lobby briefings.

Mr Ingham said that he and his staff sought to provide a service to journalists. But those who chose to discriminate against No 10 could scarcely expect the same service as others, and would not get it.

Mr Riddell, accepting there was a degree of hypocrisy, asked if the Chief Press Secretary would intend to stop all contacts with those who did not observe the rules?

Mr Ingham said he could not stop them ringing up No 10 Press Office, but they would not get the same degree of help and he suspected they themselves would not expect it. Their calls would have lower priority. They would find it very difficult to reach him and his deputy - and not simply because of deliberate policy; he and Mr Coe had a great deal to do before, between and after the recognised Lobby times of 11am and 4pm, including attendance at meetings.

Mr Hughes asked whether, if it proved necessary to dispose with briefings at 11am and 4pm and Mr Ingham was driven to call his own unattributable briefings of the Lobby, he would hold lobbies in a room of his own at the House. Mr Ingham

said that the Lobby would have to come to No 10. He had no accommodation in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr Ingham remarked that many people argued that he was foolish to wish to continue with the Lobby system. But at the root of his desire to do so was the concept of providing a service to all journalists, regardless of their status, political persuasion or importance of their newspapers. His office acted as a bridge between No 10 and the media, and it remained his objective to maintain the link in a good state of repair.

The attack on the system had come from the so-called intellectual end of the market he served, and he suspected that they felt this had nothing to lose from the destruction of the Lobby as it now existed. He had no respect for that kind of attitude.

Mr Moncrieff commented that matters might come to a head earlier than expected. He believed that Peter Preston, Editor of The Guardian, was growing impatient and was prepared to wait only until the end of November.

Mr Riddell said that the inquiry had its own terms of reference and reporting timescale.

Mr Ingham said he proposed to try to continue to deal with the Lobby and with Parliamentary journalists as a whole. Maverick organisations would not change this.

It was agreed that the British system was fairer than in many countries and particularly that of the United States. Mr Ingham said that, unlike Larry Speakes, the President's Press Secretary, he did not deal in much raw news. Mr Speakes was able to announce executive decisions by the President. British press secretaries were in a different position because of the British constitution. This

fundamental difference, involving the Cabinet system of collective responsibility and Ministerial accountability, had not been sufficiently taken on board by those who sought to impose "American" methods upon the UK.

mt

Bingham

BERNARD INGHAM
17 November 1986

LOBBY SYSTEM

This note sets out the Government's attitude to the so-called Lobby system of communication with the media.

2. The phrase "lobby terms" as a method of communicating information to the media stems from the existence of the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists ("the Lobby") operating in the Palace of Westminster. The membership of this group is confined to journalists accredited by the Serjeant-at-Arms for the purposes of controlling access to certain parts of the Palace of Westminster not generally open to the public. But the group is a free standing and independent body whose members determine their own rules and practices.
3. Lobby correspondents invite Ministers and officials to address or brief them under their own chairmanship. Traditionally these meetings have been held on "Lobby terms" - ie the information conveyed may be published by the journalists on their own responsibility but its source may not be disclosed.
4. This method of gathering information is a common, regular daily feature of journalism, both inside and outside the Lobby and at home and abroad. It operates alongside, and is supplementary to, the on-the-record system of news gathering. It is generally accepted that it facilitates the flow of information to the media, and for that reason journalists regularly ask for unattributable guidance when they believe their informants might be inhibited from conveying information on-the-record.
5. After a review of their rules and practices in 1985, the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists concluded that "it would be unworkable to oblige anybody to go on-the-record when they have no wish to do so".

Accordingly they introduced a "permissive" change "to enable Ministers and Opposition spokesmen to speak on-the-record in a Lobby briefing if that is mutually agreed". Ministers have noted this change and have taken the opportunity to go on-the-record.

6. Relations between British Governments and the media are to a very large extent governed by the nature of our constitution. The two principal features are the Cabinet system of collective responsibility and Ministerial responsibility to Parliament. Under this system significant statements of policy, announcements of initiatives or reactions to events are made by the responsible Minister by Oral or Written Statement to Parliament. These announcements are supplemented by press notices and publications, and a large amount of other information is daily made public by means of press notices and other documents. All of this material is of course on-the-record.
7. Departments also issue on-the-record statements, whether through a Minister or their press office, as and when circumstances require - for example, in emergencies.
8. Over and above these long established methods of communicating information to the media and public, Departmental Press Offices maintain hour to hour links with journalists either individually or in more formal groups of which the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists are only one. Other groups cater, for example, for Labour and Industrial, Education, Defence and Science correspondents.
9. Against the background of Ministerial responsibility for communicating information through Parliament, extensively supplemented by press notices and other

publications, Press Officers are generally concerned with providing guidance and other help to journalists. Much of this contact takes place, by mutual consent, on unattributable or Lobby terms. This has generally been the relationship between the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary and the Lobby.

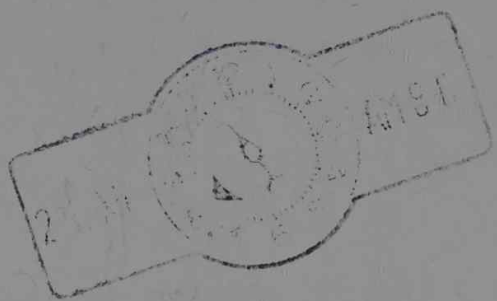
10. The Government has no plans for changing this relationship. It believes that:
 - i. the prime source of information from the Government will - and should - remain on-the-record statements by Ministers to Parliament and published material; the Lobby system supplements this flow of information;
 - ii. the Lobby system accordingly gives due recognition to the primacy of Parliament as the channel for the communication of information by the Government to the nation;
 - iii. many journalists recognise that, within the constraints imposed by Parliament, the Lobby system facilitates the flow of information and guidance;
 - iv. as operated by this Government, the Lobby system serves without discrimination the interests of all Parliamentary Lobby Journalists who wish to take advantage of briefings.

11. The Government notes that journalists who seek to end unattributable briefings of the Lobby as a group by the Chief Press Secretary are in no way opposed to his (or others, including Ministers and MPs) briefing them individually on an unattributable basis, and seek such briefings as a matter of course. Indeed, journalists apparently consider it would be entirely impractical -

and undesirable - to end the well tried system of unattributable briefing in favour of an exclusively on-the-record relationship between informant and correspondent.

12. The Government cannot accept that the Lobby should seek to treat differently collective briefings with the Chief Press Secretary.
13. In a free society journalists using their own judgement are free to accept or reject information imparted to them. In the exercise of their judgement they will take account of the credibility - the track record - of their informant, whether he is on-the-record or briefing on Lobby terms. Their briefers are similarly guided by their perception of the integrity of the journalist or group of journalists with whom they are dealing.
14. The Government considers that, properly operated according to the conventions, the Lobby system can serve a useful purpose in our democracy and for that practical reason would wish to see it continue.

11 November 1986



*Subject cc master**hlie.**VSCACG*

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 November 1986

THE LOBBY SYSTEM

The Prime Minister held a meeting this morning with the Lord President, the Chief Whip, Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Ingham to discuss Mr. Ingham's note of 30 October on the Lobby system.

Opening the discussion, Mr. Ingham pointed out that even the Lobby's most ardent critics accepted the case for unattributable briefing. But they objected to the system of collective briefing by No. 10 on Lobby terms. More fundamentally, the effect of the critics' proposals would be to alter the relationship between Parliament and Government with an attributable spokesman giving journalists information, rather than Ministers reporting to Parliament in the traditional way. It was a helpful sign that the Committee of Inquiry was weighted three to one in favour of maintaining the status quo. He believed that the Government's objective should be to maintain the present arrangements, while seeking to tighten up observance of Lobby rules. In his view, the abolition of the system of collective briefing from No. 10 would lead to briefing on a one to one basis over the Lobby telephone. This would gravely weaken the Government's power to present its policies.

In discussion, the following points were agreed:

- (i) A strong argument in favour of the Lobby system was that it stopped Government discriminating between various groups of journalists. All Lobby correspondents, who were accredited by the Sergeant at Arms, not the Government, had the opportunity to attend and ask questions. It was to this Government's credit that it had sought to maintain that system, in contrast to previous Governments which had discriminated between journalists.
- (ii) It would be unacceptable for the Lobby to seek to treat MPs generally differently from their treatment of No. 10. Similar rules should apply to everyone. There was no prospect of getting rid of unattributable briefing. While that remained, the Government needed to preserve its capacity to

present its policies. The present campaign against the No. 10 role in the Lobby system reflected Mr. Ingham's success in presenting Government policy.

- (iii) It would be impossible for Mr. Ingham or a specially appointed Minister of Information to brief on attributable terms. That would create difficulties for Ministers in Parliament, who would have the spokesman's views thrown back at them, as well as gravely jeopardising relationships between Ministerial colleagues.

Summing up the discussion the Prime Minister agreed with the general approach which Mr. Ingham had described and said that the Lobby system was a creation of Parliament. If Parliament wished to end it, that was a matter for Parliament. But it was unacceptable for there to be one set of rules for MPs and another for No. 10. Everyone should be treated the same. Mr. Ingham should see the Lobby Committee. He should also submit written evidence to the Committee which pointed out, in a cool and dispassionate way, the advantages of the present system. This paper should be circulated in draft to those present at the meeting for their approval.

I am copying this letter to the Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office) and Bernard Ingham here.

N.L. WICKS

Miss Joan MacNaughton
Lord President's Office.

cc: Lord President
Chief Whip
Sir Robert Armstrong

*I suggest an early
discussion with BI
and copy recipients.
Agree?*

1. MR WICKS
2. PRIME MINISTER

*N.L.W
30.10*

LOBBY

The Parliamentary Lobby Journalists have voted to have a second inquiry in 12 months into their current practices. Meanwhile, the existing system of non attribution, unless those briefing the Lobby wish otherwise, will continue.

We now need to examine the Government's approach to the Lobby system in the light of this inquiry and the hopes which some political journalists clearly invest in it.

Background

Peter Riddell, political editor of the Financial Times who wants to get rid of the Lobby system by slow erosion if instant killing is not feasible, is one of the panel of three who will conduct the inquiry. The others are Chris Moncrieff, PA, and David Hughes, Sunday Times, both of whom wish to retain the status quo.

Riddell interprets the vote as indicating "significant support for a clarification of the present system, in particular a change in the method of attribution used by political journalists". In other words, he sees it as offering a second bite at the cherry now that

The Independent and The Guardian, in their separate ways, have split the Lobby "down the middle".

The Guardian and the Daily Telegraph report that the idea of asking the Government to provide a Minister of Cabinet rank, or a designated Minister for Information, to brief the Lobby instead of officials will be on the inquiry's agenda.

Analysis

I think it would be useful first to analyse why we have reached the present situation.

The Lobby contains a plethora of views about the Lobby system ranging from an old fashioned devotion to the strict letter and spirit of the rules to out and out rejection of the institution as a vehicle for communication on traditional lines. The motives of those who seek change are many and varied, too. They range from simple bloodymindedness to what is purported to be a high principled devotion to openness and journalistic purity. It is conceivable that some journalists are encouraged to press for change by Ministers who see the Lobby as mere clay in the hands of the Prime Minister operating through her agent, the Chief Press Secretary.

These many strands of opinion have existed throughout the past 7 years, and before, and slowly and insidiously the zealots have been working to water down the operation of the rules. It has not been a planned operation. It has depended on ~~personalities or circumstances.~~

Fred Emery, of The Times, for example, set out to damage the system. Anthony Bevins, The Independent, simply retired hurt but in such a manner that he caused The Guardian to feel that they had suffered a setback in the journalistic purity league. Peter Preston, the opportunist Editor of The Guardian, therefore used his challenge to the Lobby system to generate publicity for his paper immediately before the launch of The Independent. (NB: Preston had reason to fear The Independent for it is now taking 15% of The Guardian's readership, according to Daily Telegraph figures.)

The Guardian's attack has, however, helped to clarify the issues. Out of the flow of argument over the last few weeks it is now possible to distil a number of conclusions:

- there is no objection in principle to briefing on Lobby terms - ie unattributable briefing; indeed, the fiercest opponents of the Lobby as an institution say, in terms, that unattributable briefing is indispensable to journalism. The Guardian and The Independent, including Bevins, seek it from No 10 Press Office
- the objection is to collective briefing; indeed, the objection may perhaps be only to collective briefing by the Chief Press Secretary for there is certainly no evidence that members of the Lobby (or other formal groups of journalists eg industrial, science, education) object to collective briefings by Ministers or Departments

Against this background, The Guardian, as arch proponents of change, have been pushed to come up with a respectable rationalisation of their case. The hour found the man - Hugo Young (The Guardian, October 28 1986).

He wrote that what is being sought is "the formalising of existing practice" [ie regularising the breaking of Lobby rules] as "a small blow for honesty"; "to lay down the norm which it [the Lobby], as a journalistic not a governmental body, regarded as elementary".

Mr Young admitted that this "blow for honesty" about the source of a journalist's information might not secure attributable statements from the Chief Press Secretary; it would nonetheless be a blow even if the Government would not play ball and the blow had little practical effect.

The Lobby's Options

Where does this leave the Lobby system? Its inquiry is faced with the following options:

- i. to insist that the Lobby's present rules are upheld and strictly observed; some members will press for this but things may have gone too far for them to carry the day;
- ii. to insist on the strict observance of present rules linked with a new rule which confines attendance at Lobby to one - and only one - representative of a particular newspaper or organisation. I do not see this being acceptable to some who might otherwise go for strict operation of the existing rule book;
- iii. to continue as now, but with new exhortations to members strictly to observe the rules with or without accompanying threats of expulsion for offenders; this, without the teeth, seems the most likely course since the system works in a rough and ready way and leaves the eroders - Riddell etc - free to go on wearing away at the stone while they await the departure of the present Chief Press Secretary, a change of Prime Minister or a change of Government;
- iv. to seek the sort of compromise suggested by Tom McCaffrey, Callaghan's Chief Press Secretary (see Guardian 24 October 1986):
 - some on-the-record briefing which "does not apply to guidance on Prime Ministerial and Governmental thought"; this is superficially attractive but operational nonsense calculated to lead to clashes over definition and early breakdown
- v. a variant of iv. which encourages the maximum on-the-record content to collective Lobby briefings, but accepts that some briefing will be given unattributably; this would be dressed up in seductive clothing but is not to be fallen for because in

practice it would generate discord and would be used to accelerate the erosion of the unattributable system.

- vi. to press the Government to appoint a Minister of Information who would brief the Lobby on-the-record - a move likely to be suggested because it is believed that this will overcome the constitutional objections to an appointed official, as distinct from Member of Parliament, reporting direct to the public through the media. I consider this option below.
- vii. to dispense with present Lobby rules and require all collective briefings to be on-the-record; this seems unlikely to carry the day since a lot of members of the Lobby fear they will lose out.
- viii. to disband the Lobby as a group with membership serving only the regulatory purposes of the Serjeant at Arms - ie abandoning the concept of group communication and leaving each individual to pursue his own interests; again this seems an unlikely outcome because a majority apparently feel there is some value in the Lobby as a vehicle for communication.

The Government's Options

The Government's options are constrained by the facts of the constitution:

- the Cabinet system of collective responsibility
- Ministerial accountability to Parliament
- Parliament's jealous desire to hold the executive to account.

The facts of British Governmental life produced the Lobby system in the first instance. They require that something like it should continue.

Consequently, the only option rehearsed above which is attractive to the Government is the strict enforcement of the Lobby's existing rules, possibly linked with a severe restriction on the number of members from any one organisation who can attend individual Lobby briefings. I believe that we should press for the strict observance of rules, emphasising that it is the least Ministers and officials are entitled to expect. This stance will at least have the beneficial effect of stiffening the traditionalists.

There is no attraction in the compromises in iv. and v. above. These will just lead to confusion and conflict because of the practical difficulty of defining where guidance on Prime Ministerial and Government attitudes starts.

The practical effect of a Lobby which requires those who appear before it to be wholly on-the-record may be little different from a Lobby which ceases to function as a vehicle for communication. In either case, Ministers and the Chief Press Secretary, who would be constrained on-the-record, would be free to call their own briefings on their own terms. The Lobby would continue to exist but in a more restricted form. This would be an attractive option but for the damaging consequences for the Government's media relations.

The fact that the media had brought this on themselves would carry little weight. The divisive effects of favouritism, real or imagined, would do the Government no good.

This leaves the idea of a Minister for Information who would operate on-the-record. Superficially, a Minister, accountable to Parliament, does not labour under the same

handicaps of an official Chief Press Secretary. But in practice he would be no less constrained whether on or off the record.

This is because he would be up against exactly the same Parliamentary and collective responsibility constraints which affect an official. He could no more anticipate Parliamentary Answers or Statements than an official can. Nor would he be freer to present other Ministers' policies for them; indeed his colleagues might well prefer a Chief Press Secretary briefing unattributably on their patch to a Minister stealing their thunder on radio and television - and it is in radio and television studios that a Minister for Information would logically soon find himself.

Government's Position

In these circumstances I recommend that the Government:

- 1. ✓ seeks to persuade helpful members of the Lobby to maintain Lobby rules and apply and police them rigorously; its aim should be to secure a more disciplined system than now exists;
- 2. ✓ has no truck with the selection of compromises identified above, including a Minister for Information;
- 3. ✓ for tactical purposes leaves unclear what might replace the present system if the Lobby were so foolish as to go down the road of ending it; but leaves no doubt that this could have an adverse effect on availability, amount and depth of briefing;
- 4. avoids, if possible, the disturbing effects of a disbandment of the Lobby or of an end to its unattributable basis of briefing;

5. reviews the situation if it becomes clear that The Independent, The Guardian or others seek to break the system by reporting on-the-record what they pick up of unattributable Lobby briefings;
6. encourages Ministers increasingly to take the opportunity to present their policies and initiatives on radio and television, using short, polished summaries designed specifically for television.

You may care to discuss.

Yes *no*

See

BERNARD INGHAM

30 October 1986

F.



10 DOWNING STREET

Note for the Record.

The PN discussed
with BI his notes
on the baby system.
PN agreed to leave
matters as they are.

N. L. W.

18.2.

G. Butler

PRIME MINISTER

LOBBY SYSTEM - MORE THOUGHTS

Nigel and I are to discuss with you next week my paper on the Lobby system in which I advise you to do nothing to change the existing set up.

This does not, however, mean that you need be bound by the Lobby system, as my note makes clear.

You have in the past wondered whether you should not hold general press conferences during the long Recess. My advice has been not to do so because this would be seen as a gimmick. It would also inevitably cause the leaders of other parties to follow suit.

I hold to this advice. It would, however, be possible to hold press conferences during the Recess if you held more in the course of the year. And there is an opportunity to do so now that the Lobby has formally made itself available for on-the-record press conferences. Indeed, the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists have just written seeking a briefing, preferably on the record, from you, as soon as you find convenient.

Tony Bevins, operating on a freelance basis, has also written in complaining that American correspondents have had more chances than the British correspondents for on the record briefings. He has asked for on the record press conferences, say, every three months for "representatives from each of the nationals and broadcasting groups". Leave aside the frequency, this is not on because such a representation would immediately - and properly - put the backs up of the provincial press and agencies.

— — —

Nonetheless, the point is that there is a market for on the record press conferences, which would of course be broadcast and televised. These press conferences would not - and could not - supplant the Lobby system, but they might - just - make it marginally more tolerable.

However, I think you should think very carefully before you get locked into press conferences and especially of an expected frequency. Below are some of the considerations:

i. if you were to give quarterly press conferences you could be landed with some very difficult occasions;

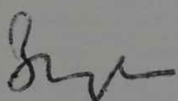
ii. British press conferences would be far more hostile and snide than American (which are not filmed or recorded) - indeed an extension of the atmosphere on the floor of the Commons;

iii. you could expect much more consistently difficult questions at a press conference than you get in the Commons;

iv. your patience would be sorely tried; but by the same token the sight of you on television answering questions, however snidely put, could bring a bonus.

You are very reluctant to appear before the Lobby, for understandable reasons. But I am concerned about the extent to which Kinnock, Owen and Steel do hold regular Lobby briefings, and the comparisons which are being made.

There is a case either very soon, or very soon after the Budget, to have an on the record session with the Lobby, which represents the whole of the British media. We can discuss this idea when we meet on the Lobby system.



BERNARD INGHAM
13 February 1986

*CR ok!
Free
NW*

MR. WICKS

MEETING WITH BERNARD TO DISCUSS THE LOBBY SYSTEM

The first available time seems to be next
Tuesday - 18 February at 1130.

BF

I hope this suits you?

C.R.

CAROLINE RYDER
11 February 1986



10 DOWNING STREET

C.R.

Fix up pl
45 mites
for Bernard +
me to discuss

this will be
PM.

Bernard,

N.L.W
7-2

Please could you
have a word with
Nigel about next
steps.

1 1/2 WEEKS

EME
Duty Clerk.
5/2/86.

Will you pl.
pursue? I stand
ready for discussion.
I think it would be
better if you & I
talked to the PM
before a war
meeting.

Jim by

Prime Minister
Should we have
a meeting to discuss
this first with
BI and then
with copy addressees?

cc: Lord President
Lord Privy Seal
Chancellor of the
Duchy of Lancaster
Chief Whip
Sir Robert Armstrong

N.L.W.

4.2

PRIME MINISTER

THE LOBBY SYSTEM

Nigel Wicks has asked me to prepare a paper on the Lobby system as a basis for discussion.

What is it?

The Lobby system has become shorthand for a method of imparting information to journalists.

There are three ways of communicating information to reporters:

- on the record - which permits what is said to be quoted and fully attributed to the speaker;
- unattributable - which allows the information imparted to be used without the source being named; hence "Mrs Thatcher was known to be concerned about this"; or "it is understood that...." etc;
- off the record - which bans the use, let alone the attribution, of any information that is offered; it follows that this method should be used very sparingly indeed and only with the most trusted journalists.

When a briefing is held under the Lobby system, or Lobby rules, it means that what is said can be used but that the source must not be identified. Thus the Lobby system is synonymous with unattributable briefing.

Ramifications

The Parliamentary Lobby Journalists, to give "The Lobby" which I meet twice a day its full name, operates mainly but not exclusively on an unattributable basis. But its method of operation is only incidental to its existence. The real reason for its existence is to regulate access by journalists to certain facilities in the Palace of Westminster. Membership of the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists - ie inclusion of a journalist's name on a list kept by the Serjeant at Arms for the Speaker - allows him access to the Members' Lobby and to meetings convened by the Lobby.

The Notes on the Practice of Lobby Journalism (Para 3 of Annex I) show that the "cardinal rule of the Lobby is never to identify its informant without specific permission". However, within the last couple of years, the Lobby has voted to permit those who accept invitations to its briefings to speak on the record if they wish. Mr Kinnock, at his weekly meeting with the Lobby on Thursday usually does so, and so do Messrs Owen and Steel when they meet the Lobby. Interestingly, none of them has so far chosen to make such meetings a major news event.

Another important point is that no-one other than the chairman, or acting chairman, can call a Lobby meeting. Thus when Ministers, or anyone else, go before the Lobby, we do so technically at their invitation, even when members of the Lobby come to No 10, as they do Monday-Thursday mornings, inclusive, and Friday afternoon.

To clarify the distinction: you, or I on your behalf, can call a press conference or an unattributable briefing; but only the chairman of the Lobby can call a Lobby. I would counsel very great caution about meeting any other than a formally constituted group of journalists on an unattributable basis.

There is in fact only one Lobby - the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists. But there is a vast number of other formal groups of journalists who serve a like purpose in other spheres of activity - eg Labour and Industrial, Energy, Science, Education correspondents - not to mention the Association of American Correspondents and the Foreign Press Association, both of whom I meet on an unattributable basis once a week. All of them rely to some extent on Lobby terms.

The Lobby system, or unattributable briefing, does not of course end there. It is part of the normal means of conveying information to journalists in all countries, however open their system of government professes to be. It is an indispensable part of contact between Ministers and MPs and journalists in the Palace of Westminster. It is the basis on which virtually all social contacts with journalists take place - lunches, dinners, parties etc.

Why it Exists

It follows that while it is perfectly possible - as distinct from desirable - to end all contacts with the Parliamentary Lobby journalists as an organisation, it is not possible to kill the so-called Lobby system - ie unattributable briefing. The unattributable system is here to stay because it is useful. Journalists, if they are honest, would say it is indispensable to the news gathering process. So, too would politicians who are in the business of communicating ideas.

But the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists does not exist simply as an administrative convenience for the Serjeant at Arms or even because it is an indispensable channel of communication. It also stands as a living, thriving example of homo sapiens adapting to his British Parliamentary environment and Cabinet Government. It has been found to be a convenient way of maintaining a regular and systematic

link with political journalists while at the same time preserving the constitutional responsibility of Ministers to report to Parliament and the nation.

Moreover, the so-called Lobby system which I have operated for the last 6½ years on your behalf did not suddenly arise when you became Prime Minister. It has been the accepted instrument of all post-war governments and attempts to change it have not been successful - notably an experiment of giving more on-the-record statements by Donald Maitland during Mr Heath's premiership. (Joe Haines, under Harold Wilson, discontinued meeting the Lobby, largely out of pique, and this did not serve the Government of the day well.)

What's wrong with it?

There are many criticisms of the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists as a group and the Lobby system as a means of communicating information. Criticisms of both stem from a mixture of motives. But I have yet to find any honest individual who understands what he is talking about who is not forced to admit that both group and system would have to be re-introduced on the very morrow of their often-canvassed abolition.

Where the Lobby system is not shrouded in a fog of ignorance it is enveloped in a cloud of cant, humbug and hypocrisy, as I shall now proceed to demonstrate.

First, there is the argument (notably by proponents of open government) that all statements emanating from Government should be on-the-record. This, far from serving the interests of greater openness, would lead to a resounding clanging of doors, since the unattributable system facilitates the communication of information rather than stifles it. But why should only the Government and not the Opposition parties restrict itself to on-the-record

statements and thereby handicap itself? If there is to be open government, there should also be open Opposition and open journalism - ie journalists should simply refuse to report anything which cannot be attributed to a named source. (I notice that Woodrow Wyatt did not name any ~~for~~ source^{for} information on which he based his attack on the Lobby the system in The Times last Saturday.)

Second, there is the argument by open government proponents who feel the need to clean up their act that the Lobby system is underhand. The truth is that it can be put to underhand use - and at least as much by the Opposition as by Government. But it cannot be maintained that a formal briefing of the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists en masse (total membership about 150) is underhand: my twice-daily meetings are well known and, as such, relatively transparent.

Third, there are the vested interest critics - news agencies who want quotes and radio and television who want access to sound and pictures. Their opposition to the system and the institution is based solely on self-interest.

Fourth, there are those who profess to be against both the system and the institution but put most weight on the iniquity of the institution as a secret society or cabal, knowing that they have no moral basis for opposing the system. The arch proponent (and consequently the arch hypocrite) of this line is Peter Hennessy, ex-Times, who has gathered virtually all his information about the inside of Whitehall and Westminster (including the Cabinet committee system and the Civil Contingencies Unit) through the Lobby system of briefings, lunches etc.

Fifth, there are the romantics, the conspiracy theorists and the fiction writers who discover all kinds of mayhem in my regular meetings with the Lobby. Woodrow Wyatt wrote last

Saturday: "Large chunks of official leaks are manufactured at meetings of Lobby correspondents". While it is true I have to use my judgment, and submit to post hoc approval or disapproval, the idea of wholesale leaking is nonsense; unfortunately the wholesale manufacturing of stories on the basis of my briefings has some foundation in fact.

What can be done?

If the critics like Woodrow Wyatt are to be believed what they want is:

- myself and other Government spokesmen to stand up in public and brief on-the-record - and never to go unattributable; in other words to say less rather than more;
- journalists to be free to ring up whoever they wish in Government - Ministers or officials - to get whatever briefing they think they need whenever they think they need it (whether attributably or unattributably is unclear); this of course ignores the extent to which press offices already arrange for experts to brief journalists;
- Ministers and MPs alone, apparently to the exclusion of press secretaries, to be permitted the luxury of speaking on Lobby terms to whomsoever will listen.

All this is presented as the route to a more open and wholesome image of your Government and a sure guarantee that Westland-type leaks will never occur again. All this is the purest fantasy, because:

1. The FCO 12.30pm daily on-the-record press conference, taken by the Head of the News Department, is widely regarded as one of the more useless events in the

daily media diary and a living demonstration of the need for briefings on Lobby terms.

2. To repeat, one can no more put down the Lobby system than end original sin.
3. The best guarantee that there will be no recurrence of the Westland-type leak is the consequences of the actual Westland leak; but that will not stop leaks of a less traceable kind.

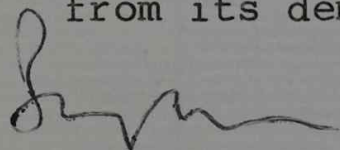
Advice

The fact is that the Lobby system has served this Government well. It is a conveyor belt for the Government of fact, information, ideas, opinion, attitude and mood - and one which can be switched on at the Government's convenience.

It is under fire, not because it is unethical, unfair, underhand or regularly abused; but because it is working well - too well for the Opposition parties.

All kinds of irrelevances are dragged into the argument against it, including the Westland leak, which while conveyed unattributably (and how else do people leak?) was not put through the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists.

My advice is certainly to do nothing about the Lobby system or institution now in haste; and then to do nothing longer term after mature judgment, other than try to persuade the Lobby to observe their own rules better - see Annex I. To do anything else is to court unnecessary publicity and failure because to tamper with the Lobby system is to interfere with something that works, however imperfectly at times, and serves the interests of all those who have recourse to it. You are the one person with most to lose from its demise.



BERNARD INGHAM

4 FEBRUARY 1986

ANNEX I

Private and Confidential

NOTES ON THE PRACTICE
OF
LOBBY JOURNALISM

JULY, 1969

LOBBY PRACTICE

1. The Lobby journalist's authority to work in Parliament is the inclusion of his name in a list kept by the Serjeant at Arms for the Speaker. He has complete freedom to get his own stories in his own way: there are no restrictions of any kind on personal initiative. But he also owes a duty to the Lobby as a whole, in that he should do nothing to prejudice the communal life of the Lobby or its relations with the two Houses and the authorities. This is in the Lobby journalist's own interest and that of his office, as well as in the general interest of the Lobby. It is a responsibility which should always be kept in mind.

2. There is no "association" of Lobby journalists, but in our common interests we act collectively as the Parliamentary Lobby Journalists. It has been found convenient to have an organisation consisting of Chairman, officers and committee for that purpose.

Individual Lobbying

3. The work of a Lobby Journalist brings him into close daily touch with Ministers and Members of Parliament of all parties and imposes on him a very high standard

of responsibility and discretion in making use of the special facilities given him for writing about political affairs. The cardinal rule of the Lobby is never to identify its informant without specific permission. In any case, members of the Lobby must always take personal responsibility for their stories and their facts.

4. Care must be taken not to reveal anything, even indirectly, which could lead to identification of informants. There are, of course, numerous instances when an informant is perfectly willing to be identified. This is in order as long as the journalist has obtained his permission.

5. The Lobby regularly receives Advance Copies of official documents to facilitate its work. All embargoes on such documents, and on all information given orally or operationally in advance for the Lobby's convenience, must be strictly observed.

Collective Lobbying

6. The Lobby frequently invites Ministers and others to meet it collectively, to give information and answer questions. Members are under an obligation to keep secret the fact that such meetings are held and to avoid revealing the sources of their information.

7. It is recognised, however, that a correspondent has a special responsibility to his Editor. The following Resolution was therefore passed by the Lobby in July, 1955:

"That it is consistent with Lobby practice that members of the Lobby may tell their Editors, or Acting Editors, the sources of their information at Lobby meetings on the rare occasions that this may be vital, but must, on every occasion that such information is passed on, explain to their Editors, or Acting Editors, that the source is strictly confidential."

8. DONT TALK ABOUT LOBBY MEETINGS BEFORE OR AFTER THEY ARE HELD, especially in the presence of those not entitled to attend them. If outsiders appear to know something of the arrangements made by the Lobby, do not confirm their conjectures or assume that as they appear to know so much they may safely be told the rest.

9. The Lobby correspondent should bear in mind that the purpose of a meeting is to elicit information not to score political or debating points.

4

10. It is a point of honour to stay to the end of a meeting. If there is some compelling reason for a correspondent to leave, he is under an obligation to obtain the permission of the Chairman to do so and, if released, is under an equal obligation not to make use of anything that has been said at the meeting before it ends.

11. When meetings are arranged on the Lobby's behalf, every correspondent should endeavour to attend. The Lobby works most effectively when the courtesy and co-operation shown by Ministers and others are reciprocated in this way.

General Hints

12. Do not "see" anything in the Members' Lobby or any of the private rooms or corridors of the Palace of Westminster. It is the rule that incidents, pleasant or otherwise, should be treated as private if they happen in those parts of the building to which Lobby correspondents have access solely because their names are on the Lobby list.

13. Do not run after a Minister or Member. It is nearly always possible to place oneself in a position to avoid this.

5

14. When a member of the Lobby is in conversation with a Minister, M.P., or Peer, another member of the Lobby should not join in the conversation unless invited to do so. Nor should the Lobby activities of any colleague ever be the subject of published comment.

15. Do not crowd together in the Lobby so as to be conspicuous. Do not crowd round the Vote Office when an important document is expected. Never use a notebook in the Lobby. Should it be necessary to make a note of anything, care should be taken to do so discreetly and unobtrusively, e.g. on the back of an Order Paper.

16. NEVER IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES MAKE USE of anything accidentally overheard in any part of the Palace of Westminster.

Parliamentary Privilege

17. On questions of Parliamentary privilege, an up-to-date edition of Erskine May's "Parliamentary Practice" will be found a useful guide. In case of doubt, officers of the Lobby and of both Houses are available for consultation.

18. As the case law of privilege is constantly being developed and amended, it is essential that members of the Lobby should acquaint themselves with current practice and bear it in mind when writing anything which might conceivably be held to be a breach.

19. Select Committees of the House frequently meet in public and are reported in the normal way. But any reference to the proceedings of a Select Committee held in private will almost certainly be raised on the floor of the House with the Speaker, with a view to obtaining his opinion as to whether or not it constitutes, *prima facie*, a breach of privilege.

20. References to the reports of Select Committees are covered by the following ruling given publicly by Mr. Speaker King on 24th March, 1969:

"Any publication of a draft report before the report has been agreed to by a Committee and presented to the House is treated as a breach of privilege; but when the report has been presented to the House, though not yet available to hon. Members in printed form, it is not an offence against the House to publish the findings of the Select Committee. It is certainly

inconvenient, however, and discourteous to the House when this is done. I cannot go further than that No question of privilege is involved."

NOTES

21. In consequence, the Lobby passed the following Resolution at a special meeting on 23rd April, 1969:

"That the Chairman and Secretary of the Lobby inform the Speaker that, in the absence of any positive and public ruling, members of the Lobby are free to use any information reaching them concerning reports of Select Committees of the House of Commons, once they have been technically laid before the House."

The Speaker was informed accordingly.

22. Finally, if you are in doubt about ANY point of Lobby etiquette or practice, consult the Chairman or Secretary of the Lobby. They will be glad to help and guide all newcomers, especially in identifying those parts of the Palace of Westminster to which Lobby correspondents have access.

23. EVERY LOBBY CORRESPONDENT IS UNDER AN OBLIGATION TO ENSURE THAT A DEPUTY ACTING IN HIS ABSENCE UNDERSTANDS LOBBY PRACTICE.

July, 1969



HC: Mr. Kydd
C. A. Whitmore

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

2 March 1982

The Prime Minister has agreed that the COI may film Ministers arriving inside No. 10 and gathering in the ante-room before a Cabinet meeting. In the first instance, the film will be made available to Panorama for a programme on the Government Information Service which is to be broadcast shortly. Thereafter the COI may use it for other purposes.

The filming will take place on Thursday, 4 March, as Ministers arrive for Cabinet at 1000 hours. There will be a camera positioned in the entrance hall and a second one in the ante-room. A sound recording will be made in order to capture the atmosphere. It is not intended that this should pick up individual conversations, but Ministers should, nevertheless, be on their guard.

I should be grateful if you would let the Home Secretary know what is planned.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of the Cabinet and to the Chief Whip, so that they too can warn their Ministers. A copy also goes to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

C. A. WHITMORE

J.F. Halliday, Esq.,
Home Office.

DRAFT LETTER FROM C WHITMORE

TO:- J HALLIDAY, HOME OFFICE

Bl.
A type.

PH.
Fin

The Prime Minister has agreed that the COI may film Ministers arriving inside No.10 and gathering in the ante-room ^{before} for a Cabinet meeting. ~~This is for a Panorama programme on the Government Information Service~~ ^{which is to be broadcast shortly. Through the COI} ~~for a~~ ^{use for this purpose.}

In the past minimum,

The filming will take place on Thursday, 4 March, as Ministers arrive for Cabinet at 1000 hrs. There will be a camera positioned in the entrance hall and a second one in the ante-room, where ~~Ministers assemble.~~ Although the cameras will be mute, a sound recording will be made in order to capture the "atmosphere". It is not intended that this should pick up ^{individual} ~~any~~ conversations, but nevertheless, Ministers should be on their guard.

I should be grateful if you would let the Home Secretary know what is planned.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries ^{members of the} ~~to other Cabinet Members and~~ ^{so that they can warn their Ministers. A copy also goes} to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

and to the Chief Clerk,

Cive

We should not overlook any other Ministers who might be invited to attend.

Jan 1/3.

File AH
ce CO
Govt Mach

MR INGHAM

PANORAMA PROGRAMME ON THE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICE

When the Prime Minister saw you and me this afternoon, she had a word with us about your minute of 11 February 1982 about the programme which Panorama is doing on the Government Information Service.

She decided that it was, on balance, undesirable for you to appear on the programme. Apart from all the possible disadvantages, it would be a contradiction of the essence of the lobby system for you to talk about it on the record in a television interview.

She also decided that we should turn down the requests for film sequences of Sir Robert Armstrong and you at your desks and of a pre-lobby conference in the No 10 press office.

On the other hand, she was content for Panorama to film her walking down the corridor from the Cabinet Room, through the entrance hall and out of the front door and for the COI to film Ministers gathering in the anteroom before a Cabinet meeting.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.

JWS.

19 February 1982

PRIME MINISTER

Your meeting at 1515 tomorrow with Mr Ingham and me is primarily to talk about the purpose of and attendance at your media meetings. There is a note below from Mr Ingham on this.

This would also be an opportunity to have the word you have asked for on the Panorama programme on the Government Information Service. Mr Ingham's minute on this, which you saw last weekend, is also enclosed below.

JWH.

18 February 1982

j

MR WHITMORE

MEDIA MEETINGS

You suggested I should do a note for our discussion with the Prime Minister on the Monday and Friday meetings now that the Paymaster General is to attend as well as the Lord President.

Two questions arise about the meetings:

1. purpose (and therefore how they can be more effectively structured); and
2. attendance, given that we are already running out of chairs.

Purpose

The Monday and Friday media meetings need to be looked at against the following background:

- regular meetings of the resuscitated Liaison Group looking at the longer term;
- the preparation of a press digest 7 days a week which Mr Pattison (Questions) and I (lobby) use as the basis for action - and for seeking guidance from the Prime Minister on specific problems;
- Tuesday and Thursday media meetings which are very short term directed at anticipating Questions to the Prime Minister (and to which the Monday and Wednesday press digests contribute);
- the greater tendency already for the Monday briefing to look at the week ahead; and similarly
- the greater tendency now for the Friday briefing to anticipate the weekend and make dispositions to the extent that I have not already done so.

I believe we need to sharpen up the present tendencies for the Monday and Friday meetings to look at the week and weekend ahead, respectively; and to relegate the press digests to a quick

run through at the end. This does not require any additional action from me, since I already provide notes about the highlights for the week ahead. Armed with this paper, it should be enough for the Prime Minister to make clear each Monday the prime purpose is to look at the week ahead and on Friday to look at the forthcoming weekend; and to ensure that the press digest is left to the end.

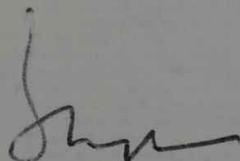
There is however one remaining gap to be filled between these twice weekly media meetings and the Liaison Group. That is the need to look ahead across a parliamentary term - eg. New Year to Easter. Since the Liaison Group is clearly intended for strategic purposes, you may well think we could sensible use one Friday media meeting at the beginning of each term for this purpose. A sample agenda (which I prepared initially for last week's Liaison Group meeting) is attached. That agenda remains valid and it would be particularly useful to me at least to consider it next Friday.

Representation

Existing Monday and Friday meetings are getting rather large. I would suggest the following is the irreducible minimum:

- Lord President
 - Paymaster General
 - Mr Gow, representing political office
 - Yourself, Mr Pattison (and other private secretaries as necessary)
 - myself (and my deputy who has to act for me at a moment's notice on presentation across the field); and
- a representative of Policy Unit.

You may of course feel that others - eg. Mr Wolfson, should be there.



B. INGHAM

12 February 1982

HIGHLIGHTS TO EASTER

The period up to Easter is likely to be dominated by the following issues:

1. BUDGET - The extent to which it is seen to be relevant to (still rising) unemployment and to which it satisfies the various lobbies.
2. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND - US economy and interest rates; movements in UK economic indicators - the extent to which your policies can be seen to be succeeding.
3. PAY/PRODUCTIVITY - Progress of rail dispute and of pay round - notably nurses, gas, electricity, civil servants.
4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT - Rates; cuts; elections; council house sales; and, in London, transport: the need to place responsibility where it lies.
5. NATIONAL POLITICS - Hillhead; SDP/Liberal Alliance; Labour's march Left.
6. NORTHERN IRELAND - Plans for devolution; Republic moves after election.
7. EC BUDGET/CAP/UK CONTRIBUTIONS reform - The Mandate: culminating in March Euro-Council.
8. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS - Poland; East-West and Euro-Atlantic relations; Middle East - Sinai withdrawal; MFO; Visit of Mrs Gandhi for Festival of India.
9. IMAGE - Need for Government and yourself to present a more caring face to the world; and to give people hope.

The following questions flow from this agenda:

1. How do you wish to prepare the ground for the Budget; what line should we all be taking?
2. Is the overall economic line still cautious optimism - underlining individual items of good news as evidence of steady improvement, though with unemployment lagging?
3. How do you wish to influence the atmosphere before local elections; how do you place responsibility locally where it lies?
4. How should we approach Hillhead and play the Alliance?
5. How should we prepare the ground for the Brussels Euro-Council, end March?
6. Is the overall presentation of our international role satisfactory?
7. How can you present a more caring face to the world?

Your opportunities for major speeches outside Parliament up to Easter are:

- 23 February - Engineering Employers' Federation dinner
- 8 March - Finchley AGM
- 13 March - Local Government conference, Kensington (where you are scheduled to say only a few words)
- 27 March - Central Council, Harrogate

Prime Minister.

I think that a TV interview with Mr. Japham would give rise to problems, not least with some of your colleagues; and I am against the idea for that reason.

1. MR WHITMORE

2. PRIME MINISTER

I see no objection, on the other hand, to the other requests and I suggest we should meet cc Sir Robert Armstrong. To do so will help sugar the pill if you decide that Mr Japham should not be interviewed. On a point of detail I think it should be the COI who fulfil Cabinet Ministers in the ante-room and not Panorama. Agree? [initials]

PANORAMA - GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICE

I received a call from Messrs. Cockerell and Penycate, of Panorama, today as part of their preparation for a programme, to be screened early in March (probably March 8) on the communication of information by the Government.

Their starting point is a claim by Mr Pym last year that it was too early to judge the effectiveness of the Select Committee System but on the basis of the flood of documents and the greater openness of Government, the amount of information available had changed dramatically.

Their overall purpose, against this background, is to look at the relationship between the executive, Parliament, press and public, and how the Government communicates information. One aspect of this is the working of the lobby system.

They were interviewing (or hope to interview), among others, Sir Angus Maude ^{and} Mr Pym and had already interviewed Henry James.

They were however apparently less than satisfied with Mr James's interview, making the point that someone 2½ years out of the system is less than authoritative.

Consequently, they asked if it would be possible for them to interview me to secure an official comment on the Government's method of communication with journalists and the lobby system. I made no promises and said I would have to consult Sir Robert Armstrong and the Prime Minister.

By way of unattributable briefing I did however simulate the sort of interview that might be conducted and I attach a note of it at Annex I. If I were to give such an interview the Annex sets out the line I should follow.

Can we have a word?
I am concerned
(i) that the initial view looks as if the lobby system is being measured
vs - it is not.
(ii) that previous similar interviews have not been very successful
(iii) that the cent. trust Panorama is not

See Sir R. Armstrong's minutes of Aug 'A'.

12"

The Panorama team made the following additional requests to be allowed to film:

- the Prime Minister walking down from the Cabinet Room to the front hall and out of the door; Mr Cockerell says he has precedents for this with the Heath, Wilson and Callaghan regimes;
- the Cabinet gathered in the ante-room to the Cabinet Room immediately before going into Cabinet; Mr Cockerell says that the COI film of your Cabinet in such a situation is now dated by re-shuffles; (we could arrange for the COI to repeat this);
- Sir Robert Armstrong at his desk;
- myself and No 10 press office in conference before lobby briefing;

In considering these requests, you should be assured that I have no desire to end my backroom boy (as distinct from front man) status. The reasons are partly covered by the argument in the Annex.

We need also to consider what is best for Government. It is not in the interests of Government to have its method of communication with media and public unfairly criticised or to have unnecessary doubt cast on the wholesomeness of its operations in this field. Our objective should be to secure a convincing defence of the present system. I am told that Sir Angus Maude has been helpful; I am sure Mr James tried to be; and no doubt the Lord President, if he decides to give an interview, will seek to maintain confidence in the system. A number of voices are therefore being raised to present our methods of communication in a positive light.

In these circumstances you will wish to consider whether there is advantage in:

- the present practitioner arguing the case on the lines set out in the Annex;

- responding positively in this way to a request for information, bearing in mind that the programme is about openness; in the past Panorama has commented adversely on the secretive nature of the lobby system most notably in the context of the Venice Economic Summit; is there a case for opening up a little on this occasion?
- the effect of myself, as the link-man, appearing on tv on Ministerial attitudes,

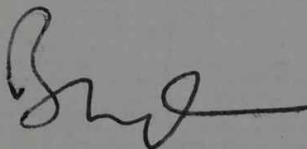
So far as the other Panorama requests are concerned I would advise positive rather than negative response, over the next fortnight, to:

- brief film sequences of Sir Robert Armstrong and myself at our desks;
- a brief sequence of a No 10 press office pre-lobby conference solely on a mute basis (which will cause Panorama rapidly to lose interest);
- sequences showing your walking down the corridor from the Cabinet Room, through the entrance hall and out of the door (to be filmed by Panorama); and
- a film of a pre-Cabinet gathering of Ministers in the ante-room - if necessary to be filmed by COI.

In normal circumstances, I would not recommend being so forthcoming. But I am sure that in this instance we should avoid appearing unduly negative,

Could I have your decisions on:

- whether I should give an interview on the lines of the Annex; and
- my advice to the other requests set out above?



B. INGHAM

11 February 1982

UNATTRIBUTABLE GUIDANCE TO PANORAMA IN FORM OF SIMULATED INTERVIEW

Q. Why do we have a lobby system? Why aren't you like the White House press secretary, for example?

A. Well, it's not because either me or my predecessors are or were blushing violets. But different countries have different systems. In the UK Parliament is supreme. Ministers - and I emphasise Ministers, as elected representatives and not appointed officials - report to and through Parliament. Government Information Officers spend a great deal of time gearing their communication of policy developments, measures and the dissemination of information to Parliamentary Statements, Answers etc. So the supremacy of Parliament and the responsibility of Ministers as elected representatives means that officials adopt a very low profile. And rightly so.

Q. Yes, but does that require you to operate off the record?

A. Well, anyone who goes on the record repeatedly sooner or later becomes a personality. And such an official, unelected personality would detract from the essential elements of our methods of communication in our Parliamentary democracy. But I have no hesitation in going on the record as and when I find it necessary to do so - for example, to kill a silly and unfounded rumour stone dead. Moreover, when you are abroad with the Prime Minister it is sometimes necessary to work on the record simply because the unattributable system does not really operate. Sometimes when you find yourself in Rome

Q. OK. So you do what you do - ie. unattributably - because of the nature of our Parliamentary democracy. But is it really healthy to have an eminence grise like yourself operating behind the scenes managing the news?

A. First, let's get out of the way this nonsense about news management. For it is nonsense. I don't believe anyone can manage the news. There are far too many uncertainties in this world of instant communication to do that however hard you might try. What you can do - and what every organisation does - is to try to get its timing right in relation to its objectives and to avoid if it possibly can clashes with other competing news. But it is a very hit or miss business because life is so full of surprises.

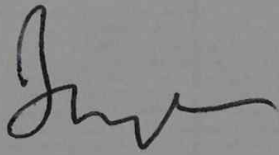
Second, my main tasks apart from reporting facts, events and dispensing information is to offer guidance. To give people a steer about attitudes, approaches, timing; to try to help the press to report a more rather than less accurate picture while at the same time trying to reconcile the often conflicting interests of Government and press radio and tv.

Third, while I am not a public figure, I am nonetheless not an eminence grise. Political reporters know me and can judge me far better than I can know or judge the hundreds of journalists who inhabit the Palace of Westminster or Fleet Street or the Foreign Press Association. And they judge me by one criteria - my credibility. Am I a credible source of reliable information? So long as I remain that, so long am I of use to the journalists, the Government, the Civil Service, and - not to sound pompous - to democracy. But once I lose my credibility, I am done for. Journalists will quite rightly go elsewhere. And I shall deserve to be dispatched elsewhere. Incidentally, this doesn't mean that I am subservant to the press. There is no reason why I should stand any nonsense from them if, as I accept, they should not have to put up with nonsense from me. I think I can state that we live and work in a state of mutual respect and strive to maintain that mutual respect.

Q. But isn't all this very cosy? Too cosy in fact?

A. Well, if it is, I haven't noticed it. Political journalists, both individually and en masse, try to knock me around from time to time. I try to give as good as I get. It's all quite

stimulating. But if what you are saying is that I am more likely to be forthcoming with journalists I know and respect rather than those I don't know, then I plead guilty. I'm only human. But people are much the same the world over and the more you work with someone and come to know them the more you like and trust them, or not as the case may be. And I do hope you don't try to sustain the thesis that in the United States and Sweden, for example, which are held out to be paragons of openness in government, things are much different. You know, their Press Secretaries may give on the record press conferences, but they give an enormous amount of unattributable guidance. That kind of guidance which is our custom is practised the world over because it does happen to be an effective method of communication.



B. INGHAM

11 February 1982

Ref: A07385

Prime Minister

A 9

ALL

12:12

MR. WHITMORE

I have been informed by Henry James, formerly Press Secretary in No. 10 and now the Director General of the National Association of Pension Funds, that he is to appear in a programme which Panorama are planning to show on 8th March about the Government Information Service. Mr. James has already filmed his contribution. He says that questioning concentrated on the spokesman's role at No. 10, despite the fact that when he was originally invited to take part it was indicated to him that the interview for the programme would go more widely than that. Mr. James tells me that he made it plain that he would not be drawn on questions of personalities or gossip, and he dealt entirely with what he describes as the "professional ethics of his role" and his approach to the question of "communication for Government as he practised it". He does not think his contribution will do any harm and believes that it may dispel a few misunderstandings.

2. We cannot know if Mr. James's confidence about his contribution and the effect that it will have is well placed until we see the programme. But you may wish to inform the Prime Minister that the programme is to take place and that Mr. James appears in it.

3. Mr. Ingham, to whom I am copying this minute, may also wish to consider whether to contact Mr. James in advance of the programme so that he can prepare a line to take in response to the questioning which is sure to follow the programme's broadcast.

RA

Robert Armstrong

10th February 1982

Graham File AH

cc Bernard Ingham
Ian Gow

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 November 1981

SUBJECT

See Danni,

THE LOBBY SYSTEM

The Prime Minister and the Lord President had a discussion this morning about the way in which the lobby system is working. Bernard Ingham and Ian Gow were also present.

The Prime Minister said that because of the increase in the number of leaks about Cabinet and Cabinet Committee business, Bernard Ingham had to deal in the lobby with extremely well informed journalists who were able to put him under a great deal of pressure. The lobby system worked well when there were no leaks, for then the Government's line was communicated to the press through the single channel of the No 10 press office. But at present that was all too often not happening, and there was in effect a rival lobby system operating in parallel to the official one. At the same time Bernard Ingham was getting blamed for some of the leaks, when she knew beyond doubt that he could not possibly have been responsible for them. These developments raised the question whether we should not try to change the lobby system in some way which would make it operate more satisfactorily.

The Lord President agreed that the lobby now worked differently from the way it had in the past. Political journalists no longer used the lobby simply to obtain information: now they were much more probing in their questions and sought comment on other people's remarks and on nuances of view. They also made a point of asking questions of a lot of people, including Ministers, very often on an almost hypothetical basis and when they put all the answers together, they were some times able to assemble a reasonably accurate story on which they then sought comment from Bernard Ingham. All this put the No 10 press office under pressure. This tendency was/inforced by the more general growth over some years now in the pre-eminence of the Prime Minister's position within the Government of the day. None the less, despite these shortcomings in the lobby system, he would be very careful about any attempt to change it. It was difficult to see how it could be successfully altered.

/re

- 2 -

In discussion it was suggested that one way of changing the system might be for Bernard Ingham to give on the record press conferences. This would give the members of the lobby just as much opportunity as they had now to obtain information at lobby briefings and would have the advantage of protecting Bernard Ingham from allegations that he was responsible for leaks. On the other hand, it was pointed out that on the record press conferences would not entirely dispose of the suspicion that the No 10 press office was the source of deliberate leaks, since plainly they would be speaking to journalists outside the press conferences.

The Prime Minister, summing up the discussion, said that so long as we continued with the lobby system, the central question from the Government's point of view was Bernard Ingham's credibility as her representative with the press. He would be incredible in the eyes of the lobby if he could not deal with their questions authoritatively, and this meant that he had to have information about the decisions of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees. The discussion had shown that although there were clear shortcomings and disadvantages in the way in which the lobby system now operated, it was very difficult to see how it could be changed in an acceptable way.

I should be grateful if this letter could be handled in your office on a very restricted basis.

Yours ever,

Alma Whitman.

David Heyhoe Esq.,
Lord President's Office.

Prime Minister

MR. WHITMORE

I think that you will find it
helpful to read this note by
Mr. Ingham before tomorrow morning's
The Lobby System meeting with the Lord Renshaw.

THH
Sxi.

1. The Parliamentary Lobby Journalists is a group, some 130-140 strong, who have access to the Members' Lobby. Their rules, which are codified in a booklet "Lobby Practice", are designed to preserve confidentiality and discretion.
2. The established practice is that the Lobby come to No. 10 at 11 a.m. - this is primarily for evening newspapermen and agency and broadcasting journalists; and for the Chief Press Secretary to go over to the House for 4 p.m. when morning newspapermen join agency reporters and broadcasters. Thus, we meet twice a day, primarily for the benefit of evening and morning newspapers. In practice, the nature of the two Lobbies is different - the morning being more mechanically and the afternoon more policy oriented. An average of about 20-25 attends each session.
3. On each occasion we set out the public highlights of the Prime Minister's day; make any announcements; issue No. 10 press notices; and then offer guidance on any issue raised by members. No holds are barred. The Lobby is thus at once a convenient vehicle for disseminating information and for presenting the Government's case, backed up with facts and argument.
4. We never disclose Cabinet or Cabinet Committee agendas but acknowledge or correct the accuracy of assertions about their business. This is often known because of leaks or gossip elsewhere. We never mislead. Under longstanding practice, we also record when meetings of full Cabinet Committees, over which the Prime Minister presides, are taking place and those attending, but we never volunteer the nature of the Committee - e.g. "E", "OD" - or its agenda. We are much more circumspect about ad hoc Ministerial meetings and generally are smoked out about them because someone elsewhere has talked.
5. We have a good relationship with the Lobby based on mutual respect for each other's role and I firmly believe the Government

would be the loser if it were to interfere with the long established procedures for meeting it. But it is wrong to suppose that No. 10 Press Office speaks only to the Lobby (plus those groups of overseas journalists who come in regularly but periodically for similar briefing). No. 10 Press Office briefs all journalists who telephone and their range is arguably the widest of any Government "Department".

6. Similarly, it is wrong to suppose that our contact with the Lobby is confined to the 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. meetings; there is a constant traffic through the day of Lobby Journalists pursuing their own inquiries which they do not wish to reveal in "open" Lobby. It is also the practice, especially of the heavyweight journalists, to ring me or press officers after Lobbies to try to get a deeper insight because they (and we) recognise that the 'group therapy' of an open Lobby has its limitations. One can exercise more influence and be more frank man to man or in small groups than in the much larger group of formal Lobbies which span a wide spectrum of personal and media political views.

7. In essence, however, the Lobby is the professional group with whom No. 10 works, just as Treasury works primarily with City and Economics Correspondents; Department of Employment with Labour Correspondents; Department of Energy with Energy Correspondents. It is no use complaining that it is too large, less discreet than its rules require and includes in its ranks those who wish fundamentally to destroy it because they feel (wrongly) that its demise would make for more open Government. It has all these faults (and others). But the Lobby exists; it is unlikely to reform itself and cannot be reformed from outside; and it won't go away. To withdraw from meetings with the Lobby, or to conduct relations with them either from a basis of ignorance or with the objective of minimising communication would damage the Government and its interest in propagating its philosophy and measures. This is what the post-war history of Government/Lobby relations teaches, if it teaches anything.

8. But this is not to say that the Lobby could not be ^{more} effectively

used or that it would object to being more effectively used. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which this could be done:

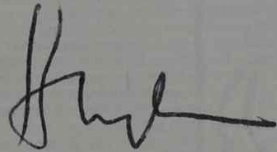
- to maintain the wholly unattributable nature of Lobby briefings but to be far more aggressive and comprehensive in our briefing on issues identified as controversial or liable to dissident treatment; in other words, to force dissidents within Government to operate within a narrower framework; or
- to complement our relationship with the Lobby (which will go on in one form or another whatever our views about the unattributable system) with open, on-the-record press conferences. (These would narrow the ground open to dissidents even further.) It used to be argued that the Lobby would object to this because it undermined their authority. It is true that they are wary of experiment and to some extent jealous of their position. But the growth of radio and TV has inevitably weakened their special position and I believe the Lobby would welcome an on-the-record briefing after e.g. Cabinet or other important meetings provided I, as presumably the regular communicator, had been in the meeting and therefore knew first hand what had gone on. (There would understandably be much less confidence in a second hand reporter). If, however, we went down this route, we should have to take a decision at the outset on whether to admit microphones and cameras or whether to confine such press conferences to writers. We should also have to recognise that, once having given an on-the-record Lobby press conference after, say, Cabinet, we should be under some compulsion to maintain the practice.

Conclusion

9. I see considerable attraction in using the Lobby to our advantage with a mixture of conventional unattributable and on-

on-the-record briefings. The important thing, working with such an influential and potentially damaging body, would be to make them feel at the outset we want to work through them; that we wish to develop rather than restrict communication; and that essentially all we wish to do is to complement the traditional and continuing Lobby-terms relationship with on-the-record press conferences as and when it is thought helpful.

10. My only reservation is the effect of such an initiative in No. 10 on Departments other than the FCO. There might well be a drive by other groups of journalists for similar on-the-record facilities and I am not sure all Heads of Information would match up. But that is not, in the end, an adequate reason for failing to take an initiative which could take the wind out of the sails of dissidents.



B. INGHAM

30 October, 1981

CONFIDENTIAL

MR. WHITMORE *W* *xi*

Cabinet Leaks

I have been giving some thought to the problem of Cabinet leaks and this note may be helpful to you before Thursday.

Present position

The confidentiality of Cabinet discussion which is inseparable from collective responsibility is now a thing of the past. Increasingly, the convention has been more honoured in the breach than in the observance by different Governments, but leaking is now systematic, and it is only a question of time before the essentials are in the hands of a fairly limited group of journalists.

What is more, the leaking is invariably motivated by an apparent determination to undermine the Prime Minister's (and Treasury's) authority.

It has often been the case that individual Ministers or Departments would seek to win an argument by selective leaking or briefing. But increasingly under this Government we have seen a qualitative change in leaking - namely, a concerted campaign to attack the Government's basic economic strategy and to weaken the Prime Minister's political position as the leading proponent of that strategy. In other words, the Prime Minister is being opposed from within without scruple or responsibility and in an increasingly blatant way. It is symptomatic of a decline in standards.

Consequence

The obvious consequence is that the Government is seen to be split and to be wasting its energies by internal feuding of a particularly unpleasant kind (for a Conservative Government). This in turn weakens the Prime Minister politically and

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intensifies our economic problems, if only by sapping confidence in the future. Instead of promoting a virtuous circle, the Government itself is encouraging a vicious (downward) spiral. A house divided

Another consequence is that I, recognised as I am as the Prime Minister's spokesman as well as that of the Government as a whole, carry less and less credibility on crucial issues. Not to put too fine a point on it, I am seen consistently to be trying to put the best possible gloss on a situation which, almost as I speak, is being eroded by the activities of the Prime Minister's colleagues.

The same goes for many Chief Information Officers of Departments. Good government has become secondary to an internal political dog fight. I am also bound to say that they - as well as myself - find ourselves, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the disposition of our Ministers, in an increasingly difficult position with the Lord President as co-ordinator of the Government Information Service.

In short, the one commodity in which I trade on the Prime Minister's behalf - credibility - is being systematically undermined. I am not worried about this in personal terms: I believe my reputation to be fairly secure after the last two years. But there are severe limits to the usefulness of a Press Secretary when the Prime Minister is continuously being beaten to the punch by leakers who are all the more attractive to journalists the more vicious they become.

Remedies

The Prime Minister's traditional stance is both a strength and a weakness - a strength in that, so far as her official press office is concerned, she is not seen or felt to be using the media to her own advantage and her opponents' detriment; but a weakness in that she is not really in the deep briefing hunt.

/It

It may well be that she believes right will triumph in the end; that integrity is all; and that her's is the only way to play the long game. I have considerable sympathy for this point of view. In ~~my~~^{any} case, indulging in competitive briefing (at least of an overt kind) could make matters worse: it could be seen rather as handing out a licence to leak.

But the fact remains that, leaving aside the continuous exposition of the Government's policy through speeches, Question Time and Lobby, we are doing little to control events or anticipate them. We are becoming boring and so irrelevant to the reporter. What, therefore, I think we need to do is to:

- anticipate key issues - e.g. the public expenditure debate - before they arise;
- get in a preemptive strike at the very beginning with a carefully prepared briefing by me to a single, reliable journalist which puts dissident colleagues on the defensive by forcing them to operate against a particular background of our choosing;
- against that stronger, positive position, maintain a firm public line - e.g. with the Lobby - and oblige others to make their case.

There are, of course, more complex, less wholesome or much more open ways in which the Prime Minister can look after herself - e.g.

- plain, straightforward competitive briefing of one kind or another by which I put her gloss on, e.g. Cabinet meetings; or
- introducing the concept of post-Cabinet Lobbies which would, of course, be a fundamental departure but would at least induce some control into the situation; it is inconceivable, however, that we could indulge in the sort of personalities that appeared in the Observer last weekend.

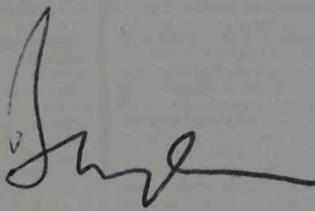
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Much depends on how seriously the Prime Minister takes all this and how far she wishes to go in meeting it. But the reality is that the dissident element is calling the shots. It may well be that it is extremely difficult to win the game just as it is difficult for moderates in the unions to beat the militants without the benefit of a secret ballot. But we might try.

We might discuss.



B. INGHAM

27 October, 1981

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