



10 DOWNING STREET

PAYMASTER GENERAL

cc. Mr. James
Mr. Gaffin
Mr. Groves (COI)

PRESENTATION

1. This paper sets out my initial thoughts on the overall presentation of the Government and its policies and how the effort and results might be improved. It is intended in the first instance as a basis for discussion which might most usefully take place this week before Parliament re-assembles.

ANALYSIS

2. Over the last five months the Government has made a workmanlike start on the implementation of its policies. The Prime Minister has emerged as a strong, dominant leader. The Ministerial team has embarked on government in a quiet, unspectacular way. And there have been no noteworthy departures from the Government's central objective of reducing the involvement of Government in the nation's business and of inducing a greater self reliance on the part of its citizens for managing their own affairs.

3. The Government is not coming over as brashly self-confident, in spite of the Chancellor's conference promise that there will be no U-turns. Rather it is seen to be grimly realistic about the enormity of its task of halting and then reversing Britain's long decline. Perhaps the most useful result of Blackpool has been to promote a sense of realism about the future travail.

4. The mood music as the curtain goes up on the first main working session of this Parliament is, therefore, probably about right. No-one doubts that things are going to get a lot

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worse before they get better; or that it will become rougher sooner rather than later. Equally, no-one doubts the rewards of success.

5. Two main queries have emerged about the Government:

- whether its economic policies will work; and
- whether they will be allowed to work - i.e. whether the Government as a whole will prove steadfast in the face of the early consequences?

6. This underlines:

- the extent to which Britain has become demoralised by continuous decline and failure - it doubts whether anyone really has an answer; and
- the widespread conviction that, even if someone might have the answer, the institutional forces ranged against them (or, in the case of management, not ranged effectively with them) will prevent them from implementing it.

7. On the other hand, there seems little doubt that the vast majority of the citizens hope (many perhaps against their political convictions) that this Government will succeed in reforming Britain and in setting it on the road to recovery. There may be little faith or confidence to sustain the Government through the bad times, but the bandwagon will be instantly down on its springs at the first whiff of a break through.

8. All this may seem unduly depressing. It is, however, as well to be realistic in October, 1979. It is certainly important for the Government to recognise how far it is out on its own. It has prescribed very strong medicine, for example, for its own local authorities. It should not necessarily

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suppose that management's pleasure from tax rebates will outweigh, in motivational terms, the pain of managing in a cold, self-reliant climate.

9. It is also crucial to recognise:

- (i) what the Government is trying to do - namely, to bring about a radical change in the post-war national ethos: to change attitudes and habits. Otherwise, given the ingrained nature of existing values, government will become unduly depressed, panicky and irrational. This is a long haul - i.e. of at least three years; and
- (ii) presentation/public relations/information - whatever its label - does not lead an independent existence. It has to be related to facts, circumstances, personalities. Too much should not be expected of it. Even less should be expected of it if it has not been brought into the development, as distinct from the execution, of policy.

IMPLICATIONS

10. It follows from this that everything has yet to be fought for, let alone won. We are not yet beyond the skirmishing stage, designed to test the Government's policies and resolve. It is inescapable that the coming winter and conceivably the next 18 months will be largely devoted to diverting the Government from its chosen course. Spot the U-turn is likely to become a national sport, with the inevitable arguments over when the trimming inherent in democratic government constitutes a U-turn.

11. It also follows that if the pundits, critics and opponents cannot come up with a U-turn on the economics front they will look for one elsewhere. This emphasises the importance in presentational terms of the integrity of the Government's

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policies as a whole. The main "non-economic" pressure points can readily be described now:

- Rhodesia (though it probably does not matter much in terms of votes);
- Northern Ireland;
- the EEC, both as a phenomenon which is often at variance with the Government's non-interventionist philosophy and as a sink for our hard earned funds;
- defence, and notably the nuclear element;
- law and order; and
- immigration.

In these cases the presentational effort will be mainly concerned with building up general credit for the Government.

12. It is, however, over the economic field as a whole that the main effort will need to be concentrated. This embraces:

- inflation;
- industrial relations;
- public expenditure;
- employment; and
- tax relief (of which we have perhaps made too little this month)

This complex of related and interactive issues poses

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diverse presentational problems. In the short run it will be a test of nerve with few successes to parade. It will not be possible to win some arguments: for example, trade union negotiators are unlikely to be impressed with tax reliefs since these are, in effect, something for nothing; they feel they need to be seen to be winning concessions for their members. It will be necessary to bring out the responsibility, notably of management, for a greater effort in return for substantial tax reliefs. It will be absolutely essential to meet allegations of heartlessness as the effects of public expenditure cuts are allocated by others; otherwise support for Government will be rapidly eroded, for while people may support policies in the abstract they soon become hostile to them as they feel their effects.

13. The objectives of Government economic policy are relatively easy to spell out in the abstract, though the message may only now be beginning to trickle through. Relating their effects on the ground to their overall justification is, however, entirely a different matter.

14. Thus economic presentation needs to be conducted at two levels:

(i) spelling out the overall objectives and how each relates to the other; such is the confusion, jargon and lack of sophistication in this area that any exercise needs to be conducted in four letter words. This is best devised centrally; and

(ii) explaining the relevance of events, circumstances, etc. at the micro level to macro policies; this can only be done Departmentally on a day to day basis.

15. The import of this paper so far is that special attention needs to be paid to economic presentation, important though effective presentation of all the Government's policies and

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actions are to its overall well-being. Some ideas on how this might be accomplished are set out below.

REQUIREMENTS

16. The presentational responsibility and opportunity falls into three parts:

- (i) the political PR network, for example, that backbenchers are fully conversant with the Government's line or inducing local authorities to cut with discrimination and sensitivity; you may agree we should have separate discussions with Mr. Howe;
- (ii) the admin. PR network - the exposition of overall and particular policies by Ministers and officials in Governmental meetings and contacts; and
- (iii) the overall Government information effort, conducted mainly through the Government Information Service.

The last two can conveniently be considered together since they are different aspects of our integrated Governmental effort. They can, however, provide useful ammunition for the political PR exercise.

17. The prime requirements in conducting any effective public relations exercise - i.e. an exercise designed to influence public attitudes and behaviour - are:

- anticipation of events; it can reasonably be argued that effective preparation is a major ingredient of success;

/ - monitoring

- monitoring of developments without which much of the benefit of anticipation is dissipated; and
- speed of reaction (for which governments are not noted)

18. In attempting to ensure that these requirements are met it is important to recognise that the Government Information Service is not necessarily the major obstacle. Not all Ministers take the media seriously as a means to a political end. Few administrators bother overmuch about the media unless they themselves come under attack. The Government Information Service will find it difficult to deliver, even where its competence is not in question, unless it is accepted that Ministers and their Departmental machines also need to be moved.

19. It is no less important to bring a sense of proportion to Government reaction. It soon becomes counter-productive to chase every hare. The essential test is not whether an article or broadcast is wrong in detail but whether the overall impression conveyed is likely to inflict continuing damage. The recurrence of detailed errors can be prevented by a telephone call; repairing damaging impressions usually requires a Ministerial statement or broadcast.

20. Finally, before turning to proposals for action, we should consider the Government's stance in its public relations work. Wherever possible, the Government should seek to cast itself in a positive and not a defensive light. This is easier said than done because the Government is a target and as such needs to defend its record. But the more the Government can be seen to be carrying the fight (in a non-combative sense) to the people the better, especially in its circumstances of seeking to change a way of life. As a Government we have the opportunity to select our platforms and often our opportunities - e.g. programmes. Ministers should be encouraged to take advantage of every

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opportunity to explain ^{that} ~~other~~ policies, consistent with their being in charge of the circumstances; this calls for some working guidelines which, while not absolutely forbidding certain practices, exhibit a prejudice, for example, against televised debates with opponents and in favour of the neglected technique of recording positive measures/decisions/initiatives or simply good news by means of an arranged Parliamentary Question supported by a Press Notice. You may feel we should consider such a set of guidelines.

PROPOSED ACTION/ORGANISATION

21. After five months' preparatory work, and reliance on the election Manifesto, the Government is about to embark on its first major working session. It will be bringing forward a stream of measures and decisions which, if they are to be presented both as measures and parts of the overall programme, will need chronicling. There are two basic needs here if the resources of the Government and its Party are to be fully deployed:

- a record of measures which might be published; and
- factual speaking notes for Ministers and others on specific topics; it is usually a simple matter to convert material prepared in any event for briefing purposes into speaking notes.

You may care to consider who should prepare the record of measures. The previous Administration was criticised for the preparation and issue of a Government record; a diary of Government measures, as it could have been styled, might have been more acceptable. I understand there has been some suggestion that Mr. Howe should prepare this and publish through Conservative Central Office; you may care to discuss.

22. The presentation of some aspects of Government policy are likely to be of such continuing importance or of particular

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difficulty that they will need separate and more detailed consideration and co-ordination outside MIO which is an unsuitable forum for this. Current examples are economic policy or particular aspects of it - e.g. inflation, industrial relations; and the need drastically to cut our net contribution to the EEC. One example of this is the central press unit proposed under the Civil Contingencies Procedure. There is no merit in meetings for meetings sake; we have all enough to do. But economic policy and its effective presentation are so central to the Government's and the nation's success that you may feel we ought to accord it special attention.

23. Anticipation, monitoring and speed of reaction are, in practice, all of a public relations piece. They are also each essential if the Government Information Service, is to operate with greater professionalism and immediacy. Consequently, I have set in hand the preparation of a forward diary in the first instance for three months ahead, setting out as comprehensively as possible not merely likely dates for Government measures and initiatives but also external events which could bear on Government moves; Departments should be encouraged to contribute, with an assurance that the diary would be internal and merely indicative. We shall need to extend this to the end of the Session as soon as possible. The compilation of this diary should proceed apart from the MIO diary which offers a weekly opportunity

- (a) to update; and
- (b) centrally to identify opportunities for getting over a particular message via a Ministerial platform.

24. If, however, we are to induce a greater immediacy, we need to introduce some of the disciplines of a newspaper office into Government Information work. The Prime Minister's media briefings have two purposes - one, to look back over the media of the last 24 hours; and two, to look forward to the stories of the day. We have an agenda for looking back - the press summary;

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but we lack a diary of the day. Accordingly, I propose to introduce shortly:

- (i) a note for the media briefing giving the initiatives, measures and relevant events of the day; and
- (ii) a similar note on Mondays setting out the events of the coming week.

If, however, the daily note is to be produced effectively we need the cooperation of Departments. We need to formalise the practice of telephoning into No. 10 press office by 5 p.m. a news list for the following 24 hours, without prejudice to consultation on slightly longer term matters. A news list is common, indispensable practice in the media; it should become so in Government, especially as it requires minimal effort.

25. Monitoring is a long standing problem since only tone, direction and balance can effectively be done centrally. Responsibility for getting the presentation of their policies right must rest with Departments. We need to encourage them to monitor this more systematically and, taking account of the problems rehearsed in Para. 18 above, to make them feel it will be worthwhile and that they will have Ministerial and official support at the centre in proposing remedial action. Meanwhile, MIO has arranged for the mechanics of monitoring to be examined.

26. With a view to sharpening up the machine, I shall shortly have met the Information Heads of all the main Departments. I am clearly indicating to them:

- (i) I do not propose to do their jobs for them;
- (ii) I do propose to give them every possible help;
- (iii) they should regard my door open to them whenever they feel they have a problem; and

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- (iv) I am anxious to raise the reputation and status of the Government Information Service, but that can only be done by a collective demonstration of effort and competence.

27. I have judged it necessary, as well as desirable, to have this series of meetings with Information Heads because of previous unsatisfactory relationships between No. 10 Press Office and Departments. The meetings have been well received. However, we need to do more to change old attitudes. An early announcement of the appointment of Mr. Groves as professional head of the Government Information Service would help. Subject to any views you may have, I also hope to introduce

- (i) The concept of two year secondments for high flyers to No. 10 Press Office; and
- (ii) if possible, taking account of manpower constraints, the concept of short - i.e. six month - training secondments for high flying Assistant or Information Officers to No. 10.

These ideas will have to be discussed and cleared with CSD but if we are to raise standards we must run the Government Information Service on more businesslike lines - and on no less businesslike lines than the administrative Civil Service.

SUMMARY

28. The Government will soon be running into heavier weather. We need to intensify the effort to get over the essentials of the Government's policies and to organise ourselves more effectively to cope with the presentational demands, notably of economic policy. Measures are proposed for improving the performance and morale of the Government Information Service.

B. INGHAM

15 October, 1979