

Trevor

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

19 November 1981

PRIME MINISTERIAL SPEECHES ON OVERSEAS VISITS

As you know we had something of a mishap with one aspect of the speech delivered by the Prime Minister at the Gala Lunch in Bonn yesterday.

I do not see much point in a detailed post mortem about precisely how the names of the absent guests got into the draft text sent over here on Friday. The situation is unlikely to recur for a long time in precisely the same form.

But the incident does suggest the need to remind Departments of one general rule which I have mentioned to your office in the past and which is, I think, usually observed. On all occasions when the Prime Minister has to deliver a speech overseas and where there is adequate notice of the requirement, the first draft should be prepared by the post rather than by the Department here in London.

I am well aware that draft speeches for the Prime Minister tend to be comprehensively rewritten before they are delivered and that it may therefore seem pointless to take on the additional complication of having them prepared by Missions. But posts are usually able to provide "local colour" of a kind which even the best informed Department cannot produce and this is often of particular value to the Prime Minister. More importantly, posts are able to draw attention to the kind of trap into which we fell yesterday. At the very least, it would mean that we did not have to read in the Daily Telegraph that "the British Embassy said it had not been asked about Mrs. Thatcher's speech or shown the draft"!

MFA

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