

MEMO

CONFIDENTIAL

TO : Mrs. Margaret Thatcher

FROM : Alfred Sherman

DATE : 20th July 1978

"Disinformation" and ways of combatting it"Disinformation" - purposive misbriefing of the media

I refer to the continuous misbriefing of the press (lobby correspondents in particular) directed against you by 'Conservative Party office-holders' - as their TIME collaborator calls them. The misbriefing falls into two categories : denigration and "disinformation".

This memo deals only with disinformation by which I mean deliberate attempts to create the belief that things are moving in a certain direction, in order to generate a band-waggon in that direction. It has become particularly strong in the pre-manifesto period.

Examples of "disinformation"

One example of disinformation was the briefing of lobby correspondents to the effect that you were back-tracking from your stand on immigration following the bien pensants outcry against your "swamped" tv response. This disinformation was spread before, during and after the YC conference, and on several subsequent occasions.

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Similar disinformation is spread through briefings to the effect that you will backtrack on incomes policy, resistance to the Union leadership's political role, cuts in government expenditure, cutting back quangoes.

### Metalexia

This misinformation is reinforced by a certain intellectual laziness on the part of "quality" journalists, which I have named metalexia, i. e. they read into speeches what they expect to see there.

### Counteraction

Your weekly lobby briefing alone cannot counteract this disinformation for several reasons. First, you will rarely wish to refer to it, even indirectly, in order not to add to the semblance of intraparty disputes. Secondly, once a week is not frequent enough.

It might be better if the misinformation were monitored and disposed of with a light touch by one of your loyal shadow colleagues. Angus Maude comes to mind as someone who really knows the press and has a light touch, with wit and sarcasm. Needless to say, I have not discussed it with him or with any other "office holders".