

10 Downing Street
Whitehall

M.

For you, via me

S.

TEL:0502 730372

Laurel House,
Somerleyton,
Suffolk,
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December 1, 1980

Denis Thatcher Esq.,
10, Downing Street,
London SW1

Dear Mr. Thatcher,

Many thanks for all your kindness on Saturday. As you might imagine, it was an occasion that Jane and I shall cherish.

I hope that your journey to Kent was not as fraught as ours through the snows of Cambridgeshire to Suffolk. But as I drove, at greatly reduced speed, I did think upon our conversation. I consider your strictures upon the media as well founded and in the accompanying letter to the Prime Minister I have outlined some points which might be worth your consideration.

I shall look forward to the next time we meet. Meanwhile, please accept my very best wishes for the Christmas season.

yours, as ever,
Michael

Michael Dexter Cole

PS: we've laughed a lot over your story of W.S.C.'s mouse!

MDC

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Private & Confidential

December 1, 1980

The Prime Minister,
10, Downing Street,
London SW1

Dear Prime Minister,

Many thanks for being so generous of your time and hospitality on Saturday. I have never known three hours to pass so swiftly and, as you might imagine, it was an occasion that Jane and I shall always remember and cherish.

During our homeward journey, I thought again on Mr. Thatcher's strictures on the media. There's much in what he says but to improve matters is not easy. However, I wonder if you have ever considered giving a monthly televised news conference, on the American Presidential model? The news conference is a form which suits you particularly well. It need not last more than thirty minutes and could be a moveable feast, held, say, during the first week of every month, except August and September.

I know there are many reasons why this is not "done" in our country and there will be no shortage of people around you who will explain why it should not be -- P.M.'s Questions, R.O.R. etc. Nevertheless, it is a sure way of removing at least one of the screens of filtration between you and the public at large. American Presidents have found the news conference a most valuable aid, particularly at times of Congressional obduracy or media mischief. It is a means of taking an argument on to a plain of your own choosing and ensuring that commentators and the country at large address current questions in a way which you might prefer.

On the general question of why the media seem to take this or that view of a particular issue, I certainly share your doubts about the lobby; if it ever had its uses, I think they are past.

There is no doubt in my mind that journalists are far too susceptible to each other's opinions and thereby certain attitudes are struck in the public prints which take little account of hard facts and inescapable circumstances. One looks in vain in Britain for a William Buckley who will take a radical but Right-ward view of events.

Making an impact on the received opinion which so many of the leading journalists bring to their task is not easy but I do believe that those who have the professional responsibility for making sure that the Government's case is heard, and above all understood, could do with having their sinews stiffened. An ounce of initiative is worth a ton of reaction. Detailed information, forcefully presented, can and should improve the tenor of any report.

Rather like the Salvation Army, determined that the devil shall not have all the good tunes, the Government can ensure that its song rises above the tumult; but the orchestration must be right and, of course, all the players must follow their parts. As one who has spent many years on the receiving end of Press briefings and so on, I have long held the opinion that "Press relations" is an art that is almost unknown in our land. By your leave, I shall address you again on this matter if and when the circumstances demand.

In closing, I must say how very good it was to see you and Mr. Thatcher again. I shall look forward to the next time. Meanwhile, very best wishes for the Christmas season and if Hughenden Manor is open on Boxing Day, I feel sure you would find a visit worthwhile. Kind regards.

Yours, as ever,

Michael

Michael Dexter Cole

PS: forgive me for typing this but I am sure you would not thank me if you had to decipher my handwriting!

M.D.C.