



10 DOWNING STREET

12th July 1983

You asked me yesterday if I would send you a short note of my role during the General Election campaign.

I have now seen Peter Cropper's excellent paper "A CRD view".

I would like to add a few points to Paragraph 2 (i) of that paper which I attach separately.

Stephen Sherbourne  
Political Secretary

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP

BRIEFING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THE DAILY PRESS  
CONFERENCES DURING THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN  
OF JUNE 1983

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1. In getting CRD Desk Officers to produce the briefing it is important to show them a specimen which makes it clear that the briefing should only in exceptional circumstances stray over one page, that it should be headed by the particular point which is being addressed which must be self-explanatory and with a reference, that there should be a clear line to take which the Prime Minister could actually say and that it should contain any background the Prime Minister should be aware of and any supplementary points she may want to make.
2. During this Election, when the Party Leader was Prime Minister, it became clear that I needed to liaise occasionally with the Number Ten Private Office who very kindly agreed to send me papers and reports which the Prime Minister had already seen in her official capacity and which she had either asked for or was likely to ask for.
3. The briefing of the Prime Minister was helped very much by the sense of order over that meeting by the Chairman. This ensured: that the Prime Minister knew that the briefing for the Press Conference would begin early on in the meeting; that she would see the list of topics to be covered so we could pace ourselves in the meeting; and that the briefing was conducted in a systematic way, keeping to a clear agenda.

4. I felt it was important for Desk Officers early on to see the Press Conference either on closed circuit television, or, space permitting, in the Conference Hall, in order to give them an idea of the questions that are put and the answers that the Prime Minister gave. Without this experience, the briefing for the press conference would be drafted "blind".
  
5. I also tried to establish a system of de-briefing CRD Heads of Section as soon as possible after the Press Conference so that they and their sections were aware of what newsworthy items, if any, had cropped up, the intention being also to allow Desk Officers to telephone this information, whenever possible, to their Ministers, so that they knew by midday the line being taken by the Prime Minister on topical issues.
  
6. We established a system of telephoning the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Scottish Conservative Party so that they knew the line being taken by the Prime Minister before they went into their own press conference which took place later.  
In the case of Wales, where the press conference began about the same time as ours, if not earlier, we telephoned them after the Chairman's meeting so they knew what lines we were proposing to put to the Prime Minister.

Stephen Sherbourne

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