

FOR YOUR INFORMATION
Conservative and Unionist Central Office

NHS

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Memorandum from: Anthony Shrimpsley

To: Chairman
c.c.: Michael Spicer, MP
Stephen Sherbourne F.I.

Date: 27th September 1983

Confidential

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The point we were discussing last week about the need for closer co-ordination between the Government and the Party on the presentation of policy issues is to my mind sharply exemplified by the impact of the NHS cuts story during the weekend and since.

Apparently out of the blue the Party is being represented almost universally as having gone back on its Election promises to protect the Health Service and to be sacking doctors and nurses wholesale after having boasted about the increase in their numbers under the Conservative Government.

In reality, I am told the announcements about manpower cuts follow a circular sent out by the Secretary of State to Regional Health Authorities in August. The semi-public horse-trading has of course been made more urgent by the Chancellor's public expenditure exercise.

However, it was stressed in the original circular which appears not to have been much publicised by the Department, that the emphasis of the cuts should be to minimise the impact on doctors, dentists, nurses and so on, even though there would have to be cuts in those areas where there was clear over-staffing.

Without getting into the details of the situation which frankly, I do not know, one is entitled to ask whether the Department's own Press Office made any reasonable attempt to explain the Government's policy and to put matters in an appropriate light.

I really cannot believe that things could not have been explained better than they have been, but assuming that there is a clear strategy behind this activity, I for one see no evidence that anyone has tried to tell the country what it is.

I believe we are now to get a Ministerial speech, and possibly an inter-Departmental speaking brief backed up by a brief from the Research Department.

But this is purely picking up the pieces.

We really do need to have better liaison in advance about this kind of issue or the Party is going to suffer damage on a serious scale.

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