

- ✓ *KW 19 iii*
1. MR. WHITMORE - for Liaison Committee briefing
  2. PRIME MINISTER

LIAISON COMMITTEE - CIRCULATION OF PRESS RELEASES

The Chief Secretary urges you to agree to a change in the rules governing the distribution of press releases. I hope that you will resolutely refuse to do so.

Questions of Procedure for Ministers (para 103) says:

"Ministers should use official machinery for distributing texts of Ministerial speeches only when such speeches are made on official occasions. Speeches made in a Party political context should be distributed through Party machinery."

This rule is not merely well founded but has served successive Governments perfectly well in protecting Ministers from charges of misusing Government resources for Party ends and the Government Information Service (GIS) from the charge of Party political bias.

Contrary to what the Chief Secretary suggests, distribution by the GIS of Ministerial speeches to be made on a Party political platform would be no less open to allegations of misuse of Government resources than the distribution of speeches containing comments of a Party political kind. The risk of such allegations is not, in my submission, avoided by eliminating all trace of Party political comment from Ministerial speeches to be made on a Party platform.

If the Government changed the rule it would be laying itself open to the kind of row which it should avoid like the plague and which is not worth the candle by any stretch of the imagination.

The Chief Secretary makes some flattering comments about the efficacy of the GIS as a distributing agent. There may be something in what he says about the relative effect of GIS and Party distribution. But the impact of any speech depends on its content, its topicality and its news value and not on the masthead of the press release.



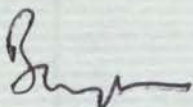
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In any case, if the Party masthead puts the media off - as the Chief Secretary suggests - Government press officers can easily redress the balance (assuming that the content of the speech supports their efforts) by "selling" the news in advance to the interested media. Ministers do too little to promote speeches they consider important, judged by the few requests I get from them to spread the word in the Lobby.

If the Party label really does put people off - and I remain extremely sceptical - there is another way of drawing attention to the speech without compromising either Ministers or the GIS. This is for the GIS to make the text available where it counts on plain paper.

In short, a professional press office can overcome any real or imagined obstacles in the way of publicity if a speech contains a good story and it has enough notice of its content to enable it to promote it. It may be no coincidence that the Treasury is the one Department which can from time to time be relied upon to try to change Rule 103. This is, I believe, the second time in your Administration. I pray that it will again be unsuccessful.



B. INGHAM

19 July 1982

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