

PPS
bcc. Chief Whip
Robin Butler
Stephen Sherbourne

Prime Minister

MAIL ON SUNDAY ARTICLE ABOUT YOUR PPS!

You should see the rather unpleasant Marcia Falkender piece about myself in last Sunday's "Mail on Sunday". I draw it to your attention partly because it is a veiled attack on yourself.

I have had a word with the Chief Whip about it. He is definitely not in favour of the idea of there being two PPS's. In relation to my own performance in the six months I have been with you, he confirms that there is some criticism from some quarters of the Party that I am not seen around in the House of Commons as much as Ian Gow was. I am conscious of this criticism, and told the Chief Whip that my own strategy was to spend as much time initially at Number Ten and in and out of your life here as possible, to get familiar with the system here and also to discover at first hand the needs and pressures to which you are subject. It was always my intention to move from that position to a more active House of Commons role, which I had intended to start doing - and am already doing - this New Year.

I mention these matters only because you know that I am here only to serve in whatever capacity may be most helpful to you, and am more than ready to accept corrections or suggestions about the course I steer!



MICHAEL ALISON

23.1.84

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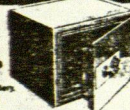
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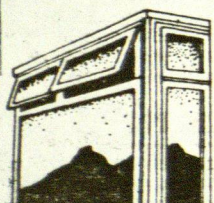
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SINNESS

Marcia Falkender



THE OTHER SIDE OF POLITICS

The right-hand man's right out

I HAVE bad news for Mrs Thatcher's newest right-hand man, Michael Alison. I regret to tell him that his days are already numbered.

The Prime Minister is preparing to lay down his political life — among others, I suspect — to help save her own.

Mr Alison, 57, who was the surprise choice last June as Mrs Thatcher's Parliamentary Private Secretary to succeed the infamous Ian Gow, took demotion from Minister of State for Employment to move to No 10.

From day one, he showed none of the bustling efficiency for which Ian Gow was known. He was rarely to be seen around Westminster, unlike the ubiquitous Mr Gow.

The explanation for his appointment last June was that a more senior figure in the Party would be suitable now that Mrs Thatcher had a thumping majority at Westminster. That is at last seen to be the madness it always was.

The new idea is that Mr Alison should be replaced by two PPSs.

One PPS would be a young, thrusting Tory on the same political wavelength as the dozens of the new-intake MPs threatening to cause more political trouble for their Prime Minister.

The other would be a senior Conservative whose role would be to advise Mrs Thatcher over the occasional whisky at No 10.

Star turn

THE Parliamentary star of the week was unquestionably John Cunningham, who led for the Opposition in the great rate-capping debate.

Cunningham is exactly the kind of modern-minded Member of Parliament which many thought would start coming through in the fifties and sixties when the rest of Britain began to move into the 20th century but, by and large, failed to materialise.

Cunningham has a Ph.D in Chemistry and at 43 is the right age to make a big impact.

His one major problem is that he speaks so slowly that there is a certain tendency among his audience to have a little snooze between words.



THE Yes Minister team must have been delighted to receive that prize last week, albeit by kind permission of Mary Whitehouse, for a cleaner-than-clean TV show. It was an even bigger coup to get the Prime Minister to present the prize.

After such an accolade it surely must be time for Yes Prime Minister and for Jim Hacker to do a Thatcher and seize the crown!

It was well timed, too, coming in the same week as the Centenary lunch of the Parliamentary Lobby, that exclusive group of political journalists who have the politicians' ears at Westminster.

The Jim Hackers of the world will, I suspect, make sure they flourish, since they'll always need to fall back on the Lobby to stop themselves being out-smarted by the Sir Humphreys of Whitehall.

icine. We regard it as more than a bit pseudish when a Doctor of Philosophy calls himself a doctor. So drop the Doctor, doctor.

Low rating

ALDERMAN Alfred Roberts is, I fancy, spinning like a top in his grave. He was, after all, a prudent and frugal pillar of

interfering with local democracy by capping the rates.

Of course, he would have recognised some of the problems Mrs Thatcher faces. And he would have been appalled to learn, for example, that the same week that rate-capping was being debated in the Commons, Ted Knight's Lambeth Council was announcing the appointment of former MP Joan Lestor to a newly invented £13,500-a-year job to monitor the activities of the local police.

But like me, he would not be in favour of rate-capping. Neither, instinctively, I believe, is Mrs Thatcher. So why did she allow herself to be dragooned into it?

Is it because the Civil Service has failed yet again to come up with a new system to replace the quite idiotic and wholly unjust rating system which Mrs Thatcher has constantly promised to reform.

She has allowed herself to be side-tracked into rate-capping instead of abolishing the antiquated rating system altogether.

I suspect Treasury and Inland Revenue officials have yet again put every possible barrier in the way of reform, dreading the huge weight of extra work.

If Mrs Thatcher had been prepared to knock a few heads together she would today be regarded as the champion of a completely rejuvenated system of local government finance, rather than its pall-bearer.

Remember the father you so rightly admired, Maggie, and go back to what you always intended — the abolition of the rating system so local democracy can flourish.

Flying ticket

TORY MP for Newbury, Michael McNair-Wilson, may be forced to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds on the grounds of ill health. If so, we'll be in for the most extraordinary Parliamentary by-election since the war.

For in the heart of the constituency lies Greenham Common and the ladies there are not going to lose such an opportunity to publicise their cause. The only way to escape them would be to fly the candidates in and ferry them