

Minister



Civil Service Department
Whitehall London SW1A 2AZ
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From the Private Secretary

3 September 1980

Mike Pattison Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

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1. Press Office
to see

Dear Mike,

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MP 3/1 X

"WORLD AT ONE" PROGRAMME:
APOLOGY TO LORD SOAMES

... You wrote to Edward Chaplin on 6 August letting the Lord President know that the Prime Minister was content that he should seek an apology from the BBC. To complete the picture you might like to have the attached copy of the apology which the BBC did transmit on 20 August.

Yours sincerely,
Jim Buckley.

J BUCKLEY

PRESS RELEASE

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Wednesday 20 August

LORD SOAMES JOURNEY TO STRASBOURG

STATEMENT MADE BY THE BBC DURING THE 'WORLD AT ONE' PROGRAMME ON WEDNESDAY, 20 AUGUST 1980.

We take this opportunity to apologise to Lord Soames. Our 22nd July programme contained an item about expenditure incurred by Lord Soames on a journey to Strasbourg to represent the Government at the official opening of the newly elected European Parliament.

It was suggested that Lord Soames had spent some £400 of public money on good living while in Strasbourg. In fact this was quite untrue, and moreover the Foreign Office say they communicated the true facts to the programme before the item was broadcast. No one on the programme staff recalls receiving such information.

Save for £24, the cost of the visit consisted only of the charge made by the RAF to the Foreign Office for the use of a communications aircraft to fly Lord Soames to Strasbourg and back within 24 hours, which was necessary to enable him to fulfil engagements.

We therefore unreservedly withdraw the allegations made in the programme and apologise to Lord Soames.

6 August 1980

The Prime Minister has seen your letter of 5 August, about Lord Soames's intention to extract an apology from the BBC following the World at One programme of 22 July.

She is content that Lord Soames should proceed as proposed, but would like him to keep the Home Secretary in the picture.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Andrew Jackson (Home Office).

M.A. PATTISON

E.G.M. Chaplin, Esq.,
Civil Service Department.

AKB



Prime Minister

Content that
had Soames should
pursue the BBC for
an apology? He should
perhaps tell the Home

Civil Service Department
Whitehall London SW1A 2AZ
01-273 4400

5 August 1980

M O'D B Alexander Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

Secretary. - *Agreed*
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MAF 5/8

Dear Michael,

MINISTERIAL TRAVEL ABROAD: BBC "WORLD AT ONE"

You will remember that the high cost of a journey by Lord Soames to Strasbourg in July last year, to attend the inaugural session of the European Parliament, recently attracted a certain amount of adverse publicity. In particular the BBC "World at One" programme on 22 July managed to imply that Lord Soames had misused public funds on good living while in Strasbourg (I enclose a copy of the transcript - the offending passage is from page 6 onwards). This was in spite of the fact that FCO News Department had told the BBC before the programme that the high cost of the journey was entirely due to the use of an RAF aircraft.

Having sought legal advice, Lord Soames intends to extract an apology from the BBC, along the lines of the enclosed statement. He has however asked me to warn you of the action he is proposing to take.

Yours ever,

E G M Chaplin

E G M CHAPLIN
Private Secretary

I want to apologise to Lord Soames. In the World at One programme on 22nd July I questioned Mr Clement Freud about the level of public expenditure incurred by Lord Soames on a journey to Strasbourg to represent the Government at the official opening of the newly elected European Parliament.

The Question I put to Mr Freud indicated that Lord Soames must have spent a considerable sum of public money - some £400 I suggested - on good living while in Strasbourg.

I in fact knew this was not the case, since before the broadcast this programme was informed by a Foreign Office Spokesman that the high cost of this visit was entirely due to the charge made by the RAF to the Foreign Office for the use of an aircraft to fly Lord Soames to Strasbourg and back again within 24 hours.

I therefore unreservedly apologise to Lord Soames for the suggestions made in the programme as a result of the question I put.

THE WORLD AT ONE

BBC RADIO FOUR

1300 HOURS BST

JULY 22 1980

PRESENTER (ROBIN DAY):

The spotlight of parliamentary scrutiny has been cast on ministers' travelling expenses when they go on trips abroad.

The backbench Conservative MP Sir Donald Kaberry, who is chairman of the Commons Select Committee on industry, was planning a trip

PRESENTER (CONT.):

to Japan by his committee to investigate import penetration there, but the Commons Liaison Committee, which deals with trips abroad, has decreed that only half the committee may go, because of the expense.

Sir Donald then asked a series of Commons questions, to discover how much is spent on foreign trips made by ministers. The answers disclosed, for instance, that a one-day trip to Strasbourg by Lord Soames and one official cost nine hundred and ninety-one pounds, and that two days in Copenhagen, for a minister and two staff, cost one thousand five hundred and thirty.

Neil Mackwood asked Mr Clement Freud, the Liberal MP who is a critic of government spending, if he had witnessed excessive extravagance by ministers or by his fellow MPs on official overseas trips:

CLEMENT FREUD:

Well, I have been party to the odd trip, and I've always felt very badly about being made to go first class, being made to stay in very expensive hotels, and then being given about two pounds seventeen and ninepence a day for expenses.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

You say 'made' to go first class. How come made?

CLEMENT FREUD:

Well, I was at the United Nations recently, and I was given a first class return ticket, which cost one thousand one hundred-odd pounds, and put up at the Berkeley Hotel on Fifty-third Street, which again ~~nearly~~ cost nearly ninety pounds a day, and I suggested that if I went to a bucket shop and got a cheap flight or a Laker flight, or ~~or~~ queued

CLEMENT FREUD (CONT.):

up, the government and I could cut the savings, which would have been about fourteen hundred pounds, or seven hundred pounds each, which meant that I could have entertained a lot of the people at United Nations whom I wanted to meet and talk to.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

Perhaps you could give us the attitude of the MPs and ministers who go on these trips. Did they regard it as a bit of a Beano?

CLEMENT FREUD:

I think everyone's always quite pleased to swan off, but I doubt whether responsible MPs do anything but, when they go there, do what they were sent to do.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

Are there any other ways in which money could be saved on the trip?

CLEMENT FREUD:

Well, I'd be very pleased to introduce a bucket shop into the House of Commons. It's one of the many services we don't have. We have a very proper travel agent, but if you go standby, or say, how can one economise on this ticket.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

Do you think all these trips, these parliamentary delegations, are really necessary?

CLEMENT FREUD:

I believe it's right that a member of parliament who takes part in a debate on foreign affairs should have the odd opportunity of leaving Tooting

CLEMENT FREUD (CONT.):

Bec or Wandsworth Common, or whatever his natural habitat is. Again, I don't see why he shouldn't do this is the recess, perhaps combine it with a holiday, perhaps take his wife, for whom, obviously, he would pay, and, quite honestly, the doubtful dignity of travelling first class these days is something which totally escapes me.

The only people who travel first class are people who get it for nothing, airline staff, and the odd Arab prince.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

Can we take the example of Lord Soames? His one-day trip with an official to Strasbourg for the opening of the European Parliament cost, I think, nine hundred and ninety-one pounds.

CLEMENT FREUD:

CLEMENT FREUD:

Yes.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

This is particularly unfair.
 FCO News Dept. may be
 BPL before the programme, and
 made clear that the reason
 for the high cost was the use
 of a special aircraft,
 which was necessary for
 operational reasons.

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Well, given that the first-
 class airfare for both of
 them is around five hundred
 pounds, that leaves four
 hundred and seventy pounds
 over, if my maths is correct.

Do you have any theory how
 that money could have been
 spent.

CLEMENT FREUD:

Well, it's always said that
 there are cars that run on
 petrol, and Lord Soames runs
 on a rather more expensive
 fuel, and I could lead you
 to several restaurants where
 the expenditure of four hundred
 and forty pounds on a pre-lunch
 snack would be substantial
 without being extravagant.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

So are you saying that ministers are indulging themselves to this extent on the taxpayers' money?

CLEMENT FREUD:

Oh, I don't think ministers on the whole. Some of them are very spartan indeed, but I don't think you can bundle Lord Soames in with other ministers, I mean, here is a man of substance, a man at whom head waiters blanch when he enters, and cooks rush out for an extra portion of whatever.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

Can you tell us a little bit about how MPs arrange a trip?

CLEMENT FREUD:

You join the Anglo-Ethiopian parliamentary group, and in

CLEMENT FREUD (CONT.):

God's good time, you will be invited to Ethiopia, and all the good things that go with it.

There is something called the inter-parliamentary union. If you join that, you get to all sorts of messages, like 'Eleven more MPs required to make up a number on a beano to Tunis'.

NEIL MACKWOOD:

So what proportion of these trips do you think are actually necessary?

CLEMENT FREUD:

Well, I believe in the two major parties the trips are very necessary to keep people from doing what the what the whips tell them to do. Almost the only sanction that a whip has is to say 'if you vote against the government once more, we will see that you never get another trip'.

End.