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From the Private Secretary

20 January 1982

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Dear John,

The Prime Minister discussed this morning with the Chancellor, the Lord President, the Chief Secretary and the Paymaster General, the Chancellor's minute to her of 23 December on how to improve the presentation of economic policy.

It was decided to reactivate the Lord President's Liaison Committee on the longer-term co-ordination of the presentation of Government policy. This Committee might normally consist of the Lord President, the Paymaster General, the Chief Secretary, the Secretary of State for Employment and a representative of the Whips' office together with the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary; it would be for consideration whether there should also be a representative of the Conservative Research Department. It would be important for the Committee to meet regularly and look ahead to identify the message on which it was desired to concentrate attention over the coming week or weeks. The Committee would give careful attention to the need for close liaison with the Party. The Prime Minister would at regular intervals chair the Committee, so as to keep in close touch with its work. One of the tasks of the Committee would be to orchestrate the Government's presentation of a particular policy initiative: for example, if it were decided to put the emphasis for a particular week on our good trade performance, it would be necessary to ensure that there was not simply one speech by, say, the Secretary of State for Trade, but a continuing and sustained effort to get this message across, built around the Secretary of State's speech. Similarly, if it were, for example, desired to concentrate on the Government's policy of returning ownership of assets to the people, there should be a concerted effort - comprehending council house sales, the distribution of British Aerospace shares to its workforce, and the growth of share ownership schemes, together with other suitable candidates for this list. The reactivation of this Committee was not of course a substitute for a convincing presentation of individual policies by the responsible Departments. Departments had to be very careful to ensure that their presentation of their policies was clear and persuasive. Too much of the material currently produced lacked imagination as well as clarity; there was often little conviction in these presentations. The Committee should be able to help by subjecting to close scrutiny individual Departments' material.

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/ The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister said that it was also important to secure as much exposure as possible for Ministers on TV and radio, subject to an appropriate format being negotiated on each occasion. She would have a look at the relevant paragraphs in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" to make sure that what was said here did not appear to be discouraging to such appearances. The Prime Minister said that she would like loose-leafed Briefing Notes for Government Ministers, which had been used during previous administrations, to be revived. She was also considering the possibility of detailing a junior Minister to work closely with her Chief Press Secretary. The Lord President was asked to consider this suggestion and to let the Prime Minister have his views both on this matter and on the membership of his Co-ordinating Committee.

I am sending copies of this letter to David Heyhoe (Lord President's Office), Keith Long (Paymaster General's Office), Terry Mathews (Chief Secretary's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

Michael Scholar

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John Kerr, Esq.,  
HM Treasury

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