



PRIME MINISTER

I have been talking to Robin Harris about ways to improve the Government's publicity. He has raised two points.

1. Cabinet Ministers make comparatively few non-Departmental ie. general political speeches. As we enter the second half of the Parliament, surely Ministers should move on to the offensive more rather than sticking to just their departments. The Research Department is more than willing to suggest ideas to Ministers and to help draft press releases.

2. We need to sharpen up Minister's responses to controversial and Opposition attacks. In particular Robin would like Ministers and special advisers to give a higher priority to requests from the Research Department for help in answering the Opposition.

You may feel you want to draw the attention of Ministers to these two points at a Cabinet meeting.

  
STEPHEN SHERBOURNE

20.5.85

Robin

I think you have already had a copy of this Minute from Stephen to the Prime Minister.

Now that it has come back out of the Box, Stephen thinks it ought perhaps to go with the Cabinet papers for Thursday's meeting.

Tessa  
21.5.85

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PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

18th April 1985

*Der Shyde,*

## ATTACKING THE OPPOSITION

We discussed briefly on the telephone some ideas about improving the Government's and Party's performance in countering Opposition policy statements. I expand on these in what follows.

For a number of reasons, we should from now on pay more attention to the Opposition in our speeches, briefing and propaganda. The Labour Party are currently ahead in the opinion polls. We are effectively entering the second half of the Parliament. There are renewed attempts to convince the public, both by a more public relations conscious Labour Party and a coalition of centrist opinion, that there are sensible alternative economic policies.

Within the Research Department I am making a number of changes in personnel, structure and general emphasis to improve our handling of Opposition Parties and their pronouncements. We are currently engaged in re-assessing Opposition pledges, on which I will shortly be in a position to send you useful material. We have also done our best to provide quick briefing on Labour pronouncements on jobs and on social security recently.

I would like to improve our performance further. But there are two obstacles which need to be overcome. First, Cabinet Ministers should, I suggest, be reminded of the need to keep up the attack through speeches and the media on Opposition policies, both as regards their own Departments and as regards those of colleagues.

... Although imperfectly, the attached break down of the subjects of speeches distributed by Central Office since the start of this year shows that the number of 'non-departmental' speeches made by Cabinet Ministers is not very great. The Research Department is more than willing to suggest themes to Ministers and, with Special Adviser co-operation (see below), to help with draft press releases and other political briefing. Could Cabinet colleagues be made aware of this?

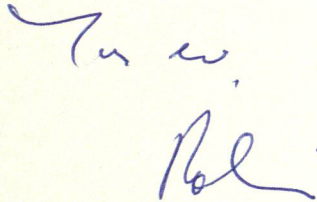
At present, the Special Adviser network is not, as I suspect we would both agree, working as effectively as it might. In particular, it proves difficult if not impossible to elicit from Special Advisers their and their Departments' officials quick, substantial observations on Opposition policy documents even when

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warning is given and even though we make every effort to distribute Opposition policy documents as soon as we receive them. I do think that some vigorous and authoritative action is required in order to ask Special Advisers, perhaps through their Ministers, to give a much higher priority to requests from the Research Department for early assistance when we are preparing briefing on Opposition statements. At present, unless a request is received from their own Ministers Special Advisers are not (with some honourable exceptions) prepared to make a real effort to mobilise their Departments' resources in this way. This will, I believe, become increasingly damaging in the run up to the General Election: we both know the increased difficulties which there are at such a time in obtaining information and co-operation from civil servants.

Finally, I intend to institute a regular forward programme of what we know of forthcoming Opposition announcements, policy statements, campaigns etc. The Political Section here will be responsible for this. But it is important that Special Advisers and relevant desk officers should co-operate in regularly providing such information as they learn too. I have told the Political Section here that we will then exercise a general responsibility to warn Special Advisers and so their Ministers of Opposition plans and projects as far in advance as possible. I will write separately to Special Advisers on this.

You may want to discuss some of these points before deciding how best to act on them.



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SPEECHES DISTRIBUTED BY CENTRAL OFFICE SINCE 1ST JANUARY: BY SUBJECT

<u>Cabinet Ministers</u>	<u>General Subjects</u>	<u>Departmental Subjects</u>
Prime Minister	4	-
Mr Fowler	0	2
Mr Biffen	2	-
Mr Tebbit	3	2
Mr Lawson	0	2
Sir G Howe	2	0
Mr Edwards	1	0
Mr Jenkin	6	13
Mr King	7	3
Mr Hurd	2	1
Mr Brittan	2	3
Mr Ridley	1	3
Lord Gowrie	1	0
Lord Whitelaw	1	-
Mr Rees	0	1