

P M for Bernard

2 August 1861-

81/01 : Private Office
fixing time.
12/8

Will discuss
on 30th August
at

PRIME MINISTER

PRESENTATION

I am preparing for you for early September, a note on the problems and opportunities in the autumn and winter. This will be seen against the background, for example, of the reception of the re-shuffle and the evidence from the Trades Union Congress of division in the Labour movement's ranks.

The note will be relevant to your party conference speech.

In the meantime I would like to offer the following thoughts at the end of a rather difficult political year.

- The epithets now most regularly thrown at the Government are "arrogant" and "insensitive"; these derived originally from the link made during the "bananaskin period" of 1983-84 with your large 1983 majority. We have manifestly not disposed of these charges, though I do think we might have made some headway against the idea that you don't care - at least the accusation seems to be made less frequently at the moment.
- Although the claim is regularly made that you are not doing enough to combat unemployment, there seems to be less criticism of policy and more of presentation. My 18 years in the Government service have taught me not to take criticism of presentation too seriously, but I think we must now do so.
- The facts are that where care is taken over presentation the Government can do well - eg social security review and airports policy. The FT actually saw the Government as "fighting back" at the end of that week which also included presentation of the other pay review body decisions.

- But what really matters is for the Government to present itself well to its own supporters, starting with its own Backbenchers. That is one of two critical lessons of the top salaries issue. The second is that where consideration of an issue is conducted in great secrecy - eg GCHQ, Top Salaries - more rather than less care must be taken over presentation. The ultimate absurdity of our presentational position was borne in upon me on Tuesday when, five days after the event, we really got down to examine how to present the Government's decisions, in preparation for the Newsnight programme. (I had responsibility for presenting the Top Salaries report to the Lobby; I read it for the first time at 12.30pm after Cabinet.)

- Certain consequences flow from this:

- a. I must make my priority task to identify presentational problems, or what the press might legitimately describe as bananaskins;
- b. but if I am to do that, then I must be privy to the sensitive issues before decisions are taken so that I can recommend an effective presentational plan. (NB - No 10 Press Office should not need to convince anyone of our security; we got you to the Falklands without the media even suspecting you were on your way.)
- c. we must seek to slow down the process of Government and to create presentational room for it; our current preoccupation with security (ie preventing leaks) is playing into the hands of the Opposition. What we must do is to contrive to be reasonably secure and presentationally effective;

d. once a sensitive issue has been identified we need, as top priority to make sure it is properly presented. We thus need to build in consideration of presentation into procedure. I would suggest:

i. each Cabinet/Cabinet Committee paper should include a paragraph which sets out how the decision is to be presented; this has been done in previous Administrations with some effect. (Incidentally, this Government is too resistant to Oral Statements - they are a first class way of presenting one's case and rallying one's own side.);

ii. on the most sensitive issues, there should be a meeting with the Department/s concerned and the Lord President and myself (the latter two acting as Devil's advocates) to make sure the Government is properly geared up. (Checklists of action are no problem; the opportunity to tick off the items is.)

iii. as a further check, I should have a weekly meeting with the Whips, under the Chief Whip's chairmanship, to discuss presentation. I am convinced that such a weekly meeting would pay dividends. And it is entirely proper for me to report to Whips. (NB: For the first time in your Administration Mr Wakeham invited me along earlier this year to meet all the Whips; I was shaken to discover that all my efforts to put your "excessive" overseas travel in perspective had not reached every Whip.)

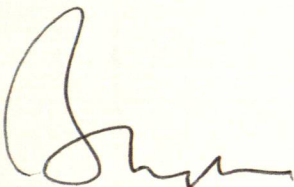
I believe that the Lord President and the Chief Whip would subscribe to all the points made above.

- I would, however, like to add one further point: it

concerns the re-shuffle.

- Given the opportunity, procedure can do a lot to improve not the actual presentation of an issue by Ministers but the thoroughness and effectiveness of the overall effort.
- For real impact, however, personalities count. The media will be watching how you dispose of your presentational resources. Your actions cannot be ruled by presentation; but they must, in my judgement, be seen to recognise its importance.
- You must not on any account make anyone in the Commons responsible for presentation; that, on the evidence of Messrs (as they were) Maude, Pym and Biffen, is entirely counter productive because they have to face questioning on the floor of the House.
- So far as I am concerned, I have never known a more organised approach to presentation than we have under Lord Whitelaw, notwithstanding top salaries which is, I hope, an almost unique case for reasons explained above.

You may care to discuss on August 30.



Now, decisions of Judges on
Judicial Review
- City notes sent as J.M.D.

BERNARD INGHAM
2 August 1985