

DIARY

Mr. Powell
Mr. Norgrove
Mr. Flesher
Mr. Addison
Mrs. Ryder
Mr. Catford
Mr. Ingham
Mr. Alison ✓
Mr. Sherbourne
Mr. Redwood
Mr. Owen

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

The Prime Minister's most precious commodity is her time and I wonder whether we can give her added assurance that it is being put to the best possible use.

I am all too aware of our difficulty in managing the diary. Many diary events are determined by events outside the Prime Minister's control. Others are virtually unavoidable, and there is an ineluctable tendency for the day-to-day pressure of events to expand the diary. So our diary managers have to cram, Procrustes-like, a potentially limitless demand for the Prime Minister's time into an all too finite programme.

Against this background, I wonder whether we might not suggest to the Prime Minister some objectives which the diary might encompass over a period of time. There are many ways of formulating such objectives. One possibility might be as follows:

1. The diary should permit the Prime Minister to follow up the following "strategic issues":
 - jobs
 - education
 - energy (especially coal)

- local government finance
- an "efficient" public sector (e.g. Civil Service value for money, responsiveness of NHS, schools, etc. to consumer needs)

[Are there any others?]

2. The diary should provide sufficient occasions for the Prime Minister to promote, in particular, the following main presentational themes:

- promulgation of the Government's record
- an Administration which "cares" and "listens"
- a need for economic change while preserving traditional values
- furthering the enterprise society
- providing ordinary citizens with greater freedom of choice (privatisation, council house sales, making the public sector more responsive to consumer needs)

[Are there any others?]

3. The diary should permit the Prime Minister to maintain regular contact with, in particular:

- Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary
- Secretary of State for Employment
- Chancellor of the Exchequer
- MPs
- Party

[Are there any others?]

4. The Prime Minister's diary should also allow the Prime Minister time for reflection on strategy

If we could establish such a framework, it might permit us passively to monitor whether the diary is meeting the Prime Minister's objectives and actively to plan so that it does. Many of the points in 1-4 above overlap and different classifications are possible. But I believe that the main objectives of the diary can be captured under those four headings. I should be grateful if recipients of this minute could give me their views on the merits of the approach described. If it is useful, do the four headings capture the main objectives? Are the items under each heading the right ones? Please could I have comments by close of play on Wednesday 25 ~~October~~ September.

In the light of comments, the Private Office will consider the extent to which the present diary meets the four criteria. I might then put a note to the Prime Minister.

N. h. W.

20 September 1985

M Alison

MR WICKS

The Prime Minister's Time

Your note of 20 September - on top of 3½ years observing the daily pressures - leaves me in no doubt that reacting to events is likely to be easier than acting to control them. But not to try is to abandon any hope of doing so.

Your first three headings seem effectively to capture the different objectives of Diary policy to which they relate, and despite some overlapping do come through as distinct themes. You are obviously going for priorities rather than for comprehensive lists, so I resist the temptation of suggesting additions from within my purview - with one exception.

Shouldn't there be a reference somewhere to the cultural/moral/spiritual side of life? The Prime Minister should not be - and, of herself, certainly would not want to be - concerned almost solely (as the lists rather imply) with the technicalities of economic strategy, public sector regulation and political image building. I would hope that this further dimension could be reflected in some way - perhaps by mention of ethical issues (law and order, drugs, hooliganism) under 1, or of the Government's belief in moral (not just 'traditional') values under 2, or of the Prime Minister's need to keep in touch with the cultural, academic, artistic and religious aspects of national life under 3?

If something in that direction could find expression under your first three headings, the fourth heading could perhaps be omitted altogether. At the moment it is rather out of balance - and, as Mark has pointed out, the Prime Minister seems to develop her strategic thinking in the course of other activities and while in contact with people. As an alternative to omitting heading 4 it could, perhaps, be extended to embrace some of my

earlier points - including recognition that the Prime Minister needs some leisure time, which probably boils down to the same as keeping in touch with spiritual things of various kinds. This seems an important objective, considering that the Diary is more and more a 7-day-a-week phenomenon.

RLC.

25 September 1985

cc Mr Powell
Mr Norgrove
Mr Flesher
Mr Addison
Mrs Ryder
Mr Ingham
Mr Alison ✓
Mr Sherbourne
Mr Redwood
Mr Owen

cc: Mr Powell
Mr Norgrove
Mr Flesher
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Mr Catford
Mr Alison -
Mr Sherbourne
Mr Redwood
Mr Owen

MR WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

As one who has consistently ditched 95% of requests by the media to trespass on the Prime Minister's time, I entirely agree it would be helpful to try to get some order of priority into her use of it.

Before coming to detailed comments, I would like to make one general observation . I think any effective management of the diary should provide for:

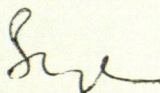
- policy formulation and review
- presentation of policy
- domestic affairs
- foreign affairs
- European affairs
- party politics
- meeting the people
- social and protocol
- administration.

These headings ^(S)cross-refer - eg party politics, meeting the people and social. I suggest they all have an importance, and perhaps their importance is stated in the correct order.

In more detail, strategic issues (1) will change over time, and we need to update them every quarter - six months. The attached summary for Liaison Committee identifies the current strategic issues.

On main presentational themes (2) I would like to add: "The kind of Britain the Prime Minister wants to see." I assume this heading incorporates the means by which these themes will be put over to the public. In this context I very much agree with Mark Addison who suggests that the Prime Minister ought to have a meeting to consider presentation. The media meetings which we used to have on Monday and Friday mornings have now virtually gone by the board. Paradoxically there is a new emphasis in our thinking about presentation, but the Prime Minister is spending less time than ever on it.

On regular contacts (3), I must ask you to add media, including editors. We need to communicate more rather than less with leaders of public opinion, perhaps over drinks.



BERNARD INGHAM

25 September 1985

Mr. Addison

MR. WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I have few observations on your minute.

One is that Prime Ministers without enough in the diary are as difficult as those with too much. There is no immediate risk of this, but I do recall days on which we wished the diary had been fuller.

Another is to warn against filling the diary with meetings about the diary (c.f. Mr. Addison's minute).

I do not disagree with the objectives you propose, though when it comes down to it, we have to fly by the seat of our pants. A great deal of what goes in the diary is inevitably demand-led.

The very considerable omission from your list is foreign affairs. The Prime Minister exercises strategic direction of foreign affairs: and after 6½ years is something of an international super-star whom everyone wants to see. We calculated earlier this year that foreign affairs (including defence and Ireland) might be taking up as much as 40 per cent of her time. This is too much, but realistically it will and should be a major feature of the diary. We introduced a system earlier this year for weeding rigorously applications by foreign visitors for calls on the Prime Minister. It is working moderately well, though I shall try to tighten it up. So in sum I think you need a whole extra paragraph which says: "The diary should permit the Prime Minister to give strategic direction to our foreign policy and see essential foreign visitors."

CDP

Charles Powell

25 September 1985

NIGEL WICKS

cc. Mr. Ingham
Mr. Alison

The Prime Minister's Time

Your Paragraph 1 talks about strategic issues. I would add Government presentation. I strongly believe that the Prime Minister should have a weekly meeting early on Monday morning with the Party Chairman or his representative, yourself, Bernard Ingham and myself/Michael Alison, to discuss the coming events, opportunities, pitfalls of the week.

There used to be a 10.00 am Media meeting that fell by the wayside increasingly. The new meeting should be called Presentation of Policy and the only paper put before the Prime Minister should be a note from Bernard setting out the events of the week, proposed courses of action and who should follow them up; and the meeting should aim to take such decisions.

I believe very strongly, as I think Bernard does, that this meeting is vitally important.

On Paragraph 2, I believe the diary should wherever possible allow the Prime Minister to undertake engagements where she can be seen with people, especially when such events, tragedies or opportunities arise. Such visits with perhaps a few words to cameras often make more impact than full length political interviews or set speeches.

STEPHEN SHERBOURNE

25.9.85

Mr. Alison

MR. WICKS

PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I have little to add following the excellent minutes you have received from the others.

Naturally I agree with the broad objectives set out in your minute of 20 September. The only point I would add is that in view of their number and scope, it would be helpful, for future purposes, to know from the others what sort of engagements, if any, the Prime Minister has been fulfilling recently which do not coincide with the objectives set out by you.

CR

Caroline Ryder

25 September 1985

cc: Mr. Powell
Mr. Flesher
Mr. Addison
Mr. Catford
Mr. Ingham
Mr. Alison —
Mr. Sherbourne
Mr. Redwood
Mr. Owen

MR. WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

Thank you for your note of 20 September. I agree with the objectives which you suggest should inform the Prime Minister's diary, although I would add the need for the diary to permit the Prime Minister to keep in touch with Parliamentary opinion and developments as a separate objective in itself.

More generally, however, can I counsel caution. You know just as much as the rest of us how difficult it is to impose strategic objectives on the day to day business of managing the diary. But I suspect that this is, in any event, not the right moment to suggest a new approach to the Prime Minister. In particular, the months of October and November are as horrendous in diary terms as any I can remember. Any new approach at this stage runs the risk of being somewhat discredited by the fact that it can have no practical effect until at least the New Year. The Prime Minister has already agreed to hold a fortnightly diary meeting which I understand from Mark Addison has had some success in leading to the refusal of one or two invitations which might otherwise have been accepted. Given this, may I suggest that we at least for the moment proceed with stealth and continue to apply the criteria you suggest in the context of the diary meeting.

My feeling that we should operate in this manner, at least for the time being, is strengthened by the knowledge that the political cycle will soon begin to impose its own imperatives on the Prime Minister's time. For example, the Party will soon begin looking to the Prime Minister to carry out more regional visits and presentational issues and political handling will occupy relatively more time than policy issues, most of which for this Parliament have been resolved and are reflected in the heavy 1985/86 Parliamentary session (although local finance is clearly a major exception).

VZ

25 September 1985

Nigel Wicks

PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I read your Minute alongside the list of the Prime Minister's engagements for the period beginning 25th September; it was salutary to see how few of the diary priorities which you listed in your four paragraphs appear in her immediate forward programme!

On your first item - "Strategic Issues" - one way to follow up what you refer to might best be done by making certain that the Prime Minister has at least a couple of slots a week say on Mondays after lunch, and on Friday mornings, to have an informal tete a tete with an individual Cabinet Minister. She already sees the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary pretty regularly, and Norman Tebbit, Lord Young and Lord Whitelaw, but perhaps she ought also to see Keith Joseph, Kenneth Baker, Ken Clarke, Peter Walker and others on a fairly regular basis for an informal exchange about how their departmental programme and priorities are moving forward.

Your second theme - promoting selected presentational priorities - might best be done by a deliberate selection on a weekly basis of a particular topic, and making certain that it surfaces in any speech or interview or visit which the Prime Minister is scheduled to make that week. When Parliament is sitting, her own Question Time to some extent pre-determines what topics shall be selected and how they will be presented.

On the question of maintaining regular contact with your list of individuals, I have already suggested how more contact with Cabinet Ministers might be maintained. So far as MPs and the Conservative Party are concerned, the diary is at present flexible enough to accommodate a good deal of contact with Parliamentary colleagues, and I think that this aspect at least is adequately covered at present.

On your final point - time for reflection on strategy - I am not sure that it is practicable to leave a "meditative slot" for the Prime Minister in the course of a selected week, and in any case I think she likes to carry out her reflection in the context of vigorous conversational exchanges. Perhaps enough of this already goes on in the context of the regular meetings she has. However, I do think that we should always aim to try to ensure that the Prime Minister has at least one evening a week, ie. Monday to Thursday inclusive, when her official commitments end by 8.00 p.m. and she can retire to the flat to read and catch up with accumulated paper work. This is an almost unattainable ideal but I am sure it is one which we should really try to regard as a positive diary entry!

A further feature which it would be nice to introduce into the programme, if possible, is the arrangement on an occasional basis - perhaps once a month - of an informal dinner either at Number Ten or possibly elsewhere, when a small stimulating company of pre-eminent individuals from a range of outside spheres of interest are brought together for conversation and general exchange of ideas. This has occasionally been done in the past - John Vaizey arranged a couple of such dinners at Cumberland Lodge; and we had a similar dinner here one evening to help stimulate ideas for the Carlton Lecture; and Hugh Thomas held a dinner when the Prime Minister had a chance to talk to people from the literary world. I think the practice is enjoyable and helpful to the Prime Minister and perhaps we could consider how it might be maintained as a feature of the diary occasionally.

MICHAEL ALISON

24.9.85

MR. WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

Your minute of 20 September.

I very much agree that it will be worth giving more systematic thought to the structure and use of the Prime Minister's time.

I have two additions to offer to the "strategic issues":

- macro economic policy
- the control of public expenditure.

DAVID NORGROVE

24 September 1985

cc: Mr. Powell
Mr. Flesher
Mr. Addison
Mrs. Ryder
Mr. Catford
Mr. Ingham
Mr. Alison ✓
Mr. Sherbourne
Mr. Redwood
Mr. Owen

MR Alison

MR. WICKSTHE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I believe your note of 20 September encapsulates most of the key points the Diary needs to make room for. It rightly points up the inherent difficulties in running a demand-led Diary under a "cash limited" system with a fixed number of hours available. Once Parliament gets under way again, pressures from the demand side will be even stronger. I agree, in particular, that the Diary, as well as making space for policy work of a problem-solving kind, also needs to have adequate room for presentation (particularly on presentation strategy) and for longer-term policy considerations.

My specific comments on your lists are that I would add overseas matters to your strategic issues, viz. South Africa, Middle East, etc. - I am sure Charles Powell will add more - and health and social security. On presentation, I would explicitly include the need to expose the weaknesses of Opposition policies, and defence. On bilaterals, etc., I should include the Lord President and the Chairman.

By hook or by crook, the Diary manages to accommodate most of the objectives you identify. The opportunities offered by Parliament, in particular, allow the Prime Minister her key platform to set out and present Government policy. Tim Flesher has ideas about how more use can be made of the House, and you may like to have a word with him about these. I think the main weak spots of the Diary at present are:

1. Simple overcrowding - particularly when a number of major Ministerial meetings come together in one day, and not enough time is allowed for the Prime Minister to consider the briefing.
2. There is not enough time set aside for planning on presentation (I think we probably allocate enough time to presentation as such when Regional Tours, Parliament, one-off visits and press interviews are taken into

account).

3. A particular difficulty is the number of requests to which the Prime Minister feels obliged to agree - including some foreign visitors, press interviews, video recordings, goodwill visits, etc.

To deal with these difficulties, I suggest we put forward to the Prime Minister proposals along the following lines:-

- a. Confirm the programme of fortnightly Diary meetings, when we are able to take stock of the programme for the next two weeks and to consider invitations which have come in in the last two. I think we need to allocate a full hour for these. They are already paying off by providing an opportunity to take evasive action in advance, and giving the Prime Minister early warning when rough waters are ahead.
- b. Setting up, perhaps every two months, presentation meetings (including the Lord President, the Chairman, Nigel Wicks, Bernard Ingham, Michael Alison) to consider what the emphasis should be for the next couple of months, and to influence the Diary accordingly.
- c. Consider setting aside a two-hour period, essentially as a buffer, perhaps on a Thursday afternoon every week, which would be kept free as far as possible, and into which we could insert last-minute pressing requests. Otherwise, it would provide a useful time for boxes, etc.
- d. Insist that meetings of Cabinet Committees taking major matters for decision should have time set aside in the Diary for the briefing and reading, preferably on the same day as the meeting itself.
- e. Setting aside more time in the Diary for seminars/ ~~pro or those~~ strategy meetings, perhaps a three-hour slot every ~~month~~ months. The Prime Minister in fact does much of her strategic thinking so far as I can see in active discussion of specific issues. So the seminar format is a good way of providing this kind of opportunity for longer-term thinking. We have had seminars on rates, and South

Africa. A seminar on education is coming up next week. The Prime Minister also has in mind to arrange one on crime prevention. We might also consider health, enterprise and Civil Service efficiency. Such seminars should, I am sure, include selective outsiders as well as Ministers.

I hope these thoughts are helpful. I would, of course, be very happy to have a word before you put anything up to the Prime Minister.

Mark Addison

MARK ADDISON

23 September 1985

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