

MR POWELL

cc Mr Flesher
Professor Griffiths
Mr Alison

BRIEFING FOR THE PRIME MINISTER AFTER MR HESELTINE'S
RESIGNATION

I list below the difficult questions which the Prime Minister can expect to get in the House where she will need an appropriate line to take. As some of these questions are likely to fall into the area of work being undertaken by yourself or the Policy Unit, I thought I would list them so that they do not get missed: no doubt answers on these are being prepared by officials, and I have not therefore provided draft replies.

Will the Prime Minister order an official enquiry into the leaked letter from the Solicitor General?

Will Mr Heseltine's press conference statement be sent to the DPP for possible breach of the Official Secrets Act?

Does the Prime Minister have a view on the fact that a Ministry of Defence official (Mr Ponting) was prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act, whereas the former Defence Secretary is likely to escape scot free despite his divulging classified information about Cabinet minutes?

Is there any precedent for a Departmental Minister having to clear any statement he makes on his own Department's policy through the Cabinet Office?

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Does the Prime Minister approve of the way the former Secretary of State used the facilities of the Ministry of Defence to launch a major attack against her and the Government even though he had already announced his resignation as Defence Secretary?

On questions relating to the Official Secrets Act, no doubt there will be official replies provided for the Prime Minister. It would seem to me preferable for the Prime Minister not to get drawn on any particular instance of any alleged breach of the Act and to have an all-purpose statement for use, perhaps along the lines "... I have set in hand enquiries into allegations of leaked documents and classified information and it will be up to the appropriate authorities to decide what further action should be taken...".

The Prime Minister will also get questions on her so-called "style of government" e.g.

Has not the former Defence Secretary confirmed that the Prime Minister suppresses debate in the Cabinet in order to steamroller through her own policies?

Suggested draft reply:

There has been no departure from constitutional practice in Cabinet and Cabinet committees. I am afraid that the resignation took place because my Rt Hon. friend could not accept the otherwise unanimous decision of the Cabinet.

At some stage, the Prime Minister should also try and nail Mr Heseltine to the policies of the Government which he supported as a Cabinet Minister. She could say something along the following lines:

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"I am most grateful to my Rt Hon. friend for all he has done in Government and I especially value the loyalty he has shown on those issues where difficult decisions had to be taken".

S.S.

STEPHEN SHERBOURNE
10.1.86