



1 August 1986

My dear Margaret,

I want to let you know about my extreme concern at the way in which matters have been managed in relation to yesterday's OS discussion about South Africa and the Commonwealth Review meeting. I am writing the unusual code of writing personally because it is both the quickest and most confidential way of alerting you to my anxiety and I am not sure when we shall have a chance to discuss it.

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There are three aspects to my anxiety: the first concerns what has already happened; the second relates to the handling



of the conference this weekend; and the third is of more fundamental long term importance.

On the first my concern arises from the way in which the OD/Cabinet discussion was presented to the lobby by the Number 10 Press Office, specifically by Bernard Ingham. I say this principally for two reasons:

- When my office - and later in the afternoon when I myself - took with the press the deliberately non-committal line which was agreed after Cabinet, we were greeted with complete disbelief. For a number of those to whom we spoke reported that the Number 10 line had remained stark and specifically hard line, dismission of the Commonwealth as "irrelevant"

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- and all in very intemperate terms. Bernard was described by someone as having gone "right over the top" in briefing which would, according to another, "have been insubstantial if it had been on the record". Someone else today ~~said that~~ described him in terms as "briefing against Geobrey".

- Consistently with this last point, throughout the second half of Thursday morning we received a number of enquiries asking for confirmation of my resignation. In face of the briefing that had provoked this story, we were still having to refute that ~~story~~ - by re-asserting our agreed line - until the end of Thursday afternoon.

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- through the press and in the eyes of
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an entirely unsympathetic position.

That brings me to the
second main point: the handling of
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meeting (I am sending you a separate
note about the meeting itself). I have
no doubt that the whole thing will
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And to to my last more
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We know that the role of Press Secretary at Number 10 is one of the most sensitive and demanding in Whitehall. Not only is the Press Secretary the Prime Ministerial spokesman, he is also the channel for playing ~~political~~ ^{governmental} decisions and policies, and in that capacity is the servant of the government, although directly accountable to you. There should be no scope for painting personal glosses, setting Department against Department, Minister against Minister - or other self-indulgences of the kind civil servants are instructed to avoid.

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Yours _____
Geoffrey