

1 August 1986

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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 OD discussion about South Africa and the Commonwealth Review Meeting. I am taking the unusual course 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.

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



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

On the first my concern airs
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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 we 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 sharp and specifically hard-line, dismissive of the Commonwealth as "irrelevant"



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The net effect of our whis has been, it course, so diskoy we value of the common line or

- 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 sensational if it had been on the record". Someone else today said that described him in terms as "briefing against Geoffrey".
- 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.

The net effect of all this has been, of course, to destroy the value of the common line we



had sheising agreed; and to reaffining - wrongs we have and in the eyes of other coming to the week end meeting - a entirely unsympothetic position.

That longs in so she Sund main point: We handling of The hors hite or the Commonwealth meeting (I am sending you a schools note close we meeting itself). I have no donder rear the whore thing wie require immentely sensitive handling if we are to steer it - as I think we should be de 20, will lust - 20 & service Conclusion reac we can accept. This means was we pros bright - throughout, as were as at the end - will have to be equally sensitive if it is not to provone other so ky to push us father she shey otherwise would. But her too I am feature - or the strugger of what I have beard about his comments i ale last day or so - about

had specifically agreed; and to re-affirm - through the press and in the eyes of others coming to the week-end meeting – an entirely unsympathetic position.

That brings me to the second main point: the handling of the press side of the Commonwealth meeting (I am sending you a separate note about the meeting itself). I have no doubt that the whole thing will require immensely sensitive handling if we are to steer it – as I think we should be able to, with luck – to a sensible conclusion that we can accept. This means that the press briefing - throughout, as well as at the end – will have to be equally sensitive if it is not to provoke others to try to push us further than they otherwise would. But here too I am fearful - on the strength of what I have heard about his comments in the last day or two – about



the effect of the line what Seman is windy is take. He is said to have made in very place where as for is he was Conserved a bush of the weeting world to they no means unwelcome - and women " hoobsby and anothe 5 hours so we PM's hornlanky (Lodays MORI hore Suggests rather a different picture). In my Judgment on bise chance of getting an agrumed who wir stand us in good Steam is no which nor in terms N a quin P.R. Edat of Benais hind - he to be arming for a "victory" not for you N for me N for Kaunta or for anybody Use - but for smithing the wine in fre is a willow for commonserse, and to a latisfactory usull for all. I believe OD's brief - handler in public a une es a me table - in a balance fastin should allow us to achieve what: And not if it is handled, wifm + after, or the basis of Germanis approach. the effect of the line that Bernard is likely to take. He is said to have made it very plain that as far as he was concerned a bust up of the meeting would be by no means unwelcome – and would "probably add another 5 points to the PM's popularity" (today's MORI poll suggests rather a different picture). In my judgment our best chance of getting an agreement that will stand us in good stead is to think not in terms of a quick P.R. éclat of Bernard's kind – but to be aiming for a "victory" not for you or for me or for Kaunda or for anybody else – but for something which will be seen as a victory for commonsense, and so a satisfactory result for all. I believe OD's brief - handled in public as well as at the table - in a balanced fashion should allow us to achieve that: but not if it is handled, before & after, on the basis of Bernard's approach.



And to so my last more fundamenter home. We have worked rogethe closely, and I time so think buruspelly, for mor ven elever years. I want so continue serving in you Government, and thus playing a has i helping to win the next general election. Her means what we must continue to have confidence is east The: The patruship - for example, this weekend - is too close in human without What. And what wind of confidence common Survivo unters I can have the essurance Use derivors when by labour and Cabrier committees offesting the policies for min I show responsibility an trutafully reflected by the Number 10 Press office.

And so to my last more fundamental point. We have worked together closely, and I like to think successfully, for more than eleven years. I want to continue serving in your Government, and thus playing a part in helping to win the next general election. That means that we must continue to have confidence in each other: the partnership – for example, this weekend – is too close to survive without that. And that kind of confidence cannot survive unless I can have the assurance that decisions taken by Cabinet and Cabinet committees affecting the policies for which I share responsibility are truthfully reflected by the Number 10 Press Office.



We know visit vie zash or from beentag at Number 10 is an of in whitehole. No only is the pris Surlany on Prince ministered Shoresman, he is also the channel for slaying formular dersins and policies, and in that cohouty is the Sewant or the forement, although dirithy accountable to you. Then should In no stope for painting personal georses, setting department grains department, minister against ministe - a Ale self indulgences of the limit crivil sevents as instructed 20 avoid.

Joss byand my consen about the forthering confermer. I fear that the Nucle 10 pers other, is its present style, is (and has been for time) undermining We know that the task 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 relaying 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.

And my bigger worry this goes beyond my concern about the forthcoming conference. I fear that the Number 10 press office, in its present style, is (and has been for some time) undermining



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our chances of securing a third term, by causing friction in Whitehall, and so giving to the outside world of Government (and party) disunity – destroying what should still be the party's secret weapon.

This is, I know, a question that goes beyond what we can tackle this week-end. But it is of the highest importance and must be taken seriously if we are to be able to continue working together in confidence: without that we shall not but able to get through to Monday night, let alone to the General Election! But we must.

I have kept only one copy of this letter, for myself: I hope we may be able to find a chance to talk about it.

Yours	
Geoffr	ey