

PERSONAL

PRIME MINISTER

You might like to have the following points in mind if you see Mr. Tebbit tomorrow:

i) You have told the House that complaints against the BBC are a matter for the Governors (Hansard extract attached). If asked in the House whether you agreed with Mr. Tebbit's suggestion that his differences with the BBC should be judged by an independent examiner, you could only say that this is a matter for the Governors. That would effectively repudiate Mr. Tebbit, something that you do not want to do.

ii) Duke Hussey would be on constitutional high ground in refusing to put the matter to an independent adviser. It is the Court of Governors' job to run the BBC and he could argue (and I think he would be right) that they would be wrong to delegate their responsibilities in the way that Mr. Tebbit seems to have in mind. In short, the BBC could make Mr. Tebbit's approach look silly. Thus, its effect would be the opposite to that Mr. Tebbit intended - it would not give him an honourable exit. The BBC would have had the last word.

iii) Mr. Hurd would be bound to take the line that this is a matter for the Court of Governors. The Opposition would then be able to drive a wedge between the two Ministers. It is not convincing to argue that Mr. Tebbit is not acting in a Ministerial capacity. This is all right for blocking questions on the floor of the House of Commons. But the reality would be that two Ministers are in open disagreement. You would be in an unhappy position inbetween, in your heart supporting Mr. Tebbit's line, but having in public to take the neutral Home Office line.

iv) The Government's critics would argue, I fear with some justice, that collective responsibility had broken down. That would weaken your position and bring back memories of last winter's problems.

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v) Mr. Hurd would, with every justification, be indignant that he had not been consulted in advance about the despatch of Mr. Tebbit's second letter. That you had known about the letter would make your position difficult, especially in view of your overall responsibility for Central Office.

vi) At the risk of being alarmist, I see a danger of some elements of this episode repeating the Westland troubles. A colleague with an obsession, doing things difficult to reconcile with collective responsibility. And all this at a time when things are going so well for the Government. It surely would be a great pity to allow the public's attention to be distracted by a row about this when all the Government's efforts should be made to focus attention on what is going right.

I recognise that this is a Party matter but I really do think, for all the reasons above, that you should tell Mr. Tebbit in the firmest terms, not to send his letter, at least without consultation with the Strategy Group.

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N.L. WICKS

13 November 1986

meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mr. Hughes:** Has the Prime Minister had time today to reflect on the seven and a half years of her premiership, and especially on the statement made during the 1979 election that her Government's first task was to create jobs for our economy? In 1983, the Government said that their greatest task was to create a prosperous economy providing jobs for our people. Can she therefore explain how, in this capital city, unemployment has increased from 2.9 per cent. to 9.4 per cent., with 400,000 people now out of work in London alone? Is there not one answer to that — cruel failure?

**The Prime Minister:** Since 1983, a million net new jobs have been created, which has brought hope to one million more people. The hon. Gentleman asked why that has not had a greater effect on the unemployment register. There are three reasons for that: first, unit wage costs are still rising faster than elsewhere; secondly, the continued increase in the population of working age due to the baby boom of the 1960s and continued reduction in overmanning in manufacturing industry.

**Mr. Waller:** At this time, when we remember the sacrifices made by our service people in two world wars, will my right hon. Friend look into the actions of those local authorities which, amazingly, have specifically banned those in receipt of service and police pensions from seeking employment with them? Is she aware that the Labour-controlled Bradford council has specifically excluded service pensioners from seeking a job with it? Is that not a slap in the face for all those who have served their country with distinction?

**The Prime Minister:** I saw that report and I hope that all local education authorities will use the very good teachers who are available and who have served in the forces, especially for subjects such as mathematics and physics. I urge all local authorities to exploit any potential source of good quality teachers. They will find those teachers among people who have served in the armed forces.

**Mr. Kinnoch:** Does the Prime Minister recall telling me on Tuesday that it was for the governors of the BBC to reply to the attacks made by her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster? Now that those governors have convincingly rebutted 39 out of the 40 charges made by her right hon. Friend, does she agree with the governors or with her right hon. Friend?

**The Prime Minister:** It is for the governors to answer the complaints. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that freedom of speech involves the freedom to make complaints — a freedom which he uses every Tuesday and Thursday.

**Mr. Kinnoch:** The BBC has made no attempt to make an incursion into the freedom of speech of any member of the Government. The reverse is certainly not the case. That effort at coercion is so blatant and obvious. Is the Prime Minister accepting the claims of her right hon. Friend or is she rejecting them? Is she on his side or on the side of the independence of the BBC?

**The Prime Minister:** The BBC exists because of a charter, a licence and an agreement. That is not embodied

in statute at all. Therefore, the governors have a special duty to see that that charter, licence and agreement are upheld. People are free to make complaints; they do. It is up to the governors to answer them. In this instance, the governors have made a reply. It is not for me to judge between them.

**Mr. Kinnoch:** The country will conclude that the governors of the BBC have discharged their duty to freedom, which is more than can be said for the Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister:** Bearing in mind that it was the right hon. Gentleman's Labour authorities that tried to restrict the circulation of free newspapers, he is hardly in a position, when he supports that censorship, to make complaints himself.

**Mr. Speed:** Will my right hon. Friend find time in between her official engagements today to congratulate Mrs. Jo Hawkes, who was the alliance parliamentary candidate in Ashford at the last election, who today joined the Conservative party?

**The Prime Minister:** I gladly do so. She is welcome, and I wish her well in her future career.

**Mr. James Callaghan:** In view of the Prime Minister's difficulties in answering questions from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, may I ask how much longer she intends to allow the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to go on making a fool of the Government?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) joins his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition in making effective use of freedom of speech, which is freedom also to make complaints. I hope that he is not himself trying to stem that freedom by making any suggestion that the BBC has anything other than a duty to uphold the terms of the charter, the licence and the agreement.

**Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way for the BBC to allay suspicions of bias and distortion is not for it to sit as judge and jury in such matters but for it to be answerable, as other television companies might be made answerable, to an independent broadcasting council to which aggrieved parties could make representations?

**The Prime Minister:** The difference between the BBC and other television companies, and some of the independent broadcasting companies, is that the other companies are bound by statute passed by the House. The BBC is not bound in any way, which is why complaints have to be made to the governors. I understand that it would be very difficult to take that charter or licence or agreement to court, which imposes on the governors special duties and responsibilities.

Q2. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 November.

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Loyden:** Will the Prime Minister now accept that the questionnaire from the Department of Employment to the unemployed is unnecessary and, indeed, is seen by many in the informed sections of the benefit system as a vicious attack on the unemployed? Will the right hon.