



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

14 January 1988

No.10 Press Office act on occasions as Press Office for the Attorney General and his office. This is, I think, happening more often as the pace of and press interest in the Spycatcher and related litigation increases.

The Downing Street Press Office do not wish to shirk any work here. Nor, I hasten to emphasise, does anyone in Downing Street wish to leave the Attorney General in an exposed position in any way. It is well recognised here that in these civil proceedings, the Attorney is acting for the Government as a whole and that the normal conventions of collective responsibility apply. But I increasingly wonder whether it is right for the Press Office to take the lead in press presentation of these issues. Too often, this has given the impression that it is Downing Street - that is the Prime Minister - which is in the lead in the litigation concerned. Inevitably, this heightens the political profile and encourages those who want to argue the case that the Prime Minister is pursuing a vendetta against the press.

Moreover, it sometimes may be more helpful from the Government's viewpoint if the media's legal correspondents of are the main recipients of briefing. They will more readily appreciate the nuances of the Government's case rather than the political and lobby correspondents with whom the No.10 office normally deal. Of course, there will be occasions when Downing Street will wish to give some briefing on these legal matters in rather the same way as they brief from time to time on matters in which any department is taking the presentational lead.

All this suggests to me that there is a good case for the Law Officers' Department to establish its own facilities for dealing with the press. I recognise that this proposal has resource implications, which would need pursuing if the principle is agreed. Bernard Ingham is ready to help you choose a suitable Press Officer.

I am very ready to discuss this matter with you if you wish.

MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

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MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

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I am sending a copy of this letter to Sir Robin Butler
and Bernard Ingham.

N. L. WICKS

Michael Saunders, Esq.,
Law Officers' Department

MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

Ref. A088/107

MR WICKS

c: Mr Ingham

C.F.

PC have letter

typed for
my signature
MW

The Attorney General's Office's
Arrangements for Dealing with the Press

Sir Robin Butler has seen your minute of 11 January on this subject and is content that you should write to Mr Saunders as proposed.

T A Woolley

T A WOOLLEY

13 January 1988

MR. INGHAM

N. Wicks
I am content with this draft. I would merely make two points: I think the chosen by Q. J. W., if there is to be one, should also cover the Solicitor General. The Lord Chancellor

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE'S ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH THE PRESS

has his ombudsman office. We would of course advise on a suitable press officer
B. W. 12/1

I should like to send the attached self-explanatory letter to Michael Saunders in the Attorney General's Office. But before doing so I would be glad to your comments, and those of Sir Robin Butler, to whom I am copying this minute.

N. L. W.

CF.

PL chase FERB's office for comments, if no reply by tomorrow.

N. L. WICKS
11 January 1988

EL3CKC

N. L. W.

13.1

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DRAFT LETTER FROM N.L. WICKS TO MICHAEL SAUNDERS, ATTORNEY
GENERAL'S OFFICE

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EL3CKD