

MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Bernard Ingham and I met Michael Saunders, the Attorney General's Legal Secretary, to discuss with him my letter of 14 January about the possibility of the Attorney General's Office establishing its own press office.

Mr. Saunders began by saying that he took much of the argument in my letter. But he could not accept its essential premise - that the Attorney General was the lead Minister in the Spycatcher and related litigation. His role was that of the nominal plaintiff on behalf of the Government, carrying out the instructions of the responsible Minister. The Minister responsible for Spycatcher matters was presumably the Home Secretary, and for Cavendish matters the Foreign Secretary. Mr. Saunders went on to say that for reasons of recent history, the present Attorney General had, from the time that he had assumed office, made it an important principle not to brief the press except on matters of general policy. Mr. Saunders himself was sometimes ready to answer questions from certain legal correspondents, though it was not his practice to initiate briefings.

The establishment of a press office in the Attorney General's Chambers would, Mr. Saunders argued, run counter to the spirit of the arrangements which he had described. The Attorney General would inevitably be drawn into the media's eye in a way which he felt was incompatible with the long traditions of his office.

We then discussed the possibility of either the Cabinet Office, Home Office or Foreign Office press offices assuming the lead role hitherto undertaken by the No.10 press office. There were disadvantages. The Cabinet Office were not the lead Department, and their press office was somewhat distant from the scene of activity. The Home Office, and to a lesser degree, the Foreign Office, had shown some ambivalence to the prosecution of the Wright and related litigation. If they

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were the lead Department, this ambivalence might percolate into the media. They could damage our legal cases, and make the Government's opponents more ready to press theirs. There was the further point that activity on Spycatcher and related litigation ought, we hoped, to die away by the end of this year; and certainly after the forthcoming Official Secrets legislation had been enacted. There was therefore a case for maintaining the present arrangements at least for the time being, especially since the press might comment, unhelpfully, upon any change. Mr. Ingham would, however, take whatever action he thought necessary to lower the Prime Minister's profile when that was thought to be appropriate.

I said that on this basis I accepted that we should maintain the accepted arrangements for the time being.

*N. L. W.*

N. L. WICKS

20 January, 1988.

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*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBIN BUTLER

Further to my letter of 14 January to Michael Saunders and copied to you, you may wish to see the attached note of the record of my discussion with Michael Saunders in which I conclude that we should not, at least for the time being, change the No.10 press office role in the presentation of arrangements arising from Spycatcher and related litigation.

NLW

20 January, 1988.

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