

Prime Minister

1

Ref. A084/2937

MR BUTLER

We must discuss some of the things of which we are responsible

Content with the instruction to Cabinet Office Secretaries which Sir Robert Armstrong proposed to circulate?

Attribution in Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Minutes

FERB 5.11.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer queried the extent to which expressions of view had been attributed to individual Ministers in the minute of the discussion in OD on 22 October of Tornados for Turkey (OD(84) 11th Meeting, Minute 1).

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2. The general rule is that the opening statement on an issue (incorporating a precis of the memorandum under consideration and any supplementary points made by the Minister presenting it) and the summing up are the only parts of the minute which are attributed to an individual Minister, and that other parts of a minute should be impersonal (ie no attribution of views to particular Ministers). The guidance given to Secretaries envisages exceptions to the non-attribution rule:

- (1) when more than one memorandum has been circulated, in which case an opening statement on each memorandum is attributed;
- (2) when a specifically departmental view has been put forward, or a suggestion has been made to safeguard a departmental interest; *otherwise the dept's interest will be part of the decision*
- (3) where there is a conflict of interest between two Departments; *No*
- (4) where a speaker reserves his (or his Minister's) position or formally registers dissent (this applies in Cabinet only if the dissenting Minister indicates his intention to resign). *No this does not apply to collective decisions.*

Not if agreed by the decision

No this does not apply to collective decisions.

3. In the particular minute in question there were four attributions: to the Minister for Trade, the Minister for Defence Procurement, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth



Office, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The first two attributions were covered by the general rule and the first exception: both the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Defence had sent out minutes on the subject (though neither of them was present at the meeting). It is arguable that the other two attributions fell within the second and third exceptions, and indeed the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were already on record in a minute, though that was not formally one of the minutes which the Committee had before them. But the minute of the discussion could clearly have been written without these two attributions.

4. In contemporary conditions, given the prevalence of leaks, it is clearly important to interpret the rules strictly. I therefore propose to issue an instruction to Secretaries of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees as in the draft attached.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'R' and 'A' in a stylized, cursive font.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

2 November 1984



DRAFT MINUTE FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG
MEMBERS OF THE CABINET SECRETARIAT

Attribution of Views to Individuals in
Minutes of Meetings

The general rule on the attribution of views to individuals in minutes of meetings of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees is set out in paragraphs 15-20 of the Guide to Minute Taking. It can be summed up as follows:

As a general rule the only parts of a minute which should be attributed are the opening statement or statements of the issue by those who have circulated memoranda for discussion and the summing up. The summary of important points made in discussion should be impersonal - ie should not attribute views to persons.

It may exceptionally be necessary to attribute views to persons beyond this:

- (1) when a specifically departmental view has been put forward, or a suggestion has been made to safeguard a departmental interest;



- (2) when there is a conflict of interest between two Departments;
- (3) when a speaker formally reserves his (or his Minister's or Department's) position or formally registers dissent.

2. The Guide to Minute Taking lists a number of cogent reasons for minimising the attribution of views to individual persons. In present circumstances the risk of unauthorised disclosures, which may embarrass individual Ministers and impair collective responsibility, constitutes a further powerful reason for limiting attribution as narrowly as possible.

3. Members of the Secretariat are therefore asked, in writing minutes of Cabinet and Cabinet Committee discussions, to adhere as closely as possible to the general rule, and to make exceptions only in cases of strict necessity. Exceptions to the rule should be made only on the authority of the senior Secretary in a secretariat; and any cases of doubt should be referred for decision to the Secretary of the Cabinet.



File 84

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Attribution in Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Minutes

Thank you for your minute of 2 November (A084/2937).

The Prime Minister has commented that she would like to discuss this with you, since she feels that some of the rules are still not fully in accordance with the principle of collective responsibility. She has made the following comments against exceptions to the non-attribution rule:

- (i) Accepted.
- (ii) She does not favour recording a specifically departmental view or a suggestion to safeguard a departmental interest since, once a decision is taken, such a suggestion is overtaken by the collective decision.
- (iii) The Prime Minister considers that there will often be a conflict of interest between two Departments and that this is what discussions are intended to resolve: she does not therefore think that a conflict of interest between two Departments should be attributed to the Departments concerned.
- (iv) Similarly, the Prime Minister does not believe that reserving a Minister's decision or a formal statement of dissent should be recorded in circumstances when a collective decision is

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taken, since the collective decision again overtakes the statement of dissent.

Perhaps we may put this on the agenda for one of your business meetings with the Prime Minister in the near future.

E. E. R. BUTLER

7 November, 1984