



Ref. A084/131
PRIME MINISTER

Freedom of Information

This is the first meeting of Cabinet since Mr Des Wilson launched his Freedom of Information campaign.

2. It might be worthwhile for you to mention this at Cabinet, and to set the tone for Ministers' reaction to the campaign. You could make the following points:

It has been circulated to all Cabinet Ministers by Lord Currie.

(1) Mr Wilson wrote to you and invited you to express views. You have done so in your letter of 7 December to him. Since he quoted (selectively) from your letter at his press conference, you have placed copies of your letter in the Library of the House of Commons. That letter should guide what Ministers say, if they are asked to comment.

(2) The Government's line need not be defensive. A tremendous amount of information is released in a whole variety of ways, not least in evidence to Select Committees. It is your Government's policy to make available as much information as possible, consistently with the preservation of national security, commercial and personal confidentiality, and the preservation of necessary confidentiality in the processes of government. The Government in our system is accountable to Parliament, not to the press, and a statutory right of access would be inconsistent with that constitutional convention. In any case it would not meet the objectives intended by the campaign, since it would simply drive underground or into channels which were not covered by the statute material which governments were determined not to disclose.

(3) One of Mr Wilson's declared objectives will be to select and publicise particular cases of secretiveness which he can hold up for derision. Departments should be at pains to try to deny him these opportunities.



(4) It is desirable that in responding to this campaign
Ministers and Departments should follow a coherent and
consistent line. It would be helpful if they would report
to the Cabinet Office approaches they receive or problems
they encounter and consult the Cabinet Office as appropriate
on the way in which they propose to deal with such
approaches and problems. These arrangements will also
help us to brief you for any questions you may get on
this subject.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

11 January 1984