

THE RT. HON. DAVID STEEL, M.P.

Ackd 9/2

has been released to the press (4)
R9/2



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

9th February 1984.

BF
CF
to Richard Hatfield
about this. Have you
the pp's please - this is a single
key
13/2
Answer draft reply for RH.
13/2
New Prime Minister.

✓ Press
✓ MA

Re Minister:

This followed
you answer today.
We will give you
a draft reply

I am sorry that at question time today you were unaware of my assertion that the Government had forbidden senior civil servants to discuss the workings of Whitehall with the Freedom of Information Campaign. I enclose a copy of Lord Gowrie's letter of 2nd February confirming this.

It
9/2

You have always put much stress on the rights of the citizen and individual freedom in a free democracy, and I find it strange that a mere discussion on how these might be better safeguarded is ruled out of order - especially in view of the recent remarks of some former Permanent Secretaries such as Sir Douglas Wass on the need for improvements in this field.

Wass

David Steel

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher M.P.,
The Prime Minister,
The House of Commons.



CABINET OFFICE

From the Minister of State

Lord Gowrie

MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL OFFICE

Great George Street

London SW1P 3AL

Telephone 01-233 8610

2 February 1984

Des Wilson Esq
Chairman
1984 Committee for Freedom
of Information
2 Northdown Street
LONDON N1 9BG

Dear Mr Wilson,

I understand that you have written to the Permanent Secretaries of a number of Government Departments, suggesting a "friendly and constructive dialogue" with your Committee about the material which you enclosed with your letter.

The Government's view has been made clear, and was set out in the Prime Minister's letter to you of 9 December. Other political parties, as you yourself have emphasised, take a different view. I am sure you will understand, therefore, that given these political differences, the principle of Civil Service impartiality should be preserved. This would make it altogether inappropriate for Permanent Secretaries or other Departmental civil servants to take part in the kind of discussion which you have in mind.

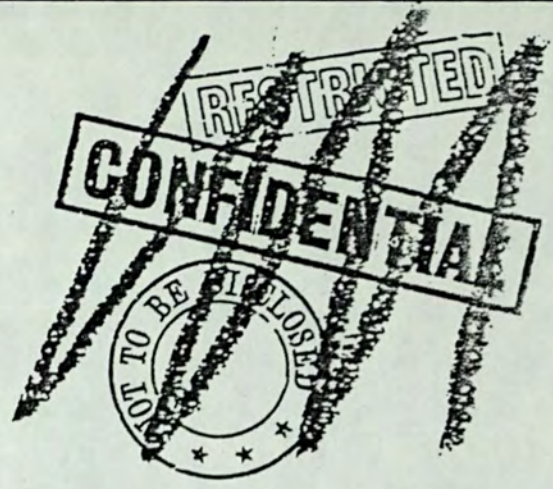
Yours sincerely,

Lord Gowrie

LORD GOWRIE

The 1984 Campaign for Freedom of Information

2 Northdown Street London N1 9BG
Telephone 01-278 9686



cc Mr. Hatfield

we spoke. This is
the letter which
Sir Brian Cullinan
received.

3 January 1984

B. H. [Signature]
13/1

Sir,

I enclose the material published at the launch of the 1984 Campaign for Freedom of Information.

Additional copies can be purchased for circulation to colleagues.

We are anxious to have a constructive and friendly dialogue with Whitehall on this matter and would welcome your views.

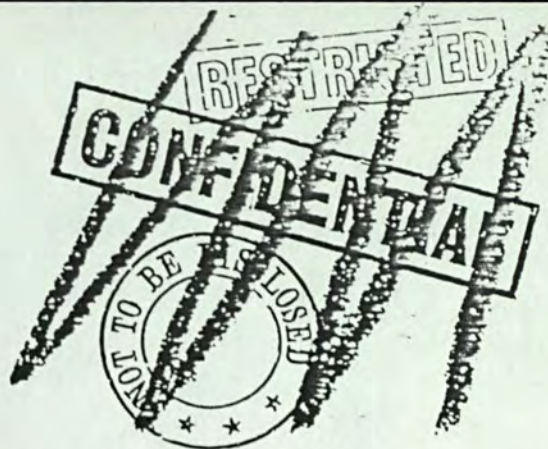
Yours sincerely

DES WILSON

Enclosures

The 1984 Campaign for
Freedom of Information

2 Northdown Street London N1 9BG
Telephone 01-278 9686



7 February 1984

Lord Gowrie
Cabinet Office
Management and Personnel Office
Great George Street
London SW1P 3AL

Dear Lord Gowrie

I have to say that I find your letter of 2 February astonishing.

First, my letter to Permanent Secretaries and the enclosed material about our campaign was clearly an act of courtesy on behalf of our campaign, and I have no doubt was understood to be so by the majority of them, and your response is, therefore, at best heavy-handed and borders on paranoia.

That said, we do of course have arrangements in hand to meet Civil Service unions and I have no doubt they would take the same dim view as our campaign of your attempt to stop reasonable dialogue between civil servants and well-established public organisations on the way our governmental system operates and how it can be improved.

I know this is 1984, but your position that once the Prime Minister and colleagues have made up their mind, a subject no longer exists for discussion, is Orwellian in the extreme.

It will be noted by all objective observers that a government that puts so much stress on the rights of the citizen, individual freedom and democracy, is, literally terrified of discussion on how the rights of the citizen can be better protected and our democracy made more healthy.

Yours faithfully

DES WILSON, Chairman, 1984 Committee

23 JAN 1984

