

SUBJECT

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

cc: Mr. Ingham  
Mr. Mount  
Mr. Sherbourne

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CO-ORDINATING THE PRESENTATION OF  
GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The Prime Minister discussed with Lord Whitelaw, and subsequently with Mr. Biffen, today Ministerial responsibility for co-ordinating the presentation of Government policy. Before doing so, she had seen a minute from Mr. Mount and Mr. Sherbourne suggesting that this responsibility should be given to Mr. Gummer. She did not agree with this on the grounds that Mr. Gummer already had two jobs as Minister of State, Department of Employment, and Chairman of the Party, and it would be premature to add this further one.

Lord Whitelaw suggested that he should speak to certain Ministers about presentation, and that the administration needed to be better co-ordinated and to present itself as a team. The Prime Minister said that she felt that a Minister with Lord Whitelaw's seniority was needed to undertake this task if he was to have sufficient influence with Ministers in charge of Departments. Lord Whitelaw said that he would be willing to take this task on: he would not wish to have any additional staff, but would rely on the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary for support. It was also agreed that Mr. Ingham would continue to chair the regular meetings of Information Officers, but Lord Whitelaw would be willing to hold ad hoc meetings when necessary. It was also agreed that the existing arrangements for Lobbies should continue.

The Prime Minister subsequently saw Mr. Biffen. Mr. Biffen said that he would gladly give up his present responsibility for co-ordinating the presentation of Government information. The staff engaged on this had been run down and he did not find it easy to combine the adversary character of organising Government briefing with the conciliatory role of the Leader of the House of Commons. It was agreed that the decision to appoint Lord Whitelaw to undertake this task should be presented as resulting from the importance attached by the Prime Minister,

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which had caused her to give the responsibility to her most senior non-Departmental Minister.

It was agreed that the change should be announced on Friday, 2 December, and the Prime Minister said that she would have another word with Mr. Biffen about the terms of the announcement which she had in mind.

F.B.R.B.

30 November 1983