



JU956

PERSONAL

PRIME MINISTER

As I look at the arrangements for the better presentation of economic and social policy arising from the considerations of Willie Whitelaw's group I find myself concerned at the blurring of lines between Parliamentary and Governmental activities.

It seems certain that the activities of the backbench teams will soon be perceived as an organised effort. I'm sure a set of briefing notes will be lost and turn up either at PM's PQs or on BBC and the role of civil servants, not least Bernard Ingham, will be questioned.

Perhaps much of this work could be conducted by John Gummer's people at Central Office with less chance of mud being slung by our critics.

I think it right for Bernard Ingham to keep his group together and indeed for Willie Whitelaw's group to continue too, but the distribution of material might be better through the Central Office net rather than the official one.

NT

February 1985

Prime Minister

I will get Bernard's
Comments.

F.R.B.

7.2.

??



Rue

JR

cc: B1

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

13 February 1985

Dear Callum,

PRESENTATION OF POLICY

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's personal minute of last week (JU 956). She has now seen the Lord President's minute of 11 February, and I have shown the papers to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Sir Robert Armstrong has advised that there is no problem about the propriety of a Group of Ministers under the Chairmanship of the Lord President, supported by a group of officials under the chairmanship of Mr. Ingham, to co-ordinate the preparation and dissemination of presentation of Government policy. He also thinks it legitimate for the Government to use its backbenchers in the House of Commons to help in the dissemination of this policy, using material prepared in this way. He agrees, in the interests of avoiding a risk of unnecessarily attracting a Parliamentary attack on these arrangements, however ill-based, that it is preferable for the documents circulated to backbenchers to bear the name of the Lord President rather than that of Mr. Ingham. He considers that this would be more appropriate than to circulate through Conservative Central Office material prepared by officials, which would indeed blur the line between official and political functions.

The Prime Minister hopes that your Secretary of State will be content with the arrangements, subject to the change proposed by the Lord President.

I am copying this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Sir Robert Armstrong and Bernard Ingham.

Yours ever,

Robin Butler

Callum McCarthy, Esq.,
Department of Trade and Industry.

R57

PERSONAL



Prime Minister

This is in line with Bernard's advice below and deals with the problem.

PRIME MINISTER

Presentation of Policy

It would certainly be wrong for Conservative Central office to distribute notes prepared by officials. Content?

Norman Tebbit has shown me a copy of the personal note he sent you last week expressing his concern that the lines between Parliamentary and Governmental activities might become blurred in the work of my group on the presentation of policy.

FEB

11.2.

2. Of course I appreciate and indeed accept Norman's point; such a risk is inherent in work of this kind. I do not think it necessary at present to make any change to the way in which the group works but I do propose that in future the briefing notes which it produces should be circulated with a covering letter from me, rather than being circulated by Bernard Ingham on my behalf. I can explain to you in person why it would not be a good idea to use the Central Office net for this purpose.

Yes
ml

3. I am sending a copy of this note to Norman Tebbit.

holds

Privy Council Office
11 February 1985



12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

FEB 1985

[Faint handwritten text]



cc Mr Butler

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Press Secretary

LORD PRESIDENT

PRESENTATION

I promised a note on Mr Tebbit's observations for discussion with me this morning.

The position is as follows:

- over my 18 years in the Government's service, there has been a persistent, and often unfair, tendency to criticise the Government Information Service (GIS) for its failures to put over Government policy; you know I am not an unqualified admirer of the GIS, but too often when people do not like the message they shoot the messenger. In addition, there is too little awareness of the limits within which a taxpayer-financed and politically neutral GIS must operate - surprisingly little, you may think, in view of the concern about the extent to which ratepayers are financing local authority party political propaganda
- over the last 18 years - or at least the last 16, for it took me some time to learn the trade - I have consistently advised Governments of different political complexion on the basis of the total approach to presentation of policy. In other words, I have presented them with an overall plan which has identified not merely what the GIS can do but also what the party in Parliament and country might do. And in doing so I have drawn a clear distinction between what is, and is not, possible for the GIS
- my objective in doing this has not merely been to do a professional job, though that has been uppermost in my mind; I have also had other motives which might be summarised as follows:
 - to protect the GIS from pressures to exceed its role;
 - to demonstrate that the GIS is only one instrument in the total PR orchestra;
 - to identify other agents who have a responsibility - notably Backbench MPs and

CCO - and so further to protect the GIS
from criticism.

- I have not always immediately been thanked for my pains and it is a novel experience to be accused of "blurring the lines between Parliamentary and Governmental activity"
- my approach to the latest economic and social policy presentation is entirely in line with the background I have set out above
- there is only one respect in which, in the interests of getting the show on the road, I have gone further in extending my already stretched No 10 Press Office resources to circulate to Ministers the background notes I have drafted and cleared on your behalf. Previously, this has been undertaken by the Minister responsible for the coordination of policy presentation, though in practice the job was only a substantial one under Angus Maude (Background or speaking notes tended to die the death under John Biffen and Francis Pym.)
- my only concern, in acting as circulation agent for background notes, is the sentence in my covering letter which, however varied for impact, typically states:

"Lord Whitelaw hopes that you will circulate the notes to your groups of MPs and encourage them to make use of their contents in the press and on radio and television."

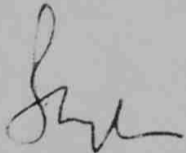
Assuming I continued to sign, or perhaps even if a Private Secretary signed, the covering letter, that sentence might be differently worded

- for the rest, I think I should state in relation to Mr Tebbit's points:
 - I hope the activities of Backbench groups are seen as an organised effort; it is about time Backbenchers were mobilised, organised and set to work; you have already said Ministers should not be coy about admitting that Backbench MPs are actually supporting Government policies;
 - I have already given suitably decontaminated briefing notes to journalists I can trust in the interests of getting over the message
 - there is no question that I can prepare, or on your behalf commission, background/speaking notes on any matter of Government policy in suitably expressed Government terms for dissemination to members of the Government, which includes the Whips Office, nor is there any question that I can circulate on your or the Prime Minister's behalf those notes, as approved responsible Departments, to members of the Government

- this narrows the whole issue down to whether I am entitled in a letter to say you, as Lord President hope Ministers will circulate the background note to Backbench MPs. I believe, as your agent as a member of the Government, I am; but I would much prefer that your Private Office made that request
- this brings me to the major point: whether the CCO should circulate the background notes I prepare and clear with Departments. I think I should state at the outset that, as a Civil Servant, I am not permitted to draft and secure approval through the Government machine, background notes for circulation by CCO. That is not a proper use of my or others services. The proposition put forward by Mr Tebbit would kill stone dead your Ministers' and my official group. The present system provides the compromise and acceptable solution, with the reservation about the method of circulating background notes.

Conclusion

I fear Mr Tebbit's proposition, however well meant on my behalf, would be lethal to the current exercise. Whether it is more directed at CCO than the GIS is a matter for speculation.



BERNARD INGHAM
11 February 1985



cc Mr Butler

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Mr Butler

The Lord President is writing to the Prime Minister. He has accepted my advice

John 11/2

CCO - and so further to protect the GIS from criticism.

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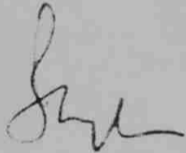
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BERNARD INGHAM
11 February 1985

Ref. A085/482

MR BUTLER

Presentation of Policy

--- Thank you for letting me see the attached papers.

2. I have now read the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's note of 7 February and the subsequent minutes by Mr Ingham and the Lord President.

3. I have no problem with the propriety of there being a group of Ministers under the chairmanship of the Lord President, supported by a group of officials under the chairmanship of Mr Ingham, to co-ordinate the preparation and dissemination of presentation of Government policy. It seems to me to be a legitimate part of the duty of civil servants to assist Ministers with the presentation of Government policy.

4. I think that it would blur this line if the dissemination were via the Conservative Central Office. It seems to me to be preferable that the Government should use its backbenchers in the House of Commons. But I agree that the briefing notes produced should be circulated with a covering letter from the Lord President, rather than being circulated by Mr Ingham on the Lord President's behalf.



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

13 February 1985