

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Mr Wicks - on arrival

Mr Ingham

Mr Sherbourne

Mr Alison

J. Cairnes

PRESENTATION

Bernard Ingham recently sent you a note about issues of presentation following TSRB. This note covers the Parliamentary dimension. It seems to me that over the last two years or so we have become rather too re-active in dealing with Parliament in that the only occasions in which you speak are debates inspired by Opposition motions (apart from the Debate on the Address) and the only time you make statements tends to be for the ritual reporting back after European Councils. To continue in this mode for the next two years might well be to waste one of the Government's principal Parliamentary assets i.e. your ability to put over the whole of the Government's case in a way no other Minister can and to give backbenchers the arguments they need to defend Government policies. Classic examples of this were GCHQ where the whole Government case was not deployed until you had an opportunity to put it and TSRB where your performance at Questions on the Tuesday after the decision crashed the Opposition but came too late to prevent the substantial backbench revolt.

I think that it is worth considering that over the next two years you should plan at the beginning of the Parliamentary session to speak in two or three Government inspired debates on subjects of the Government's choosing. Of these examples are foreign affairs and in particular defence on which ground the Government can feel most secure; or industrial relations, depending on the mood of the moment. Taking on more debates would mean cutting down on extra-Parliamentary speaking engagements but this would be no bad thing. There is a job to be done in Parliament, especially after TSRB, and it would do no harm with Government backbenchers if you were seen to be participating more. Moreover, even without television, your Parliamentary speeches get just as much, if not more coverage,

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from non-Parliamentary speeches. With television - as we may be in the 1986-87 session - the balance of advantage is clear. It is moreover worth noting here that in the 1979/80 session you spoke in three Government inspired debates and 1980/81 in two. In 1981/82 there were five but this was, of course, dominated by the Falklands. Since the General Election there have been none.

The same applies to oral statements. Without suggesting that we rush to the House whenever there is an announcement to be made, I believe that we have become slightly over-fastidious about the use of the oral statement. With hindsight, it is clear that there should have been one on TSRB. It would not have prevented a row but it would have ensured that we all concentrated on making the case and ensuring that backbenchers had full access to all the arguments. It may be a forlorn hope, but a greater willingness to make oral statements rather than no statement at all or leaving it to other Ministers could enable us to cut down on routine European Council statements.

Agree to consider nearer the beginning of session?

IF

19 August, 1985

BF // CS
Pse BF to me 24/10

MR. WICKS

cc Mr. Maclean
Mr. Powell
Mr. Alison

This is just to record that I discussed briefly with the Prime Minister today my note of 19 August, a copy of which you have seen, in which I suggested that she might consider taking part in one or two Parliamentary debates of the Government's choosing during the forthcoming Parliamentary Session. Generally speaking the Prime Minister seemed disposed to such a course provided that suitable subjects could be identified sufficiently far in advance. Foreign Affairs and Defence was one obvious example. You might like to consider reverting to this subject at one of the Monday morning business meetings.

TJ.

Tim Flesher

PL B/F to us

(Timothy Flesher)

1 October 1985

a few days before PM's next meeting with Chief Whip, Lord Ross etc. I will put a note into the summary log of this. We should also remind the Chief Whip of the possibility before the meeting.
W.C. W 7.10