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Seen by MEA 30/4

Government Chief Whip
12 Downing Street, London SW1

29 April 1986

Dear Whip,

CIRCULARS FROM MINISTERS RELATING TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

There have been a number of occasions recently when Ministers have circulated letters or documents to Members of Parliament setting out and explaining particular aspects of Government policy. There appears to be some confusion about the procedure which should be followed when issuing such circulars particularly in relation to where the costs should fall: the rules governing the use of House of Commons or departmental stationery in this respect are quite clear. This note summarises the position.

If a Member of Parliament, including a Minister, wishes to send out circulars he is obliged to purchase original House of Commons stationery or photocopy it at his own expense. There is clearly no requirement to use House of Commons stationery for a circular which is setting out Government policy as this is a proper charge to public funds. I assume that when this has happened it has been done because the circular was being sent only to Conservative Members. Statements of this Government's policy are not and should not be for the exclusive information of our own Members. There is much to be said for sending such statements of policy to all opposition parties.

It follows that as a rule, and within the rules relating to the use of House of Commons stationery and departmental stationery, circulars setting out the Government's policy should be sent on departmental paper and copies should also be circulated to opposition parties, normally through their Whips' offices. The Government Whips will always be prepared to give advice on these matters.

In this regard, unbelievably, a number of the Whips have told me that there remains confusion in the minds of some senior Civil Servants and in Private Offices as to the position of the Government Whips. I regret having to ask but I would be most grateful if you would ensure that all those in Departments who need to know, are aware that the Whips are full Ministers within the Government with all that implies.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, Members of the Cabinet and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

John Wakeham
John

J WAKEHAM

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw PC CH MC

