

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Mr. Ingham  
Mr. Sherbourne

I re-submit Bernard's note so that you can give the Cabinet a pep talk on presentation. Norman Tebbit is, I understand, preparing for the Strategy Group a paper on presentational initiatives for the recess. But the speaking note annexed to Bernard's note does not cut across that.

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At the last Strategy Group there was some discussion about the BBC. If I might say so, this should be tackled on two fronts:

- (i) Departments need, as part of their regular monitoring of the electronic media including the BBC, to respond to specific items of misreporting, slanted items etc. They should do this by getting departmental spokesmen to give quick responses, use PPSs to summon up back bench spokesmen etc.
  
- (ii) CCO should monitor in a systematic way general bias on the BBC. The Chief Whip believes that MPs can help here, but the organisation of the monitoring has to come from CCO.

N.h.W.

N. L. Wicks  
2 July 1986

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PRIME MINISTER

CABINET - PRESENTATION

At the first meeting of the Strategy Committee on Monday a number of points arose which you wish to mention at Cabinet. Nigel has asked me to do a speaking note and it is attached at Annex I.

I think you need to make five points.

- the need to step up the momentum of media activity;
- the importance of having a Minister on media duty throughout August and September and the need for No 10 to have details of the rota;
- the need to keep telling a positive story about the Government's achievements during August and September;
- the need to ensure that Government's point of view is heard on radio and television programmes and for Departments to ensure that the Government has every opportunity to reply to criticisms;
- the need for quick reaction to either inaccurate or contentious news items or programmes where no right of reply is offered.

In making those points you should have at the back of your mind the following considerations:

1. The stance of this Government from the beginning is that you have placed the responsibility for putting over Government policies in the particular Department; and that you have expected Ministers and Departments

take every opportunity to make positive use of the media, and especially radio and television.

- ii. It is necessary from time to time to remind Ministers and Departments of the need to be positive in their approach to the media; we now need to take the initiative and keep up the momentum throughout the second half of the year.
- iii. There is relatively more space in newspapers in August and parts of September and every opportunity should be taken to explain Government policy and otherwise positively to capture the headlines.
- iv. Chief Information Officers are in the front line in monitoring programmes, ensuring a quick reaction to controversy and responding to media invitations; they should be left in no doubt of the need to sharpen up the attack. [I will personally follow up your remarks at a meeting with them.]
- v. All of us recognise that sometimes there are tactical reasons why the Government should remain silent but these are few and far between.
- vi. There is a strong case for putting the media right about errors, but we should take care not to press arguments about bias. Alleged bias is best dealt with by a Minister in an interview; to complain about it, without offering someone who will redress it, is usually counter-productive. [NB: In my experience the media, and not least BBC's 'Today' programme, welcome advice, put in a constructive way, about where they have got their facts wrong. This is quite different from moaning subjectively about programmes. I am afraid Mr Tebbit has acquired a reputation with some broadcasters as simply a moaner. This does no

good. Mr Kinnock is doing himself no good either ringing journalists, even allegedly friendly ones, at 7am to complain.)

In short, we need to be positive and active in our approach to the media; clear about the messages we wish to convey; firm but reasonable in demanding the opportunity to reply to allegations and in informing them about errors of fact; but careful to avoid a reputation for moaning.



BERNARD INGHAM

24 June 1986

DRAFT SPEAKING NOTE FOR CABINET

The Government is beginning to do better and the formation of the Strategy Committee has been well received. There is a new feeling around that we really mean business.

We do mean business, but we need to leave people in no doubt about it.

This means that we need to step up and sustain our efforts to put over our case positively in the press and more especially on radio and television.

My entire approach from the beginning has been to put the responsibility for explaining Government policies and measures on to the individual Department and to encourage you to take every opportunity to put over our case. By and large this has worked, though of course from time to time I've tried to inject a new momentum.

I think we need to do two things now:

- to use the time available before the Recess to give the impression of a dynamic Government which knows what it is doing and is getting on with the job for Britain; let us send our Backbench troops away in good heart to put new heart into our supporters
- to use the opportunities which August and September offer, especially by way of newspaper space and air time, to keep the initiative, to force the pace and wherever possible make good positive news.

I would like therefore to ask you to:

- plan a programme of continuing activity in August and September and to draw up a rota of Ministers who will be on positive as well as reactive media duty in those months; my office would like to have a copy of your rota;
- make sure your Chief Information Officers are aware of the need to step up our attack and are monitoring the media - press, radio and television - and are adopting a positive approach to media offers; my Chief Press Secretary will be speaking to them separately on these lines;
- charge your Chief Information Officers with responsibility for preparing a report to enable us to take stock of all our efforts in October.

I should add that I do hope that when the media gets its facts wrong our Press Offices firmly but reasonably draw mistakes to their attention. My office is of course available to help through its twice daily meetings with the political correspondents.

I hope you will back up your staff by offering to put the facts straight in interviews.

If however you feel the media has dealt with an issue unfairly or in a biased way it is essential that we don't just complain; we must offer to give an interview to redress the balance. Otherwise we shall just get a reputation for moaning and that will do us no good at all.

Finally, I feel strongly that fairness requires the media to give us an opportunity to put over our point of view where we are criticised or feel we have been misrepresented and

have not been invited to give our side. We have every right to demand an opportunity to do so and to ensure that the format of the programme allows us to do so.

I have already stepped up my media programme and I propose to keep plugging away. I hope you will do so, too. We have a very good story to tell right across the board.

24 June 1986