



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

11 May 1983

Dear Private Secretary,

The Prime Minister has asked me to circulate for the information of Ministers the attached copy of instructions to Chief Information Officers and their staff on information activities during the period of the General Election. This memorandum has already been circulated by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary to all Chief Information Officers but I should be grateful if you could draw it to the attention of your Minister.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Butler

The Private Secretary

INFORMATION ACTIVITIES DURING A GENERAL ELECTION

1. The general principle governing information activities during a General Election is to do everything possible to avoid competition with Parliamentary candidates for the attention of the public. In addition, it has always been recognised that special care must be taken during the course of an election since information material produced with complete impartiality which would be accepted as objective in ordinary times, may excite criticism during an election period when feelings are running high.
2. This paper gives guidance as to how these principles should be applied. It is being circulated by the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary to Ministers; by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary to Heads of Information Departments and by the Director General of the Central Office of Information to senior officers at COI Headquarters and in the Regions. Part I deals with Paid Media and the COI Overseas Operation. Part II deals with the work of Information Departments in regard to 'free' media.
3. The election period should be taken as from MONDAY 9 MAY TO FRIDAY 10 JUNE.

PART I - PAID MEDIA AND CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

4. (a) Exhibitions which form part of a privately sponsored exhibition should not be withdrawn; but self-contained official exhibitions should not be kept open or opened during the election period.
- (b) The Central Film Library and the Photographs Library will operate as usual but the political party organisations will be asked, as in previous elections, to agree that films and photographs from the libraries will not be used by the parties during the election period.
- (c) Printed material should not normally be given any fresh distribution in the UK during the election period, in order to avoid any competition with the flow of election material. The effect on Departments which distribute posters and leaflets to the public is as follows:

Posters. The normal display of existing posters on official premises may continue but efforts should not be made to seek display elsewhere. Specific requests by employers, trade unions, etc. for particular posters may, however, be met in the ordinary way.

Leaflets. Single copies of leaflets may be issued on request to members of the public and to Parliamentary candidates. Bulk supplies should not be issued to any individuals or organisations without appropriate approval.

- (d) Export promotion stories for the overseas services will continue to be sought by staff in the Regions and at Headquarters but it must be made clear on each occasion that this industrial information is needed for use abroad.
- (e) Official "filler" films and radio tapes transmitted in intervals or public service periods of TV and radio programmes may be limited in consultation with the BBC and IBA Companies.
- (f) Press, television, cinema, radio and poster advertising will in general be postponed until after the election period. An exception will be made for semi-display recruiting press advertising which can continue, provided it appears only on classified pages and is limited in size to quarter-page or equivalent. In some circumstances localised health or safety campaigns could also well continue.
- (g) Research. Field work involving interviews with the public or sections of it will be postponed or abandoned.

5. Facilities for Overseas Visitors

COI arranges tours for official visitors from overseas invited by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It will be in the British interest to provide opportunities for these visitors to see how a free election is conducted; and the following instructions are being issued in connection with the arrangements to be made for them (they are on similar lines to those approved by the political parties in previous general elections).

(a) Tours by official visitors during the election period

Where it is practicable and acceptable to the political parties, arrangements will be included in the programmes for visits to party headquarters and committee rooms and arrangements may also be made to attend political meetings. Transport may be provided for these purposes if necessary, but the visitors will not be accompanied by a COI representative. In addition, arrangements may be made to see polling stations and attend the counting of votes; if so, Regional Officers will be authorised to ask for the assistance of the Returning Officer in providing these facilities; and may escort the party if the visitors so desire, and provide transport if necessary.

(b) Other journalists from overseas

Any foreign journalist - press, television or radio - not being an official visitor, who may ask for assistance from COI should be given the addresses of the central or local party offices.

6. Facilities for Information Material for Overseas Use

The permission of the political parties will be sought for photography, filming and sound recording (by COI officers or units commissioned by COI) in particular constituencies, for use in the Overseas Information Services.

PART II - FREE MEDIA AND DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES

7. During an Election campaign the Government retains its responsibility to govern and Ministers remain fully responsible for the work of their Departments. By custom, however, Ministers observe reasonable discretion as regards the initiation of any new action of a continuing or long-term character - they do not for example make new appointments during this period to any statutory body for which they are responsible - and they avoid using Government occasions for Party purposes.

8. Departmental Information Services may therefore properly continue to discharge during the Election period their normal function only to the extent of providing factual explanation of current Government policy, statements and decisions. They must be particularly careful not to become involved in a partisan way in election issues.

9. Rules for the guidance of departmental Information Officers should be broadly as follows:

Press Relations

- (a) In response to questions Departments can provide factual information by reference to published material.
- (b) There is no objection to issuing routine press notices, e.g. figures which are issued on a monthly or regular basis - or drawing attention to and as necessary summarising reports of nationalised bodies, independent committees, etc. which a Department is required to publish.
- (c) Statements which might refer to the future intentions of the Government should not ordinarily be handled by a Department. It would be better if they were made by the appropriate Minister in a political speech which would be handled by the Party organisation. Where a Minister wished to hold a press conference to make clear the Government's policies on a particular subject of immediate importance, then clearly his Department must provide facilities and give guidance.
- (d) There is a danger that some announcements of new items of Government expenditure or commitments to invest in the future, if handled by the Press Office, might be criticised as providing support for the Party in power. On the other hand, there are bound to be fairly routine announcements of this kind, and it might

10. Press Articles, Interviews and Broadcasts by Ministers

The Prime Minister gives guidance to Ministers in regard to press articles, interviews and broadcasts by Ministers during the election period.

The normal rules governing these are relaxed during the election period but arrangements for such articles and interviews will normally be made on the political network. Care should be taken by Information staffs in arranging press interviews for Ministers during this period because of the possibility that such interviews would have a strong political content.

Requests for Ministers to broadcast during the election period are initiated by the broadcasting companies. Instructions to Ministers on this subject are issued separately by the Prime Minister but Information Officers should remember that the distinction between political and ministerial broadcasts will be under very close scrutiny during this period. They should not arrange broadcasts through official channels unless they are quite satisfied that the subject is non-controversial.

11. Press Notices to Parliamentary Candidates

Press releases sent to Members of Parliament should cease on their becoming Parliamentary candidates. This follows the practice of the Central Office of Information who discontinue to these people overseas information material ordinarily sent to them.

12. Factual Information

Requests for information from all Parliamentary Candidates should be referred to the appropriate Minister's Private Office. But Departments can provide organisations or members of the public with factual information which does not require disproportionate time or effort to produce.

13. In any case of doubt about the application of this guidance in a particular case, Departmental Information Officers should consult their Private Offices, the Press Secretary at 10 Downing Street or, in the case of paid for publicity, the COI.

look ridiculous if they were issued through a political speech and the Party machine, just because of the danger of controversy. Indeed their use in a speech might tend to turn something routine into a point of controversy. Provided a Press Notice is couched in entirely non-controversial language, there should be no objection to the normal procedure. In particular, it is preferable to avoid, in the Press Notice or in the background notes to editors, any recapitulation of the Government's past achievements in the field which is the subject of the announcement. Ultimately, each case must be judged on its merits and left to the discretion of the Department.

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11. Lectures

Routine regional lectures about the work of a Department being in no way political may continue unless other factors are involved such as the use of a hall which would otherwise be used for election purposes.

12. Loud Speaker Vans

The use of loud speaker vans and other publicity media which would compete for public attention during the Election campaign should be avoided.

13. Press Articles, Interviews and Broadcasts by Ministers

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15. Broadcasting

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16. Factual Information

Requests for information from all Parliamentary Candidates should be referred to the appropriate Minister's Private Office. But Departments can provide organisations or members of the public with factual information which (a) is not classified or (b) does not require disproportionate time or effort to produce.

17. In any case of doubt about the application of this guidance in a particular case, Departmental Information Officers should consult their Private Offices or the Press Secretary at 10 Downing Street.

1 September, 1978



Undated

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Press Secretary

Dear Chief Information Officer,

I enclose a copy of the instructions which, on the authority of the Minister of State(C), Treasury, Mr Hayhoe, and with the Prime Minister's approval, are being circulated to all Chief Information Officers. They are also being sent to the Central Office of Information for distribution to its Chief Regional Officers.

The Prime Minister has asked me to emphasise the importance of the Information or Public Relations Divisions of all Departments avoiding doing anything which might give grounds for criticism of the activities of the Official Information Services during the Election. I am sure you will take steps to ensure that our, so far, clean record in this respect is maintained this time.

Yours sincerely,

Bernard Ingham

BERNARD INGHAM

*Referred to above
that it should be
from any information
taken matter agrees
referred to*

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