

MR WOLFSON

cc Mr Coles  
Mr Scholar  
Mr Rickett  
Mr Ingham  
Mr Davies-Jones

Banana Skin Neutralisation

Last night's episode over the Time Out article, and a talk with the Chancellor's Private Secretary, prompts these thoughts about the respective roles of the Private Office, Political Office and Press Office in dealing with stories about the Government's actions which come out as part of the Election debate.

It is written on my heart that the failure of Mr. Heath's 1974 Government to take action quickly enough to deal with the story about the miners' pay figure was generally thought to have gravely damaged them.

I suggest that our respective roles should be:-

- i. Private, Press or Political Offices should immediately alert the other (and the Prime Minister) to the breaking of a story, depending on who hears of it first. The No.10 Duty Clerk should alert the duty Private Secretary of any such story if it appears on the tapes when the Private Secretaries have gone home.
- ii. Private Office (or the Private Secretary on duty at home) should:-
  - a. Alert the Private Offices of other Cabinet Ministers who are involved and may be questioned about the story;
  - b. Commission, or if necessary prepare, a factual note for the Prime Minister, copied to other Ministers concerned. (The important point about the latter is that, however difficult or inconvenient it is,

/it is more

it is more important to get some briefing to Ministers quickly, and particularly in time for them to be able to counter stories before the television news or next day's papers if they want to, than to get something comprehensive from the relevant experts - but, of course, any briefing should be checked as carefully as possible by telephoning the experts at home if necessary).

- iii. It is for Political Office to arrange, with Conservative Central Office, for the appearance of Ministers on the media or a statement from Central Office to deal with the story.
- iv. The No.10 Press Office should be given a copy of the briefing material but should use it for answering factual questions rather than adopting a positive profile in volunteering guidance.

Are you happy with this allocation of responsibilities? Bernard Ingham has emphasised to me the importance of speed of response: he points out that in this, more than in any other previous election, the media are pervasive - e.g. Channel 4 and breakfast TV in the potent area of television.

F.E.B.

19 May 1983





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Press Secretary*

In Bullis

I think this is fine, but perhaps in the nature of things Press Office might get just wind of a story. I shall reinforce your alert.

However, my experience suggests two things:

- first, the machine, because quite properly it seeks to be impartial, is slower during an election than at other times; and
- second, there can be failures of communication and even omissions in getting a spokesman into print, and on radio or television. The CLO machine is less reliable or smooth running than the Government Information Service.

(P.O.)

Consequently, I wonder whether you might not  
probably add a final para.

Bernard Ingham has  
"If so (ie if you are happy with the allocation  
of responsibilities) ~~could~~ <sup>to me</sup> emphasized the  
importance of speed of response? In this,  
more than any <sup>are</sup> ~~the~~ previous election,  
the media ~~is~~ <sup>are</sup> pervasive - eg Channel  
4 and breakfast TV ~~are~~ in the potent area of  
television."

B. Ingham

19/11