

010  
**CONFIDENTIAL**

Prime Minister

Content with this  
paper?

Ref. A083/1485

MR BUTLER

Yes m

ERB  
23.5

During an Election campaign - and without any regard to its likely outcome - it is customary for the Secretary of the Cabinet to seek the Prime Minister's approval, on a contingency basis, to a note about the custody of Cabinet documents which would be issued only if the Government party were not returned.

2. The reason for this procedure is simply that, if there is a change of Government, the outgoing Prime Minister is sometimes not immediately available to approve this instruction before Ministers start clearing their desks.

3. Would the Prime Minister be ready to approve the attached draft on this purely contingent basis?

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

23 May 1983

**CONFIDENTIAL**

DRAFT

## CUSTODY OF CABINET DOCUMENTS

Note by the Prime Minister

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1. It is a well established rule that members of the Government in office may not have access to the Cabinet papers of earlier Governments of a different political complexion except by agreement between the two Prime Ministers concerned. To assist in securing compliance with this rule in the immediate future, all Ministers should forthwith arrange for the destruction by their Departments of all copies now held by Ministers of (i) papers and minutes of the Cabinet itself, and (ii) papers and minutes of all Ministerial Cabinet Committees and of any similar Ministerial meetings. Departments are reminded that the destruction of all Secret and Top Secret documents should be supervised by two individuals, both of whom sign the destruction certificate. This request extends to all papers since the Conservative Government came into office in May 1979.

2. I ask that Ministers should not take away with them, on relinquishing office, any Cabinet papers or minutes - whether of the Cabinet itself or of Cabinet Committees. This request applies to papers which a Minister submitted himself as well as to those submitted by other Ministers. Under modern conditions general compliance with this request is necessary to

ensure the safe custody of Cabinet documents. Any former Minister may at any time have access in the Cabinet Office to copies of Cabinet or Cabinet Committee papers issued to him while he was in office; and the services of the Secretary of the Cabinet and his staff will continue to be available to former Ministers for this purpose.

3. I also ask that Ministers should not take away with them copies of other official documents seen or used by them during their period of office - for example, minutes, letters, telegrams and the papers of Boards or Committees. It is customary to give a former Minister access to such documents, in the Department concerned, just as facilities are accorded for him to see Cabinet papers issued to him while he was in office.



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*file 26*

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Thank you for your minute of 23 May seeking the Prime Minister's approval on a contingency basis for a note about the custody of Cabinet documents which would be issued only if the present Government were not returned in the General Election. The Prime Minister is content with the paper on this basis.

E. E. R. BUTLER

24 May 1983

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N BPM

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



HOME OFFICE  
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE  
LONDON SW1H 9AT

14 June 1983

Dear Richard,

MINISTERIAL CHANGES

draft  
on flap.

This is to confirm, in response to your letter of 13 June, that the Home Secretary has taken over from his predecessor the Cabinet and Cabinet Committee documents needed for current administration.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Robin Butler.

Yours sincerely,  
H H Taylor

H H TAYLOR

R Hatfield, Esq

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Election May 83

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~~PS ECO~~  
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~~PS PARLW~~  
~~PS HOME~~  
~~DIARY~~

Cabinet Office,  
70 Whitehall,  
London SW1

10 May 1983

PS(83) 7

Dear Private Secretary,

Cabinet Documents

In order to enable Ministers to fulfil their continuing responsibilities as a member of the Government during the Election campaign Departments will wish to retain during the campaign the Cabinet documents issued to them. If there is no change of Government after the Election Ministers who leave office or who move to another Ministerial position will be requested not to take away any Cabinet or Cabinet Committee papers or minutes. If the Government lose the Election the Prime Minister will immediately issue an instruction that Ministers are required to arrange for the destruction of all Cabinet and Ministerial Cabinet Committee documents issued to them. (If after leaving office former Ministers wish to have access to Cabinet and Cabinet Committee documents issued to them while in office they can of course do so in the Cabinet Office). Clearly no instructions can be given to this effect until the result of the Election is known, but Sir Robert Armstrong thought your Permanent Secretary might want to be reminded of the rule in case he gets enquiries. Indeed he might want to warn the relevant Private Secretaries.

I am copying this letter to Private Secretaries to Permanent Secretaries in charge of Departments.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) R P HATFIELD

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