

Mr. Powell ✓  
Mr. Norgrove  
Mr. Flesher  
Mr. Addison  
Mrs. Ryder  
Mr. Catford  
Mr. Ingham  
Mr. Alison  
Mr. Sherbourne  
Mr. Redwood  
Mr. Owen

#### THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

The Prime Minister's most precious commodity is her time and I wonder whether we can give her added assurance that it is being put to the best possible use.

I am all too aware of our difficulty in managing the diary. Many diary events are determined by events outside the Prime Minister's control. Others are virtually unavoidable, and there is an ineluctable tendency for the day-to-day pressure of events to expand the diary. So our diary managers have to cram, Procrustes-like, a potentially limitless demand for the Prime Minister's time into an all too finite programme.

Against this background, I wonder whether we might not suggest to the Prime Minister some objectives which the diary might encompass over a period of time. There are many ways of formulating such objectives. One possibility might be as follows:

1. The diary should permit the Prime Minister to follow up the following "strategic issues":
  - jobs
  - education
  - energy (especially coal)

- local government finance
- an "efficient" public sector (e.g. Civil Service value for money, responsiveness of NHS, schools, etc. to consumer needs)

[Are there any others?]

2. The diary should provide sufficient occasions for the Prime Minister to promote, in particular, the following main presentational themes:

- promulgation of the Government's record
- an Administration which "cares" and "listens"
- a need for economic change while preserving traditional values
- furthering the enterprise society
- providing ordinary citizens with greater freedom of choice (privatisation, council house sales, making the public sector more responsive to consumer needs)

[Are there any others?]

3. The diary should permit the Prime Minister to maintain regular contact with, in particular:

- Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary
- Secretary of State for Employment
- Chancellor of the Exchequer
- MPs
- Party

[Are there any others?]

4. The Prime Minister's diary should also allow the Prime Minister time for reflection on strategy

If we could establish such a framework, it might permit us passively to monitor whether the diary is meeting the Prime Minister's objectives and actively to plan so that it does. Many of the points in 1-4 above overlap and different classifications are possible. But I believe that the main objectives of the diary can be captured under those four headings. I should be grateful if recipients of this minute could give me their views on the merits of the approach described. If it is useful, do the four headings capture the main objectives? Are the items under each heading the right ones? Please could I have comments by close of play on Wednesday 25 September.

In the light of comments, the Private Office will consider the extent to which the present diary meets the four criteria. I might then put a note to the Prime Minister.

N. L. W.

20 September 1985

cc: Mr Powell ✓  
Mr Norgrove  
Mr Flesher  
Mr Addison  
Mrs Ryder  
Mr Catford  
Mr Alison  
Mr Sherbourne  
Mr Redwood  
Mr Owen

MR WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

As one who has consistently ditched 95% of requests by the media to trespass on the Prime Minister's time, I entirely agree it would be helpful to try to get some order of priority into her use of it.

Before coming to detailed comments, I would like to make one general observation . I think any effective management of the diary should provide for:

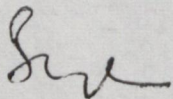
- policy formulation and review
- presentation of policy
- domestic affairs
- foreign affairs
- European affairs
- party politics
- meeting the people
- social and protocol
- administration.

These headings <sup>(S)</sup>cross-refer - eg party politics, meeting the people and social. I suggest they all have an importance, and perhaps their importance is stated in the correct order.

In more detail, strategic issues (1) will change over time, and we need to update them every quarter - six months. The attached summary for Liaison Committee identifies the current strategic issues.

On main presentational themes (2) I would like to add: "The kind of Britain the Prime Minister wants to see." I assume this heading incorporates the means by which these themes will be put over to the public. In this context I very much agree with Mark Addison who suggests that the Prime Minister ought to have a meeting to consider presentation. The media meetings which we used to have on Monday and Friday mornings have now virtually gone by the board. Paradoxically there is a new emphasis in our thinking about presentation, but the Prime Minister is spending less time than ever on it.

On regular contacts (3), I must ask you to add media, including editors. We need to communicate more rather than less with leaders of public opinion, perhaps over drinks.



BERNARD INGHAM

25 September 1985

MR. WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

Thank you for your note of 20 September. I agree with the objectives which you suggest should inform the Prime Minister's diary, although I would add the need for the diary to permit the Prime Minister to keep in touch with Parliamentary opinion and developments as a separate objective in itself.

More generally, however, can I counsel caution. You know just as much as the rest of us how difficult it is to impose strategic objectives on the day to day business of managing the diary. But I suspect that this is, in any event, not the right moment to suggest a new approach to the Prime Minister. In particular, the months of October and November are as horrendous in diary terms as any I can remember. Any new approach at this stage runs the risk of being somewhat discredited by the fact that it can have no practical effect until at least the New Year. The Prime Minister has already agreed to hold a fortnightly diary meeting which I understand from Mark Addison has had some success in leading to the refusal of one or two invitations which might otherwise have been accepted. Given this, may I suggest that we at least for the moment proceed with stealth and continue to apply the criteria you suggest in the context of the diary meeting.

My feeling that we should operate in this manner, at least for the time being, is strengthened by the knowledge that the political cycle will soon begin to impose its own imperatives on the Prime Minister's time. For example, the Party will soon begin looking to the Prime Minister to carry out more regional visits and presentational issues and political handling will occupy relatively more time than policy issues, most of which for this Parliament have been resolved and are reflected in the heavy 1985/86 Parliamentary session (although local finance is clearly a major exception).

✓

25 September 1985

MR WICKS

25 September 1985

cc your addressees

THE PRIME MINISTERS'S TIME

Your initiative on this subject is most welcome and timely.

1. Strategic Issues

In addition to those which you identify, we suggest the following, in no particular order:

Defence

Health and Welfare

Infrastructure

Deregulation and Enterprise

Law and Order

2. Presentational Themes

A theme which the Prime Minister needs to present is the dangers which dismantling the Government's policies would pose; for example, the danger to national defence posed by Opposition parties, the danger to jobs and economy posed by Labour in particular, Labour's threat to people's savings and pensions. The positive side of this is that the quality of our health and welfare services requires a Government that manages the economy well enough to be able to pay the heavy bills.

The Prime Minister would be helped in her presentation if her engagements had a wider appeal. There seems to be some

impression in the public's mind that the Prime Minister begrudges expenditure for anything expensive. So she should open more things (the body scanner engagement next year seems a good example). There is, however, a natural tendency for Departments to reserve the opening of hospitals, motorways and inner city restorations for their own Ministers. You may have to wrest some of these for the Prime Minister!

### 3. Regular Contacts

There has obviously to be some ranking here. The Prime Minister needs to see the Chancellor weekly to dispose of the business questions. She might also see the Chancellor for regular and more strategic discussions, for example, on the prospects for the British economy. She will obviously want to keep in touch with the Foreign Secretary. We would suggest that in addition she might see the following, with the same frequency as the Secretary of State for Employment:

Secretary of State for Defence  
Secretary of State for the Environment  
Home Secretary  
Party Chairman

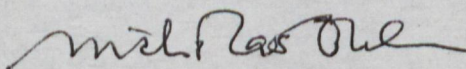
We would suggest that the Prime Minister should also see the Head of the Policy Unit on a weekly basis. This would help to ensure that the formulation and implementation of policy is not lost sight of. It would also ensure that the Policy Unit is working in ways, and on themes, which are most useful to her.

Caroline Ryder has very reasonably asked what sort of engagements should make way for all this strategy and policy. One possibility is that the FCS should take on more - certainly to the extent of taking care of his opposite numbers. Foreign visitors sometimes merit no less than three Prime Ministerial engagements. I wonder whether industrial visits and dinners are productive? Are European bilaterals avoidable?

4. Reflections on Strategy

The Prime Minister has little taste for reflections in a vacuum. In our experience, her best strategic discussions take place during personal briefings prior to meetings with colleagues. Good preparation also makes for more constructive meetings.

In addition, we suggest that seminars become a regular feature of the diary. It is important that some subjects are aired without the pressure of an immediate decision. They need to have a structure which is carefully thought out. Outside experts, in limited numbers, can help. Two possibilities: health, and some aspect of conventional defence (changes in the threat?; division of tasks within NATO?; greater use of part-timers in the armed forces?).

  
NICHOLAS OWEN

Mr Powell

MR WICKS

The Prime Minister's Time

Your note of 20 September - on top of 3½ years observing the daily pressures - leaves me in no doubt that reacting to events is likely to be easier than acting to control them. But not to try is to abandon any hope of doing so.

Your first three headings seem effectively to capture the different objectives of Diary policy to which they relate, and despite some overlapping do come through as distinct themes. You are obviously going for priorities rather than for comprehensive lists, so I resist the temptation of suggesting additions from within my purview - with one exception.

Shouldn't there be a reference somewhere to the cultural/moral/spiritual side of life? The Prime Minister should not be - and, of herself, certainly would not want to be - concerned almost solely (as the lists rather imply) with the technicalities of economic strategy, public sector regulation and political image building. I would hope that this further dimension could be reflected in some way - perhaps by mention of ethical issues (law and order, drugs, hooliganism) under 1, or of the Government's belief in moral (not just 'traditional') values under 2, or of the Prime Minister's need to keep in touch with the cultural, academic, artistic and religious aspects of national life under 3?

If something in that direction could find expression under your first three headings, the fourth heading could perhaps be omitted altogether. At the moment it is rather out of balance - and, as Mark has pointed out, the Prime Minister seems to develop her strategic thinking in the course of other activities and while in contact with people. As an alternative to omitting heading 4 it could, perhaps, be extended to embrace some of my

earlier points - including recognition that the Prime Minister needs some leisure time, which probably boils down to the same as keeping in touch with spiritual things of various kinds. This seems an important objective, considering that the Diary is more and more a 7-day-a-week phenomenon.

*DL*

25 September 1985

cc Mr Powell ✓  
Mr Norgrove  
Mr Flesher  
Mr Addison  
Mrs Ryder  
Mr Ingham  
Mr Alison  
Mr Sherbourne  
Mr Redwood  
Mr Owen

Mr. Flesher

MR. WICKS

PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I have little to add following the excellent minutes you have received from the others.

Naturally I agree with the broad objectives set out in your minute of 20 September. The only point I would add is that in view of their number and scope, it would be helpful, for future purposes, to know from the others what sort of engagements, if any, the Prime Minister has been fulfilling recently which do not coincide with the objectives set out by you.

CR

Caroline Ryder

25 September 1985

cc: Mr. Powell  
Mr. Flesher —  
Mr. Addison  
Mr. Catford  
Mr. Ingham  
Mr. Alison  
Mr. Sherbourne  
Mr. Redwood  
Mr. Owen

Mr. Powell

MR. WICKS

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I have few observations on your minute.

One is that Prime Ministers without enough in the diary are as difficult as those with too much. There is no immediate risk of this, but I do recall days on which we wished the diary had been fuller.

Another is to warn against filling the diary with meetings about the diary (c.f. Mr. Addison's minute).

I do not disagree with the objectives you propose, though when it comes down to it, we have to fly by the seat of our pants. A great deal of what goes in the diary is inevitably demand-led.

The very considerable omission from your list is foreign affairs. The Prime Minister exercises strategic direction of foreign affairs: and after 6½ years is something of an international super-star whom everyone wants to see. We calculated earlier this year that foreign affairs (including defence and Ireland) might be taking up as much as 40 per cent of her time. This is too much, but realistically it will and should be a major feature of the diary. We introduced a system earlier this year for weeding rigorously applications by foreign visitors for calls on the Prime Minister. It is working moderately well, though I shall try to tighten it up. So in sum I think you need a whole extra paragraph which says: "The diary should permit the Prime Minister to give strategic direction to our foreign policy and see essential foreign visitors."

CDP

Charles Powell

25 September 1985

MR. WICKS

cc: Mr. Powell ✓  
Mr. Flesher  
Mr. Addison  
Mrs. Ryder

#### THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I have commented separately on the four headings listed in your minute of 20 September. These seem to me to be right. However I find it difficult to see what is left out of the list; all human life is there (except foreign affairs).

How are we going to make this more concrete?

I suggest that the first stage should be an analysis of how the Prime Minister actually spends her time now. This would need to cover the weekly pattern, the differences between recesses and times when Parliament is sitting, and the regular cycle of business (the autumn for example has its own distinctive flavour, with the Party Conference, the survey etc.).

The results of this should help the next stage. I understand that we already block out in the diary (naturally enough) fixed points like Cabinets, Question times. We might consider extending this to other areas. So:

- fix a quota for media briefings and interviews, and mark out times in the diary, with a bias towards the recesses;
- fix in advance for the year times for Cabinet Committee meetings; Cabinet Office to advise nearer the time which Committees should fill them; leave departments to work to the Prime Minister's schedule, not the other way about;

- set aside time for thinking and reflection.

All very idealistic, and the times and durations would need to be flexible, but it is easier to shift things than to create time for them. And some activities would benefit from having a quota.

*DN*

David Norgrove

24 September 1985

DIARY MEETING: MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 1985

ACTION POINTS

*file*  
*LB*  
*LOZARH*

1. Meeting with Lord Marshall:  
Invite him to lunch on Sunday 29 September at Chequers, or to a meeting earlier that morning at 1030. Caroline Ryder to see which he would prefer.

Action

CR

2. Request for video for Annual Conference of Queensland National Party of Australia: regrets.

Action

MEA

3. Lunch or dinner with American Correspondents and with Foreign Press Association.  
To be put on Agenda for next diary meeting.

Action

CR

4. Michael Charlton interview for Radio 3: confirm for 17 December.

Action

BI

5. Malcolm Rutherford interview, FT. This will be difficult to fit in before the State Opening, but Caroline will see if she can find a slot as early as possible.

Action

CR

6. Pete Murray's Nightline programme: the programme did not in fact go out on Friday 25 October. The Prime Minister would need to consider an alternative date. Caroline will need to put a note up.

Action

CR

7. Photo session for Sunday Telegraph: This could be fitted in over this weekend at Chequers.

Action

BI

Remaining items not reached at the Diary meeting:  
Mark Addison to put a written submission to Prime Minister.

Action

MEA

DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Wicks

Mr. Powell

Mr. Ingham

Mr. Alison

Mr. Sherbourne

Mrs. Ryder

23 September 1985

DIARY MEETING

My minute of 23 September omitted to deal with the visit to the Remploy factor. Action on this is for Caroline Ryder, who will consider a suitable opportunity for working this into a constituency visit.

Mark Addison

MARK ADDISON

23 September 1985

cc Mr Wicks  
Mr Powell ✓  
Mr Ingham  
Mr Alison  
Mr Sherbourne  
Mrs Ryder

MR. WICKS

ME Bowen

THE PRIME MINISTER'S TIME

I believe your note of 20 September encapsulates most of the key points the Diary needs to make room for. It rightly points up the inherent difficulties in running a demand-led Diary under a "cash limited" system with a fixed number of hours available. Once Parliament gets under way again, pressures from the demand side will be even stronger. I agree, in particular, that the Diary, as well as making space for policy work of a problem-solving kind, also needs to have adequate room for presentation (particularly on presentation strategy) and for longer-term policy considerations.

My specific comments on your lists are that I would add overseas matters to your strategic issues, viz. South Africa, Middle East, etc. - I am sure Charles Powell will add more - and health and social security. On presentation, I would explicitly include the need to expose the weaknesses of Opposition policies, and defence. On bilaterals, etc., I should include the Lord President and the Chairman.

By hook or by crook, the Diary manages to accommodate most of the objectives you identify. The opportunities offered by Parliament, in particular, allow the Prime Minister her key platform to set out and present Government policy. Tim Flesher has ideas about how more use can be made of the House, and you may like to have a word with him about these. I think the main weak spots of the Diary at present are:

1. Simple overcrowding - particularly when a number of major Ministerial meetings come together in one day, and not enough time is allowed for the Prime Minister to consider the briefing.
2. There is not enough time set aside for planning on presentation (I think we probably allocate enough time to presentation as such when Regional Tours, Parliament, one-off visits and press interviews are taken into

account).

3. A particular difficulty is the number of requests to which the Prime Minister feels obliged to agree - including some foreign visitors, press interviews, video recordings, goodwill visits, etc.

To deal with these difficulties, I suggest we put forward to the Prime Minister proposals along the following lines:-

- a. Confirm the programme of fortnightly Diary meetings, when we are able to take stock of the programme for the next two weeks and to consider invitations which have come in in the last two. I think we need to allocate a full hour for these. They are already paying off by providing an opportunity to take evasive action in advance, and giving the Prime Minister early warning when rough waters are ahead.
- b. Setting up, perhaps every two months, presentation meetings (including the Lord President, the Chairman, Nigel Wicks, Bernard Ingham, Michael Alison) to consider what the emphasis should be for the next couple of months, and to influence the Diary accordingly.
- c. Consider setting aside a two-hour period, essentially as a buffer, perhaps on a Thursday afternoon every week, which would be kept free as far as possible, and into which we could insert last-minute pressing requests. Otherwise, it would provide a useful time for boxes, etc.
- d. Insist that meetings of Cabinet Committees taking major matters for decision should have time set aside in the Diary for the briefing and reading, preferably on the same day as the meeting itself.
- e. Setting aside more time in the Diary for seminars/<sup>two or three</sup> strategy meetings, perhaps a three-hour slot every <sup>two or three</sup> months. The Prime Minister in fact does much of her strategic thinking so far as I can see in active discussion of specific issues. So the seminar format is a good way of providing this kind of opportunity for longer-term thinking. We have had seminars on rates, and South

Africa. A seminar on education is coming up next week. The Prime Minister also has in mind to arrange one on crime prevention. We might also consider health, enterprise and Civil Service efficiency. Such seminars should, I am sure, include selective outsiders as well as Ministers.

I hope these thoughts are helpful. I would, of course, be very happy to have a word before you put anything up to the Prime Minister.

*Mark Addison*

MARK ADDISON

23 September 1985

DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Powell  
Mr. Norgrove  
Mr. Flesher  
Mrs. Ryder  
Mr. Catford  
Mr. Ingham  
Mr. Alison  
Mr. Sherbourne  
Mr. Redwood  
Mr. Owen

LO3ALK