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cc Home office

*From the Private Secretary*

Mr. Mallaby,  
Cabinet Office.

**THE PETER WRIGHT CASE: PQs**

We agreed earlier today that it might be helpful to record the outcome of our discussion about the way the Prime Minister had decided to reply to Questions relating to proceedings before the Australian Court.

The Prime Minister believes it is appropriate to answer all Questions relating to matters which are or may be at issue in the proceedings in the following way:

"It would be inappropriate for me to comment on matters which are or may be at issue in the proceedings concerning the Peter Wright case in Australia, while those proceedings continue."

There will of course be Questions bearing on the Wright case (e.g. on the costs of airfares, etc.) to which we can give a substantive answer. But it is clearly important that all Departments, and their press offices, adopt the approach set out here and I am accordingly sending a copy of this minute to Tony Galsworthy (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Michael Saunders (Attorney General's office) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

(MARK ADDISON)  
21 November 1986

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PRIME MINISTER

THE PETER WRIGHT CASE: TAM DALYELL'S PQ

Earlier this evening you approved a draft reply (attached) to Tam Dalyell's question, down for written answer tomorrow.

Since we spoke, we have heard that the Home Office Press Office were briefed last weekend to respond to a question like the one Mr. Dalyell tabled with a simple "No".

The Home Office are urgently trying to find out whether the question was in fact put to the Home Office. If so, whether they answered with a simple denial, and if so whether that denial was reported. We shall not know the answers to these questions for sure until tomorrow morning, and we therefore need to clear with you contingent replies to take account of a number of different possibilities.

- (i) The question was not put to the Home Office  
Your original "blocking reply" can stand.
- (ii) The Home Office were asked the question, responded with a denial, but this did not find its way into the papers.

There seems a good case for sticking with the blocking reply. A reply on the record from the Prime Minister is one thing; a comment from a Home Office press spokesman is another. The response would be unlikely to be challenged; even if it were, you would not, of course, be over-turning the Home Office's response - merely saying it would be inappropriate for you to comment while the case is in full swing.

(iii) The Home Office responded to the question with a denial, which clearly featured in the press.

The arguments for following the Home Office line and answering Tam Dalyell with a simple "No" are clearly strongest in this case. Though such a reply would unfortunately break with the pattern you have so far followed, this may be a lesser evil than courting the possibility of Tam Dalyell and co trying to drive a wedge between your line and the Home Office's, and arguing that you are now "covering up".

Content for us to determine on this basis which of the two replies you give?

We shall ask Cabinet Office to ensure that all Departments from now on use the formula which you are adopting on any matters which are or may be at issue in the proceedings in Australia.

MARK ADDISON

PS Latest information from the Home Office is that they are fairly sure that they did not use the denial, but they cannot be absolutely certain until tomorrow. So it looks as if the answer at i) above will be all right.

N.L. WICKS

20 November 1986

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