

588

Confidential filing.

Relations between Civil Servants and the Press.

INFORMATION +  
PUBLICITY.

Press Office: Media Relations

Post of Chief Press Secretary AT  
No. 10.

December 1979.

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
<del>14.12.79</del>							
<del>13.11.87</del>							
<del>18.11.83</del>							
<del>22.4.86</del>							
<del>25.4.86</del>							
<del>28.4.86</del>							
<del>10.9.86</del>							
16.5.88							
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10 DOWNING STREET

7/2 WICKS

I mentioned a helpful  
extract - in a leaflet put  
out - by David Hart's  
Committee for a Free Britain  
called "Speaking to the People  
Communicating the International  
Message".

The helpful passage is  
highlighted, attached -

B. H. Wicks

$\frac{7}{10}$

for opponents to put the opposing political case. Only then does it deploy its political arguments – if at all. The introduction of the Community Charge and the reform of social benefits are cardinal examples of the Government's weakness in communication.

The very name Community Charge is a euphemism. It would have been far better to go onto the offensive and call the new tax the Poll Tax. The defensive name given to it immediately signals to the Government's opponents a weakness that they can exploit. Even the present Labour Party has managed to win this particular political argument. Most people refer to the new tax as the Poll Tax. Only Government ministers and sympathetic newspapers call it the Community Charge.

Very few Conservatives even now can provide the political arguments for the reform of social benefits introduced earlier this year.

Important policies should be identified well in advance and a properly thought out, coordinated campaign to explain the political argument and to influence the public perception of the issue should be devised and implemented.

All parts of the Party should be co-opted into this effort, from Cabinet Ministers to local branch Chairmen. They should be provided with a clear and convincing message to be expressed through ministerial speeches, well thought out interviews on television, press articles, explanatory pamphlets, posters and videos.

Under the new Chairman, Peter Brooke, Central Office is to be reorganised into three principal departments. Communications, Campaigning and Organisation and Research. Of these the most important is Communications. It should be given the greatest authority and the Communications Director should not only be an ardent Thatcherite but should have access to the Prime Minister.

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### Conclusion

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Many people believe that the Prime Minister's Press Secretary is charged with communicating the Conservative political message. He is not and cannot be. He is a civil servant. He can and does communicate some of the Prime Minister's arguments for the introduction of a particular policy but the fundamental political arguments need to be communicated as well. Central Office is the only organisation that can fulfill this role. It should organise the Party to communicate the Government's vision and explain its actions between and during elections.

Mrs Thatcher is one of the most radical Prime Ministers this century. Most British institutions have felt the refreshing breath of her reforms. Unfortunately Central Office has not – yet.

If Central Office is reorganised so that it does create and undertake the communication of the Conservative political case it will give the Government much more room for manoeuvre because the electorate will understand the issues better and so be more likely to accept the Government's policies.

Unless political communication is accorded the highest priority in Central Office very soon, the outcome of the next election is far more uncertain than it needs to be.



cc N L Wicks ✓  
M Addison  
Murdo Maclean

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*CP to see f/w*

*From the Press Secretary*

16 May 1988

*In Donald,*

Thank you for your long letter of May 13 in response to mine of May 9.

I note that in the course of it you dispute the facts lying behind your front page lead of May 8; seek to fog the context of my remarks; impute motives to my making them; read into them evidence of a threat you perceive to press freedom; and indulge in a ritual blast against the lobby system.


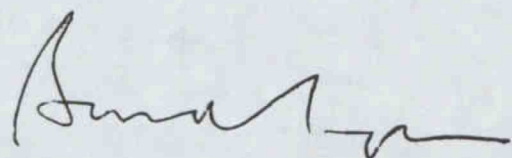
This is all very revealing of your prejudices but unfortunately it takes us rather a long way from the facts of the case. These are:

- i) however inconvenient for you, I made absolutely clear to your reporter the context of my remarks; I said more than once to him that the Government was not intending to take any action against the media, except perhaps to encourage a debate about their responsibilities in a democratic society; your story took diametrically the opposite line - in other words, it owed more to your editorial needs than it did to your interview with me.
- ii) I did not volunteer for quotation the words you misquoted; I was asked if I would agree to being quoted and I did so because I was already substantially on the record to that effect.
- iii) I did not say "the standards of the media have declined to the point of institutionalised hysteria". Nor, to be fair, did the text of your story do so. The quote is entirely an invention of your headline writer, and I think I am entitled to a correction since this invention is even now hardening into fact in the cuttings files.

- a reputable newspaper, confident of its facts, including the context of my remarks, would not have amended its story in its later editions, however strong my protest
- I was approached by the journalists of other media organisations on the evening of May 7 and I made it clear to all of them I thought your story was a travesty and a disgrace if, as it apparently was, it was founded on my briefing. (Incidentally, I do not take the same snooty view of tabloids as you do; experience teaches me that they are not by any means the sole repository of journalistic ills)
- my letter to you of May 9 was issued later in the week attached to the Home Secretary's reply to Mr Hattersley on the subject of Government/media relations.

You will see from the above that I was concerned about the inaccuracy of your story, not with its prominence. I suggest you should be concerned with both.

Finally, I am grateful for your confirmation of something I had always suspected - namely, the existence of a "trade" in stories between media organisations on Saturday evenings. We shall probably never know how, or more to the point, why - the BBC came to learn of your front page lead before your first edition was published. Perhaps we should be told.

BERNARD INGHAM

Donald Trelford Esq

9 May 1988

You are, I know, concerned about journalistic standards because I have read papers you have given on the subject. You have also very kindly attended meetings at which I have spoken on it, too.

In these circumstances you may care to look into the preparation of your front page lead yesterday which, to judge from reports by other journalists, was somewhat softened in late editions after I had spoken to your staff about it. Your lead story owed far more to your editorial needs than it did to your interview with me.

The plain truth is that I was asked, in the light of the Thames and BBC TV programmes on the Gibraltar incident, whether the Government was going to extend the role of the proposed Broadcasting Standards Council beyond its intended concern with sex and violence. I said that I did not believe so.

I was then asked what therefore was the Government going to do about the media. I said not much, so far as I knew, except perhaps to encourage a debate about their responsibilities in a democratic society of which they are part.

The questioning then moved to the media in general and I observed that there were a number of signs of concern about standards both within and outside the media. And it was in this general context - and not in the context of the Thames and BBC TV programmes - that I made the remarks you not entirely accurately quoted. (I did not say, as you quoted me as doing: "The standards of the media have declined to the point of institutionalised hysteria". The correct version is given below).

What is more, these remarks were made in the context of my saying that after 8 and a half years as Chief Press Secretary I felt it was important to keep a sense proportion about the media. After all, I said, rather in jest, they were really an institutionalised form of hysteria in the sense that we move day

to day from one set of screaming headlines to the next reporting that the end of this or that world is nigh. I felt however that there was nothing much wrong with the media that could not be cured by a new reverence for fact, fairness and objectivity instead of chasing after the false gods of invention and malice.

These comments will not come as a surprise to you in view of your attendance at talks I have given. After your front page yesterday you may well feel I have a substantial point.

I should add that since I live daily with media attempts to breathe new life into dead stories - or into stories they desperately want to keep going for one reason or another - I reminded your reporter on his second telephone call to me on Saturday morning that the remarks he not entirely accurately quoted me as saying were in the context of the media generally and not of the Thames and BBC TV programmes.

I hope you will agree that this is no way to run a reputable newspaper.

BERNARD INGHAM

Donald Trelford Esq  
Editor  
The Observer



FILE  
FCL

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

16 May 1988

CF

Dear Mr. Dalyell.

Thank you for your letter of 9 May.

The remarks of my Chief Press Secretary, to which the Scotsman leader refers, have been inaccurately quoted and used entirely out of context. He has written to the Editor of the Scotsman accordingly.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

Tam Dalyell, Esq., M.P.

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R11



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

9/5/88

- 1. ~~My~~ ~~Wicks~~ ~~to~~ ~~see~~
- 2. ~~Mr~~ ~~Hyman~~ <sup>we spoke of</sup>
- To see, I suggest we wait until tomorrow before putting up a reply.
- 3. Nelson ~~to~~ ~~see~~

Dear Prime Minister,

Could

you to contact

Mr - Jay's

Scotsman Leader?

Yours sincerely  
Ian Doherty

# Out of the bag?

THESE days, it seems, Government press secretaries are making headlines as often on their own account as on behalf of those who pay their salaries. Mr Larry Speakes, who used to do the job for President Reagan, recently confessed that he did it so well that he was able to broadcast presidential *bon mots* that Mr Reagan had not even thought of. Now we have the spectacle of his Downing Street comrade-in-arms, Mr Bernard Ingham, letting loose at the British media for lacking respect for facts, objectivity and fairness.

For his pains Mr Ingham finds himself deluged by criticism and, running for cover, seeks refuge in the only defence available to public figures in such circumstances. His remarks, he claims, were taken out of context, a complaint that sits ill with the official admission that he has expressed similar opinions before.

It can only be concluded that, though Mr Ingham was angry about the use made of his words, No 10 (including himself presumably) was anxious to keep the sentiment on the record. Journalists, therefore, now know what the Government expects of them. And recognise the implied threat that, if they do not live up to that expectation, then the administration will take steps to make sure that they do.

In this instance, as in others, it can be safely assumed that Mr Ingham is reflecting accurately the views of the Prime Minister. There are several reasons why this ought to be of concern. (Though if he isn't then, as Mr Tam Dalyell among others has noted, quite a different question arises.)

There is, first, the general point that democracy's interests are served best when the media are untrammelled by Government interference. Mrs Thatcher is not unusual in having a Prime Ministerial paranoia about journalists, particularly the broadcasters among them. Where she differs from her predecessors is in her readiness to do something about it, sometimes using the law and at others planning new regulatory agencies.

Exhortation to get its own house in order, it would appear, is the favoured option at present, at least as far as the Press is concerned. But the timing of this warning is another reason why Mr Ingham's weekend outburst should be taken seriously. In the months ahead proposals about changing the Official Secrets Act and about setting up the new Broadcasting Standards Council are to be published; a claim of irresponsibility on the media's part could be used to make these developments authoritarian rather than liberal in nature.

This may be the cat that Mr Ingham's words, at least initially, let out of the bag. His noisy, public struggle to retrieve it suggests that, perhaps, there really is something to worry about.

SCOTT WAIN  
9.5.88

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*en*

PRIME MINISTER

Bernard Ingham has been invited by Columbia University of South Carolina to give a number of lectures to their College of Journalists during the week of the Conservative Party Conference. He has also been invited to give a talk at the end of the week to the Nieman Foundation at Harvard under which aspiring young journalists study for a year.

Subject to advice from MPO, I agreed that he might take up the invitation. MPO say there is no bar to Bernard's accepting travelling and accommodation expenses for both himself and his wife. In fact, he would pay his wife's fares.

Under the present proposals he would talk at Columbia University to their College of Journalism on public relations and persuasion and address the Professional Chapter of the Journalists Society and the College of Journalists on his reflections after 7 years as Chief Press Secretary. In addition he will meet local editors and discuss with the International Studies Faculty the media handling of major international events such as economic summits, Commonwealth conferences and European Councils.

At Harvard his talk to the Nieman Foundation would cover much the same ground as his review at Columbia of his 7 years as Chief Press Secretary.

Bernard says he intends to follow the lines of lectures he has already given in the UK, suitably adapted for an American student audience.

Content for Bernard to make this lecture tour from 4 - 11 October?

*N.L.W.*

N.L. WICKS

10 September 1986

*Yes no*

## 10, Downing Street (Chief Information Officer)

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Boscawen.]*

10.48 pm

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): The genesis of this debate on the post of chief information officer at No. 10 is to be found in the exchange on the Floor of the House on Monday 14 April, which is in *Hansard* at column 575.

I interject that I welcome the presence of the Leader of the House. It is good parliamentary practice when Mr. Speaker can oblige those of us who in genuine circumstances have had to resort to the time honoured phrasing, "On a point of order. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, I beg to give notice that I shall seek to raise the issue on the Adjournment at the earliest opportunity."

I am acutely aware that in our system a civil servant cannot directly answer criticisms of him made on the Floor of the House, so let me say at once that my criticisms are directed not at Mr. Bernard Ingham, but at his boss, the Prime Minister, a politician who can answer back, and at the way at which she has allowed and encouraged Mr. Ingham to go about his business.

**Mr. David Harris** (St. Ives): Shameful.

**Mr. Dalyell:** An hon. Member on the Government side shouted "Shameful."

I am not alone in these opinions, and I should like to quote from one of the grandest mandarins in Whitehall in the 1970s, Sir Frank Cooper, permanent secretary to the Ministry of Defence. In the Suntory Toyota lecture, he said:

"A further paradox is that the more it has become technically easier to communicate the less good has that communication become between Government and the governed. Indeed, the aim now is the management of the media with a very much higher degree of central control from No. 10 Downing Street and with the connivance of a part of the media. There is now public relations — which I would define as biased information. I suggest that the post of Chief Information Officer at No. 10 Downing Street is in fact a political job in a party sense and is not a job which it is proper for a Civil Servant to fill unless he or she, resigns from the Civil Service on appointment. Moreover, what is said ought to be said on the record. The participation of the media in the lobby system is a public disgrace. That is Sir Frank Cooper's view.

**Mr. Harris:** I am the person who shouted "Shameful" at the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr Dalyell) for his attack on a civil servant. The hon. Gentleman was a parliamentary private secretary to the late Richard Crossman. After the debate, perhaps I could refer him to the Crossman diaries. The section dealing with 28 September 1966 says that the hon. Gentleman's boss spent most of the day trying to work out how he could manipulate the press and the Government information services for the then Labour Government. Will the hon. Gentleman refresh his memory about what happened in those days of a Labour Government?

**Mr. Dalyell:** I can refresh my memory clearly. There are different views on this. Sir Donald Maitland, for example, would not have acted in the way that a number of other chief information officers have acted. I take seriously the remarks by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) because I remember 1966 only too well.

There are problems here. That is why I was careful to say that I was getting at the politicians, not the civil servant who cannot answer back, rough though that civil servant may have been. It is not a cheap attack. In page 60 of Henry Porter's "Lies, Damned Lies" we are told that the advice that Mr. Ingham gave was that "remedial action should be taken against troublesome journals, whether national, provincial or specialist." Porter and others have at least to be answered.

What I am saying is a serious reflection on the job specification. It is appropriate, for example, for a civil servant on his own initiative to offer cover for selective leaking a Law Officer's letter? What sort of position did Mr. Ingham imagine that he was putting Miss Collette Bowe into when he required her to phone Mr. Chris Moncreiff with the selective contents of the Solicitor-General's letter over Westland? Can one imagine Sir Donald Maitland, the late William Clark, Sir Tom McCaffrey or any other holder of the office deeming it proper or ethical to make any such request of a civil servant colleague? [Interruption.] If the hon. Gentleman would like to name names, I shall listen to him.

**Mr. Harris:** The hon. Gentleman says that he is not attacking this civil servant. The allegations that he has made are a blatant attack on a civil servant who, because of the rules of procedure is incapable of answering back. As I said in a seated interjection earlier, I think that that is shameful.

**Mr. Dalyell:** The reply is that any traditional civil servant proposing to do that which ethically he knew he should not do would seek a prime ministerial instruction. Did Mr. Ingham ask the Prime Minister on 6 January about the leaking of the Solicitor-General's letter? After all, the Prime Minister was next door in the very same 10 Downing street building and the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was in his Yorkshire constituency. Why are the Prime Minister and Mr. Ingham so coy about appearing before the Select Committee on Defence that is considering the Westland affair on behalf of the House? It was the Prime Minister who endorsed the reference of the Westland affair to the Select Committee of which my right hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) is a distinguished and leading member.

There is one of two explanations. Either Mr. Ingham asked the Prime Minister about the Solicitor-General's letter, or Mr. Ingham knows the Prime Minister's mental processes so well that he knows instinctively what she would want done. If an answer were given at all, was it along the lines, "You know what I think and would want done"—wink, wink?

It would seem most unlikely that the Prime Minister felt that the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had done anything very wrong in her eyes, bearing in mind that at the time of his resignation she was reported to have spent over an hour trying to dissuade him from resigning. After his resignation, the Prime Minister was reported as indicating that she hoped it would not be long before he was back in a senior position in the Government.

I have no brief for the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), but, to put it bluntly, he was the fall guy. Many of us would agree with what Mr. Alan Watkins has stated in print—that he has heard from leading Conservatives that "Poor Leon is carrying the can". We all have to judge one another in this place. I do not find it believable that the former Secretary of State for

[Mr. Dalyell]

Trade and Industry, a careful QC, let alone a former Home Secretary, would dream up the device of selectively leaking a Law Officer's letter. Cover having been offered to Collette Bowe, there is only one explanation why Mr. Ingham was not dismissed in the aftermath of the Westland affair—that either implicitly or explicitly the Prime Minister approved of Mr. Ingham's action in giving cover.

We should go into these matters in some detail. On 5 February the Select Committee questioned Sir Robert Armstrong in case he might be able to provide answers which would make it unnecessary to call the five civil servants, including Bernard Ingham and Collette Bowe, as Sir Robert had interviewed them all during his inquiry. However, the Committee still reserved its right to call them if not satisfied with the information obtained from Sir Robert.

It is clear that the Committee was not fully satisfied, because it asked Sir Robert to appear before it again to answer some further questions. This he did on 5 March. However, there were a number of questions which Sir Robert was not prepared to answer. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, East, who is present, asked about the officials' knowledge of the special status of the Law Officers' letters. Sir Robert would not answer. My right hon. Friend asked him if the only person who could answer was Mr. Ingham. Sir Robert said that he could answer but was not prepared to do so. My right hon. Friend then asked:

"Then the only person who can answer is Mr. Ingham?"

Sir Robert appeared to indicate that that was so. My right hon. Friend asked Sir Robert:

"If you can't answer, the only people who can are Mr. Powell and Mr. Ingham."

In reply to several questions Sir Robert took refuge in repeatedly quoting the Prime Minister's reply to me on 27 January, the oft-repeated reply:

"I gave my consent."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 656.]

It is of interest to note that on 5 March Sir Robert Armstrong said that the five civil servants were not responsible for the way that the leaked letter was handled, as the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had taken full responsibility for the way in which the information was disclosed. It is of even greater interest to note that on his earlier appearance on 5 February, Sir Robert made a different statement. He said that when the letter arrived at the Department of Trade and Industry, the then Secretary of State was out fulfilling a luncheon engagement, that an official had read the letter over the telephone to him, and that the then Secretary of State had decided that it should be brought into the public domain.

Sir Robert emphasised that while the then Secretary of State had authorised the disclosure, it had been the officials who had decided on the method to be used. Sir Robert summed up by telling the Committee that although the former Secretary of State wanted the information brought into the public domain before the Westland press conference that day, he did not say how this was to be done.

From all this, and particularly in view of Sir Robert's inability or unwillingness to answer questions himself, I believe that on 5 March the need to call for evidence from certain key civil servants had been positively established. To save time, I shall refer to the article by Richard Norton-Taylor in *The Guardian* on 11 March.

On 1 April, Mr. John Carvel wrote in *The Guardian* that Labour members of the Committee were planning to repeat their request to examine the officials, particularly Mr. Ingham. He also wrote:

"The Committee has been advised that a request from Mr. Ingham would be refused by the Prime Minister, but that if the Committee instructed him to attend, he would turn up and say nothing."

Although, in theory, the Committee's wish to see the civil servants was still on the table, arrangements were being made to have the final hearing, which a Minister would wind up. On 10 April, *The Guardian* reported that, at a private meeting of the Committee, the Labour members' move to summon the five civil servants or just Mr. Ingham was defeated.

A question along the following lines could properly be put to the Prime Minister. "It was reported in *The Guardian* on 1 April 1986 that the Defence Committee had been advised that a request for Mr. Ingham to attend would be refused by the Prime Minister but that if the Committee instructed him to attend he would turn up and say nothing. Is it true that the Prime Minister would refuse to allow Mr. Ingham to appear and, if so, bearing in mind Sir Robert Armstrong's inability to answer questions put to him by the Committee, on what grounds would the Prime Minister refuse to allow Mr. Ingham to appear?" If the Prime Minister replied that she would not refuse to allow Mr. Ingham to appear, the following question might then be asked: "Would the Prime Minister think it appropriate for Mr. Ingham to appear before the Committee and then to refuse to answer its questions?" Why should a civil servant—the chief press officer—be subject to special treatment before Committees of the House of Commons that does not extend to the generality of civil servants?

Westland is not simply a one-off episode. There is a whole litany of operations unbecoming to a civil servant. As one who gave evidence to the Franks Committee for an hour and 25 minutes, I was appalled at the way that the chief information officer gave that complicated report to the Lobby correspondents at 3.30 pm when their deadlines were at 5 pm. This is not the kind of guidance that a civil servant should give on behalf of the Prime Minister, but it is not the civil servant that I blame; it is the Prime Minister, because I bet that the instructions were hers. Did not Mr. Ingham have to apologise to the Lord Chancellor for suggesting that Judge Jeffries might be the appropriate judge to preside over the trial of Clive Ponting at the Old Bailey?

We are tonight not considering the role of a mere press secretary, but dealing with the position of a man who is an adviser on central decisions of Government in Britain, and whose power has grown exponentially, along a geometric progression, with the years during which he has occupied the office. The longer a man occupies this office, the more power accrues to him.

I do not think that I exaggerate if I say that, with the arguable exception of Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Bernard Ingham has evolved as the most important man making decisions in British politics. When I put this view to a senior Conservative Privy Councillor, he shook his head sadly and said that he could not dissent.

The blame must rest not with Mr. Ingham, but with the Prime Minister who has become so dependent and has allowed this to happen. This is an unsatisfactory position.

11.5 pm

**The Minister of State, Privy Council Office and the Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce):** The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is well known for his persistence on many issues. He certainly gave the House notice recently that he would raise this issue about the chief press secretary at No. 10. Having listened to him, I believe that he is misguided in his views. Indeed, I would go further: the hon Gentleman is continuing to demonstrate his ability to develop obsessions—I can think of no other word—about issues, and to formulate some allegations which are completely unsubstantiated but which become genuine figments of his imagination. I can give an exact example of that from the end of his speech when he referred to Mr. Ingham as one of perhaps two men in Government who take the most important decisions. That is an exact description of a figment of his imagination. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The hon. Gentleman proceeded to talk about the so-called Westland affair, and, more precisely, the events surrounding the disclosure of the Solicitor-General's letter which have been fully explained to the House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on both 23 and 27 January. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) contributed to the debate on 27 January. The events were the subject of an inquiry conducted by the head of the home Civil Service who subsequently gave evidence to the Defence Select Committee on 5 February and 5 March. The role of officials in this matter has thus been fully described and explained to the House and the public, and I have nothing tonight to add to what has been said. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that there is some great or sinister matter still to discover, I can assure him that he is completely mistaken. This issue is worn to a frazzle.

I shall seek to answer the debate by concentrating on the role of the chief press officer and the most unfair allegations that the hon. Gentleman makes about Mr. Ingham.

**Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East):** Will my hon. Friend say whether he believes that Mr. Ingham has acted in any way different from the way in which Mr. Joe Haines acted when he was chief press officer to Lord Wilson of Rievaulx when he was Prime Minister?

**Mr. Luce:** I can establish that. I know that Mr. Ingham has managed to maintain a steady and continuous relationship with the Lobby which has not always been the case in the past.

The hon. Gentleman argued that the post of chief press secretary should be a party political appointment, and that it is no longer possible or right for the holder of that office to be a civil servant. He cites in support of that the views of Sir Frank Cooper, ex-permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence, in a recent lecture. Obviously, both Sir Frank and the hon. Gentleman are entitled to their views on this, as on any other matter, but I do not agree with them.

It is important to stress the role of the chief press officer or any information officer. It is to promote an informed press and public about the Government's policies and measures, and to advise Ministers and officials on presentation.

Obviously, the chief press officer will aim to ensure that the merits of those policies and the arguments in their

favour are brought as fully as possible to the public's attention. He would be failing in his job if he did not do that. But it is his job, as it is the job of all civil servants, to serve his Minister as a member of the Government to the best of his ability, to give him well-informed, dispassionate and impartial advice, and to give effect to the Minister's decisions with skill, vigour and loyalty. The present chief press secretary at No. 10 Downing street does just that.

On 23 January this year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"I should like to say that Mr. Ingham has served successive Governments with devotion and dedication, and I have great confidence in him."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 1986, Vol. 90, c. 459.]

That is absolutely right.

Let us look at Mr. Ingham's career—19 years as a professional journalist and about 19 years as a civil servant, of which 17 have been as an information officer. He has endless experience in information services within government. It is notable that Mr. Ingham has served loyally as an information adviser both Labour and Conservative Governments. It is notable that he has been an information officer to Mr. Varley, and to Barbara Castle. Above all, quite apart from his service to the Prime Minister, he has been an information adviser to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). If Mr. Ingham is capable of serving the right hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that is a sharp demonstration of his ability to provide an impartial service as a loyal civil servant with a great deal of integrity. The allegations of the hon. Member for Linlithgow should be totally and utterly refuted.

**Mr. Dalyell:** If Mr. Ingham has such integrity and is a loyal civil servant, why, with all that experience, did he give cover to Collette Bowe in giving information to Mr. Chris Moncrieff of the Press Association in the form of a leaked Law Officer's letter? A man of such integrity and experience would not have done that unless he either knew the Prime Minister's mind or had prime ministerial instruction. It is the Prime Minister who is at the root of that trouble.

**Mr. Luce:** As I have already said, this issue has been gone over time and time again. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Sir Robert Armstrong have given substantial evidence on it. Of course, we await the report of the Select Committee on Defence.

The feeling seems to be that the fact that the chief press secretary deals with the media somehow makes it party political. I agree that the need to deal with the media means that particular skills and qualities are required of an information officer that may not always be required for other jobs in the Civil Service. That is why many, although by no means all, information officers come, as the chief press secretary at No. 10 came, from within the Government Information Service. Information officers must, of course, have the ear of their Ministers but must also have a detailed knowledge of their Department and its responsibilities so that they are well placed to present them to the media. That does not make the task a party political one—indeed, it is the task, for example in the Conservative party, of the party chairman and others to speak for the party.

I wonder whether the correspondents who deal from day to day with information officers would prefer them to

[Mr. Luce]

be political appointees. The reputation and the effectiveness of information officers depend on our contacts being able to rely on what they say. If they were party political appointees, there would be a much greater danger of suspicion that the information coming out of the Department was being distorted for party political considerations. It is a matter of establishing credibility and trust.

It is worth quoting from a speech in May 1983 in Cardiff by Mr. Ingham to a conference of the Guild of British Newspaper Editors in which he said:

"no one will, or should, take the slightest notice of a word I say if I cannot be relied upon to get it right; my crucial stock-in-trade is reliability; otherwise I lack credibility and cease to be useful either to Government or media".

That is correct. I believe that it is true that Mr. Ingham is widely respected and generally respected by the press for that.

I do not agree that there is something special about the post of the chief press secretary at No. 10, apart from the fact that it is one of the two top jobs in the Government Information Service. Like any other job in the Prime Minister's office, the holder of this must be exceptionally able. A close relationship with Ministers and the ability to command the respect of the press are the essential requirements of the job, as the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) emphasised in his evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Subcommittee. As I have just said, to serve a Minister successfully, any civil servant must gain his confidence. Therefore, there is no difference there. Any senior civil servant, chief information officer or permanent secretary, must advise a Minister clearly and in an unbiased manner and carry out the Minister's instructions. Therefore, there is no difference there. All senior civil servants, in advising Ministers, are serving the Government and not a political party. Again, there is no difference with No. 10.

Of course, the chief press secretary at 10 Downing street, like departmental chief information officers, has to have an understanding of political sensitivities and of the political framework and environment within which his Minister and the Government of which he is a member are operating. However, there is nothing unique about that. It is no less true of all civil servants who are in the business of advising Ministers and executing their policies.

History shows that civil servants are no less capable than others of carrying out the duties of the chief press secretary effectively and acceptably. Over the past 20 years there have been both civil servant and journalist holders of the No. 10 chief information officer job. The civil servants concerned have shown themselves perfectly capable of presenting the policies of whichever administration was currently in power. I believe that journalists would agree that the civil servant holders have performed no less satisfactorily than professional journalist occupiers of the post.

I have sought to demonstrate why, in the Government's view, Mr. Ingham is doing an excellent job and why there are strong advantages in having an experienced civil servant to do the job. I think that in answering the debate generally I must take the opportunity to say that my experience as a Civil Service Minister points to the fact that civil servants as a whole, including Mr. Ingham, serve this Government, as they would serve any Government, loyally, professionally and with integrity; and I believe that we can be proud of them.

**Mr. Dalyell:** If the emphasis is to be put on obeying ministerial instructions, we are now left with the fact that it was the Prime Minister's instructions, implicit or explicit, which offered the cover to Miss Bowe to leak the Solicitor-General's letter against one of her own Ministers. The Minister's reply does not put Mr. Ingham in a bad light but the Prime Minister. If all that he says about the chief press officer's virtues is true, the Prime Minister has to say how, if she was so loyally served by a man obeying ministerial instructions, cover was given to leak a letter against one of her own Ministers. After tonight it is the Prime Minister, not Mr. Ingham who is in the dock.

**Mr. Luce:** The hon. Gentleman is continuing to try to make political capital out of an issue from which it is no longer possible to make any political capital. The issue has been covered time and again by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Secretary to the Cabinet and the head of the home Civil Service who has given evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.*



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute to Mr. Thomas of today's date with draft material for Mr. Luce's speech at Monday's Adjournment Debate.

My only comment on the material is that I hope that Mr. Luce can confine any comments which he has to make on the "Westland affair" to the material on page 1 of the draft. If he possibly can, Mr. Luce ought, I am sure, to avoid explanations on the floor of the House about why the civil servants concerned did not give evidence to the Defence Select Committee. Surely it is enough to say that this matter has been explained in detail to the Select Committee by the Head of the Home Civil Service. This is not to say that the explanations given on page 5 of your draft are not the correct ones. But the more that is said on the floor of the House, the greater the ground for the indefatigable Mr. Dalyell to rake over in Parliamentary Questions!

I am copying this minute to Mr. Thomas, Miss Mueller, Mr. Hewes, Mrs. L.J. Brown and Mr. Ingham.

N.L. WICKS

25 April 1986



Mr Wicks

Ref. A086/1258

MR C P THOMAS

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cc Miss Mueller  
Mr Hewes  
Mrs L J Brown

Adjournment Debate

The Minister is to answer Mr Dalyell's adjournment debate on 28 April about the post of Chief Information Officer at 10 Downing Street.

- 2. I attach draft material for the Minister's speech. It is based on a draft prepared by MG Division, and I am grateful for the work which Mrs Brown and Mr Hewes have put in to it. It also reflects a discussion which I was able to have with the Prime Minister and Mr Ingham.
3. We are to meet the Minister to discuss this on Monday 28 April at 11.15 am.
4. I am sending copies of this minute and of the revised draft to Mr Wicks and Mr Ingham at 10 Downing Street, and should be grateful if they would let you or me have any comments they would like to suggest before 11.15 am on Monday.

MS

for  
ROBERT ARMSTRONG

25 April 1986

Adjournment Debate: Monday 28 May

Motion: The Post of Chief Information Officer at 10 Downing St

1st Speaker: Mr Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow)

Possible 2nd Speaker: Dr John Gilbert (Dudley E)

DRAFT WINDING UP SPEECH

The Hon Member is well known for his persistence in following up topics on which he has some concern. This persistence is manifested in his adjournment debate tonight, which follows from two oral questions to me on the same topic so far this year, and numerous questions over the last nine months. The Hon Member obviously feels that there is something he ought to be chasing. But I can assure him that he is misguided in this belief.

The whole story of the so-called "Westland affair", more precisely, the events surrounding the disclosure of the Solicitor General's letter, have been fully explained to the House by my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister on two separate occasions - on 23 and 27 January. Mr Rt Hon Friend the Member for Richmond contributed to the discussion of the matter during the debate in the House on 27 January. The events were the subject of an inquiry conducted by the Head of the Home Civil Service, who subsequently gave evidence to the Defence Select Committee on 5 February and 5 March. The role of officials in the matter has thus been fully described and explained to Hon Members of this House and to the public, and I have nothing tonight to add to what has been said. If the Hon Gentleman thinks that there is some great or similar matter still to discover in all this, I can assure him that he is quite mistaken.

[IF HE CONTRIBUTES: The Hon Gentleman the Member for Dudley E. is of course a member of the Defence Committee, and had ample opportunity to seek answers to his questions in that forum.]

We now await the Defence Committee's report, and the Government will of course consider its views carefully when they are available. I cannot anticipate its findings tonight. But I can and will pick up some of the points made by the Home Member(s) in the speech(es) we have heard.

#### Information Officers

The Hon Member has argued that the post of Chief Press Secretary at No 10 Downing Street should be a party political appointment, and that it is no longer possible or right for the holder of that office to be a civil servant. He cites in support of this the views of Sir Frank Cooper, ex-Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, in a recent lecture. Of course, Sir Frank and the Hon Member are both entitled to their own views on this as on any other matter. I have to say that I do not agree with them.

The role of an information officer is to present the Department's and hence the Government's policies and views to the public and to the media. Obviously, he will aim to make sure that the merits of those policies and the arguments in their favour are brought as fully as possible to the public attention; he would be failing in his job if he did not do this. But it is his job, as it is the job of all civil servants, to serve his Minister as a member of the Government, to the best of his ability: to give him well-informed, dispassionate and impartial advice, and to give effect to the Minister's decisions with skill, vigour and loyalty. The present Chief Press Secretary at 10 Downing Street does just that, to my Rt Hon Friend's unqualified satisfaction.

It seems to be felt that the fact that the Chief Press Secretary deals with the media somehow makes it party political. I would agree that the need to deal with the media means that particular skills and qualities are required of an information officer which may not always be required for other jobs in the Civil Service. That is why many, though by no means all, information officers come, as the Chief Press Secretary at No 10 came, from within the Government Information Service. Information officers must of course have the ear of their Ministers, but must also have a detailed knowledge of their Department and its responsibilities so that they are well placed to present these to the media. That does not make the task a party political one. I wonder too whether the correspondents who deal from day to day with information officers would prefer them to be political appointees. The reputation of the effectiveness of information officers depend on their contacts being able to rely on what they say: if they were party political appointees, there would be much greater danger of suspicion that the information coming out of Departments was being distorted for party political considerations.

Nor can I agree that there is something special about the post of Chief Information Officer at No 10 - apart from the fact that it is one of the two top jobs in the Government Information Service. Like any other job in the Prime Minister's office, the holder of this must be exceptionally able. A close relationship with Ministers and the ability to command the respect of the press are the essential requirements for the job, at the Rt Hon Member for Cardiff S. and Renarth emphasised in his evidence in his evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee. As I have just said, any civil servant, to serve a Minister successfully, must gain his confidence. So there is no difference there. And any senior civil servant, Chief Information Officer or Permanent Secretary, must advise a Minister clearly and in an unbiased manner, and carry out the Minister's instructions. So there is no difference there. And

all senior civil servants, in advising Ministers, are serving the Government and not a political party. Again, there is no difference with No 10.

Of course the Chief Press Secretary at 10 Downing Street, like departmental chief information officers, has to have an understanding of political sensitivities, of the political framework and environment within which his Minister and the Government of which he is a member is operating. But there is nothing unique about that: it is no less true of all civil servants who are in the business of advising Ministers and executing their policies.

History shows that civil servants are no less capable than others of carrying out the duties of the Chief Press Secretary effectively and acceptably. Over the last twenty years there have been both civil servant and journalist holders of the No 10 Chief Information Officer job. The civil servants concerned have shown themselves perfectly capable of presenting the policies of whichever administration was currently in power. And I believe that journalists themselves would agree that the civil servant holders have performed at least as well as the professional journalist occupiers of the post.

#### Appearance of Officials Before Select Committees

We have heard tonight a demand that certain officials should have been permitted to give evidence to the Defence Committee. This is surely the wrong occasion for such a debate. But I will reply to the Hon Member by reminding him that it is Ministers who are responsible to Parliament, and the convention that has been generally accepted between Government and the House is that it is for Ministers to determine who is to represent them before Select Committees. The wisdom of that convention is self-evident, and I do not think that the effectiveness of Select Committees is likely to gain from trying to set it aside.

In the particular case of the Westland affair and the Solicitor General's letter, the civil servants concerned had given detailed accounts of their actions in confidence to the Head of the Home Civil Service in the course of his inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the disclosure of the Solicitor General's letter. They had thus given their evidence, on a matter in which their professional competence and reputation as civil servants could have been at issue, to an appropriate person and in an appropriate way. For them to have been required to give evidence a second time to the Select Committee would have put them as it were in double jeopardy; would have exposed them to a second round of questioning, this time in public, in what would inevitably have been a highly charged political atmosphere. This would have been neither right nor fair. As it was, the Head of the Home Civil Service had the whole story at his fingertips, as a result of his inquiry, and was well placed to answer the the Committee's questions. As I have said, he has appeared twice before the Defence Committee, on each occasion for several hours. The Committee would gain no more information by interviewing the individual civil servants involved, though it might give one or two honourable gentlemen the opportunity of pursuing a witch hunt and gaining whatever publicity advantage they might think they could gain from that.

#### Co-operation with Select Committees

The departmental select committee system has been in operation now for seven years. The Government's view is that it has made a great contribution to the Parliamentary scrutiny of the conduct of Government Departments. There have been differences of opinion between the Government and individual committees at times; that is inevitable and, in my view, healthy. Indeed, I would question whether committees were doing their job properly if there were not such disagreements, from time to time. There are conventions and guidelines to be followed, and, subject to these, the Government is always prepared to co-operate fully

with Select Committees. Committee inquiries and reports are doubly useful - they encourage Government Departments and Ministers to keep a close and critical eye on their policies and implementation; and they contribute to the greater knowledge of Members of Parliament and the public in general. This can only assist the democratic process.

#### Freedom of Information Act

Reference has been made this evening to the need for some form of freedom of information legislation. Again, Sir Frank Cooper has been prayed in aid. I understand that his view is that a Freedom of Information Act would be tedious, time consuming, expensive and most likely to result in an increased flow of irrelevant trivia. In spite of this, however, it would still bring pressure to bear for more open government.

I do not find this argument convincing, either as to the need for an FOI Act or the effect it would have. The Government already has a clear policy, set out on numerous occasions in this House and in another place, to make as much information available as possible while preserving the confidentiality essential to the effective working of government. I have already referred to the departmental select committee system. I think those on both sides of this House would agree that those Committees are now examining an increased range of government activities in greater detail and drawing out a wider range of government information than ever before.

Moreover even those in favour of an FOI bill, recognise that certain categories of information would have to be protected. For example, the FOI bill introduced by the Rt Hon Gentleman the Leader of the Liberal Party in 1984 would, had it been successful, have exempted various categories of information from disclosure. Those would have included, inter alia, information seriously impairing defence, security or foreign relations;

information impeding law enforcement; information constituting an unwarranted invasion of an individual's privacy; and civil servants' policy advice to Ministers.

Nor do I accept that the result of a Freedom of Information Act would necessarily be to give the public a better access to and understanding of the process of decision-making in Government. The House may think that this is a cynical view, but my fear would be that the effect would largely be to drive decision-taking into channels which were not covered by the legislation, and that the end result would be to make the process of decision-taking less efficient and effective without improving the public's knowledge of how and why decisions were taken.

A general statutory right of access to information would also make a very fundamental change in the relationship between Ministers, Parliament and the public. That change would be as to who should take decisions on what information should be released outside Parliament. Two possibilities have been mooted - an appeal to the courts or some sort of non-elected information Commissioner. In either case, I suggest, Ministerial accountability to Parliament would be reduced, and Parliament itself diminished. The Select Committee system has demonstrated how real Ministerial accountability to Parliament can be. We should concentrate on that.

#### Politicisation

Turning now to the position of the Civil Service generally in our system of Government, there are several proposals which are currently the subject of much debate. One of these, is an allegation of increasing - and creeping - politicisation of the senior Civil Service. There are those who claim that Ministers, and the Prime Minister, are playing a much greater role now in the appointment of senior civil servants than ever before. They



charge that only those with 'correct' political attitudes are being promoted to senior positions - and then promoted again. I would refute this utterly. The Head of the Civil Service has made it clear that it is simply not the case. I would also point out that the First Division Association, which represents senior staff in the Civil Service, told the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee that they saw no evidence of people being favoured because of their political views. Rt Hon members of this House who gave evidence to the Sub-Committee similarly saw no evidence to support the view that the top of the Civil Service was becoming more politicised.

The criterion for promotion in the Civil Service remains as it has always been - one of merit, the best person for the job. What may have changed somewhat is the combination of skills and qualities looked for in the most senior civil servants, and in particular the increased emphasis now given to proved efficiency and effectiveness in the management of resources and people, along-side the provision of first-class policy advice to Ministers.

I think that the people who charge that there is now a political tinge to the senior Civil Service are perhaps guilty of wishful thinking. Some of them would like to see the whole of the upper echelons of the Service as purely political appointments. The case for the post of chief information officer to be a political one is just one aspect of this. But that way lies the end of the provision without fear or favour, of clear, unbiased advice from civil servants which is in my judgment vital to the effective working of Government in this country. I do not believe that a system like that which prevails in the United States, where virtually the whole of the higher civil service changes with a change of administration in the White House, suits the British system of Government or would make for better policies or decision-taking here. I was very pleased therefore to see that the paper recently produced by the Institute of

Directors in preparation for their forthcoming conference on "Reskilling Government" did not adopt such a simplistic approach.

### 'Cabinets'

A refinement of the 'politicisation' idea is that of adopting the continental system of 'Cabinets' in this country. This would not involve sweeping away senior permanent civil servants in Departments: it would simply mean that in addition to his permanent civil servants a Minister would also be able to call for advice from a group of political staff and expert advisers as a kind of extension of his private office. Such a group could, if the Minister wished, contain civil servants as well as appointees from outside the Service, in much the way that the Policy Unit in No 10 does.

This has been proposed by the Institute of Directors' paper, and I look forward to reading the reports and the conclusions of the conference they are organising. I know that there are some eminent supporters of the idea of 'Cabinets'; equally, there are many, of whom I am one, who are not yet fully convinced of all the merits of the proposal or of its advantage over the present system - where, after all, we have special advisers working very effectively in Departments. The Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee have I am sure been considering this idea in the course of their current enquiry, and I look forward with interest to their conclusions on this as on the other aspects of their enquiry.

### Sir Robert Armstrong's Note

As aspect of some importance whenever one considers the position of any civil servant, chief information officer or clerical assistant, is of course the note of guidance issued just over a year ago by the Head of the Home Civil Service.

Much has been said and written about this note in the fourteen months since its issue, and of course it forms the basis for the enquiry by the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee. While I have no wish to prejudge the outcome of this enquiry, I think there are some aspects of that note which bear repetition.

The ideals and ethos set out in the note are not new; Sir Robert was adapting and restating for today's circumstances principles which have been valid and effective for many years. Some people have tried to argue that this very fact means that they are not suitable for the modern Civil Service. That is surely to take too simple a view. It is more sensible to consider what lessons are available from our past and retain the best of them. That, in my view, is exactly the basis of Sir Robert's note - it embodies the best of the traditional Civil Service ethos, and places it in a modern context with solutions for today's problems. The note sets out the general guidelines for today's Civil Service, and the procedures which individual civil servants can follow if - exceptionally - they feel themselves at odds with what they are asked to do.

There has been criticism of these procedures, from the Hon Member for Linlithgow among others, and various remedies have been proposed. The Association of First Division Civil Servants have prepared a draft of a code of ethics, in which they seek to set in far more detail solutions for possible crises of conscience which may strike civil servants. That draft shows how extremely difficult, if not impossible, it is to prescribe for every circumstance a procedure which will always fit. Human nature, if nothing else, will contrive to make each case individual. This alone, it seems to me, argues for the more general approach which Sir Robert's note takes. This whole matter is, however, to be discussed further between Sir Robert Armstrong and the Council of Civil Service Unions and the Government will obviously consider their views carefully in the light of the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee Report.

Another proposal, one which I suspect has found some favour with the Hon Member for Linlithgow, judging from his many questions to me on the subject, is for some form of external appeals procedure for civil servants, an Inspector General, or a Public Service Commission. There is one fundamental problem with these ideas. They interpose between the civil servant and his Minister an independent authority. That authority may well be set up to report to Parliament, but meanwhile three key tenets on which our system of Government depends will be undermined - the trust which Ministers currently have in their civil servants; the loyalty which civil servants have to their Ministers; and the ultimate responsibility of Ministers to Parliament. In my view, we should think very seriously indeed before we tampered with these three.

I would not wish to end this debate on too negative a note. The issue of Sir Robert Armstrong's guidance has led to an interesting and worthwhile debate about the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers, in which the validity of the principles underlying the guidance has been tested, and possibilities for altering or expanding the guidance canvassed. It must be to the good that all concerned - civil servants, Ministers, Members of Parliament, and the world at large - should be fully aware of their respective duties and responsibilities. And it is to be hoped that this debate tonight, the greater public debate which is still continuing, and the Treasury and Civil Service Committee report which is due soon, all contribute to this awareness, which can only help the Civil Service to serve Ministers and the country even better than they are already doing.

SUBJECT  
cc Master.

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

MR. DALYELL'S ADJOURNMENT DEBATE ON THE POST OF CHIEF PRESS SECRETARY, 10 DOWNING STREET

The Prime Minister held a meeting with the Lord President, Mr. Ingham and yourself about the line which the Minister of State Privy Council Office, Mr. Luce, should be advised to take in this Adjournment Debate on 28 April.

Mr. Ingham said that he expected Mr. Dalyell to concentrate his speech on the following four points: some personal criticism, the lobby system, his role in the Westland affair and the political aspects of his job. Mr. Gilbert, in his contribution to the Debate, might concentrate on Westland aspects.

After some general discussion, the Prime Minister said that Mr. Luce should be advised to take the following line in the Debate.

The Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary's relationship to his Minister was the same as any other career civil servant to his Minister. If it was a requirement that his job had to be held by a political appointee, this would have consequences for the politicisation of the civil service more generally. It was only fair to civil servants engaged on information work that they should have the opportunity to fill the post, which was one of the two top posts in Government Information work. Mr. Luce could usefully refer to previous practice regarding the appointment of Chief Press Secretaries: sometimes the post had been filled by political appointees, and in other cases not. But it was relevant that the previous Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary, Mr. McCaffrey, had been a career civil servant, and that Mr. Ingham had served Labour Ministers as Press Secretary as he now served the Prime Minister. It should be emphasised that his function was to advise and help the Prime Minister carry out her functions as Head of the Government, not as Party Leader. In reply to questions about Westlands, Mr. Luce should say that this matter had already been discussed extensively in the House by the Prime

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- 2 -

Minister. Generally, Mr. Luce's speech should be in factual, low-key terms.

I am copying this minute to Miss MacNaughton (Lord President's Office) and to Mr. Ingham.

N. L. W.

N. L. Wicks

22 April 1986

RESTRICTED

cc BI



Prime Minister  
Agree to discuss  
with R. T. A., BI  
and myself?  
Yes not N.L.W.

Ref. A086/1200

MR WICKS

I understand that Mr Dalyell has been successful in the ballot and will use his opportunity for an adjournment debate on 28 April on "The Post of Chief Information Officer at 10 Downing Street." The Minister of State, Privy Council Office, will reply.

2. Mr Dalyell will no doubt use the occasion to promote his view that the post of Chief Information Officer at 10 Downing Street has become untenable by a civil servant and should become a party political post.

3. I should welcome an opportunity to discuss with with the Prime Minister the line to be taken in the briefing for Mr Luce (who is in China until the end of next week).

MS

for

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

mu

18 April 1986

Mrs Rydes.

Pl arrange an early  
meeting - 30 minutes - with PR, BI  
R TA + me.

N.L.W.

21.4.

MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

PRIME MINISTER

Media Relations

I attach a paper by Bernard Ingham which I encouraged him to write. I think that it would be useful if we could have a talk about the Press Office operation; there is no urgency, and it can wait until after Athens.

Because No.10 is such a focus for the media, and criticism and leaks make good copy, there are bound to be times when we wish that things had come out differently (or had not come out at all!). I am surprised that, in respect of the No.10 Press Office, those moments are so few, and that is a tribute to the way in which our Press Office currently works.

Some of the questions arising from Bernard's note are important, but peripheral, e.g., the growing lobby habit of attributing "statements" to No.10. I agree with Bernard that he should pursue this with the lobby as he suggests.

But one dilemma is central, and it is this. On the one hand, Bernard argues that he must know what is going on so that his judgement about what to say and what not to say is fully informed. On the other hand, it can be argued that the best defence for the Press Office is ignorance, especially since Bernard says - rightly in my view - that the Press Office must not be untruthful if it is to preserve its credibility. The resultant combination of knowledge and truthfulness is:-

- (i) The Press Office look unduly secretive if they refuse to answer apparently trivial details like "What time did the Prime Minister go to bed?".
- (ii) The Press interpret the absence of a denial of a story as confirming it.

MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE



How do we resolve this dilemma? My preference is that Bernard should be kept informed - within limits which we would all accept as reasonable - but that we should devise more precisely the rules by which the Press Office operate, e.g., that they should not, without specific authorisation, give domestic details, such as times of comings and goings in No.10, the length of meetings, and so on; and should use the phrase "no comment" in relation to some stories that are false as well as some that are true, so that the journalists do not regard refusal to comment as implicitly confirming the truth of their stories.

John Coles is also thinking about this problem in relation to the Press handling of foreign affairs. When he has produced his ideas, may the three of us - John, Bernard and I - have a talk with you about it?

F.R.B.

18 November, 1983.

1. MR BUTLER
  
2. PRIME MINISTER

MEDIA RELATIONS AFTER 4 YEARS

Robin and I have discussed media relations and your Press Office's operations. We thought it would be useful if I prepared a note to give you an opportunity to take stock and review our working methods.

Review

You may recall that in a minute to you at the beginning of September (Annex I) I said you had avoided in your first four years the following pitfalls:

- credibility;
- boredom: you remain exciting;
- disaffection with the media: the state of relations after 4 trying years is considered remarkably good by the media themselves;
- obsessions, with two possible exceptions: your reputation for workoholism and your worrying about leaks (on both of which I felt you could be more publicly relaxed with advantage).

I then concluded that relations with the media in your second term would be much more trying, partly because of the size of your majority and partly because of the media's endemic desire to take someone down a peg or two. We would have to work much harder to keep relations on a reasonable basis.

Nothing that has happened since has changed my mind. But a great deal has occurred over the last 3 months to intensify my concern.

It is now clearer than ever that life with the media is going to be - indeed already is - much more difficult. At the same time

my effectiveness as your spokesman and as co-ordinator at official level of the Government's presentation is being undermined. You will not retain a reasonable relationship with the media if your Chief Press Secretary becomes ineffective.

Present Position

Any analysis of how this has come about properly starts with my appointment in 1979. You will recall that you then gave me the remit not merely of providing an information service to the media but of arguing the Government's case. It was stated at the time this was not being done because your Press Office was not abreast of events, policy and arguments.

The logic of this was that the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary must be kept, and must keep himself, closely informed not merely with the development of events and policies but with the formulation of those policies. This is easier said than done but the longer I go on the more difficult it becomes to secure access to information, especially on issues where presentation really matters.

All this might be understandable if there were any suggestion that No 10 Press Office is less than entirely reliable and secure. It might therefore be helpful to review how your Press Office works.

Function of the Press Office

No 10 Press Office - indeed any Government press office - is an instrument and servant of policy. It does not and cannot lead a separate existence. But if it is to be of any use it has to build a bridge to the media. If all it does is erect a barrier - whether by commission or omission - it will be of little or no use, and almost certainly counter productive. This means that it has to try to reconcile conflicting interests. This requires judgement, and that judgement is all the better for being informed.

No 10 Press Office seeks at all times to advance your interests and those of the Government, consistent with accuracy and a reverence for truth. It will perform better rather than worse the greater its

credibility. Only a credible press office will serve your interests. And only an informed press office is credible.

This does not mean that No 10 Press Office - or any press office - retails every single bit of information it acquires to the media. Far from it. We adopt a disciplined approach because we know the destructive use to which information can be put.

Second, we take a lot of trouble to co-ordinate a line with the responsible Department before we go public; we know how journalists try to play one off against the other and how damaging perceived differences can be for Government.

Third, we form a view in consultation with your Private Office and Departments on how to play successfully for advantage.

But since we have a free press we are not in command of what they print. We have no means of preventing their putting 2 and 2 together and making 22. Nor are we the sole source of information, whether in Whitehall or in other capitals, which may have a much more open - or leaky - style of Government.

For example, I did not say during the Grenada crisis that you stayed up until 3.00am. Your reputation for retiring late put you to bed at that time. (I was incidentally told you were up until 4.00am!) Earlier I did guide on the timing of the announcement of a re-shuffle because I needed to head off stories, which come so easily to the media, of difficulties with the exercise. I can assure you that when we release detailed information we do so with an identified purpose aimed at protecting your interests.

#### Lobby Rules

Another problem is the way in which the media increasingly "source" information. Under the Lobby system, strictly interpreted, no source can be disclosed, the journalist should take responsibility for what he writes.

But for years - and certainly over the last four years - the Lobby system has been under attack for a variety of reasons. We have tried to hold it together because we believe that on balance the Lobby is useful and that it would have to be reinvented tomorrow if it were abolished today. But the modus vivendi has inevitably evolved and part of it is the increasing use of the terms "Whitehall/Government sources" or "Sources close to the Prime Minister" or even "A No 10 Spokesman". Recognising that the strict Lobby system has gone out of the window, this sourcing causes concern only when the media gets our guidance wrong. From time to time I come down hard on excesses and will continue to do so.

Statements - Volunteered or Extracted

But of occasionally greater concern is the practice of the media in describing as statements from No 10 quotes which we put out "on-the-record" in order to kill stone dead entirely false stories - eg. five days before Mr Parkinson resigned to "rubbish" the PA report that he was on his way to Chequers to tender his resignation.

I have asked our Washington Embassy for guidance on White House rules which I believe might be helpful in this respect. Subject to their advice, I intend to raise this issue with the Lobby. It would make for more honest reporting if, for example, we could get the media to say: "In response to a question a No 10 spokesman said ...."; rather than to give the impression that we have volunteered a statement.

Leaks

This Government has been bedevilled by leaks, whether Ministerial or official, and latterly there have been some extremely serious examples. These have inevitably brought restrictions in their wake. As a consequence I am having to operate in a more restrictive atmosphere and it is only a matter of time before this affects my credibility.

This means that I feel to be becoming less effective in the central role of arguing the Government's case and in contributing to the formulation of that argument. And that in turn means that the purpose for which I was primarily appointed four years ago is being frustrated.

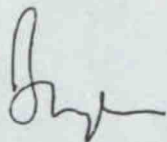
The value of forcing the Government's arguments down the Lobby's throats twice a day should not be under-estimated.

But in an ideal world we should be taking those arguments to the media instead of reacting to the arguments or others. There is some evidence that leaks are paralysing Government presentation - as they are no doubt intended to do. I propose to produce a separate paper on the problem of how the Government might regain the initiative.

Conclusion

Meanwhile, my method of working remains as it has been over the past 4 years, to protect you from the media, especially at weekends, and to act in support of your interests on the basis of the guidance I receive. This involves a substantial element of judgement on my part and of being judged by results. On the whole it seems to have worked.

I feel strongly that my judgement can only be good if it is informed - not, of course, on the most sensitive matters but on subjects within the area of public discussion. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any points which have caused you concern or any respects in which you would want me to seek more specific guidance from you.



B. INGHAM

16 November 1983

*A perceptive and stimulating analysis.*

MR BUTLER

FEB

cc Mr Mount

7.9

2. PRIME MINISTER

YOUR SECOND TERM - THE MEDIA

Introduction

This note sets out frankly my thoughts about your relations with the media in your second administration.

It takes account of:

- (i) your first term;
- (ii) the atmosphere after the election and before the Recess;
- (iii) your objectives;
- (iv) problems arising in the future; and
- (v) other relevant issues.

I do not make any specific proposals in this minute. A suggested media programme for the next 6 months or so will be set out in a separate minute, taking account of any comments on this review.

Your First Term

The longer your term of office ran the hotter media property you became. After 4 years in No 10 you have avoided all the obvious pitfalls:

- (i) credibility: you remain a formidable, dominating Prime Minister thoroughly in charge of the Government;
- (ii) boredom: you remain exciting;
- (iii) disaffection with the media: whatever privately you may think about the media, or parts of it, your relations with them remain reasonable to good or even excellent (eg. ITN); this, as Jack Warden, immediate past chairman of the Lobby has observed, is remarkable;
- (iv) obsessions: with two possible exceptions - your reputation for workaholicism and for worrying about leaks - you remain human in public eyes.

By any standards this is not bad going. The task for the next 5 years is to keep it this way. This will be easier if your policies are successful and you keep your feet on the ground. (And perhaps if the opposition parties remain in a mess).

### Election to Recess

The attitude of the media between the election and the Recess did not surprise me - since I accurately forecast what it would be - but it nonetheless appalled me. It confirmed my view that your second term will be much more trying.

Leaving aside the basic tension between media and the Government, this is because the media:

- (i) finds it difficult to come to terms with success, much as it loves a winner; it is essentially destructive and spoiling; it is never happier than when taking someone down a peg or two;
- (ii) has an arrogant and inflated view of its role in democracy. For the time being it has written off the Opposition parties, with considerable help from them, and conceives its duty to readdress the balance;
- (iii) believes that power corrupts and that a second term of office, with a huge majority, inevitably leaves you more vulnerable to the charge (evidence in support of which will continually be sought); (I should add that the betting in the Lobby is of a major Government/Cabinet sex/other scandal within 18 months if only because it has happened before).

In short, I believe we shall have to work much harder to retain reasonable relations with the media.

### Your Objectives

Your objectives in your second term are to:

- (i) complete (or substantially complete) a revolution in British attitudes to life, work, motivation, pride, achievement;
- (ii) complement that change in attitudes with economic success - a low inflation, high employment (ie. lower unemployment), high productivity, technologically well equipped, export economy;



- (iii) strengthen our standing abroad, both as a constructive member of the European Community and as a recognised force for good and enlightenment in the world as a whole;
- (iv) win the 1987/8 general election.

You will certainly achieve the last if you also:

- secure the other objectives above;
- the Opposition parties remain fragmented (though the worse they disarray the more the media will try to fill the Opposition vacuum);
- ~~you~~ keep your feet on the ground, retaining your identification with the people, and your Government avoids serious scandals.

#### Problems Immediately Ahead

Over the next few months there are four major and three minor issues with which you will be pre-occupied:

##### Major:

- public expenditure/pay/unemployment - I have minuted you separately on public expenditure and related issues;
- the EC budget - Athens may be bloody;
- disarmament/Cruise deployment;
- privatisation - increasing interest will be taken in progress.

##### Minor:

- miners' pay/closures/MacGregor (which will need most sensitive handling);
- Falklands (including public expenditure implications);
- Hong Kong.

My media proposals in a separate minute will take account of these problems and the advent of a new Labour leadership.

#### Other Relevant Issues

Your last 4 years have paid off. You have won handsomely. But you have only won a battle. You have not yet won your - and Britain's - war.

You must not lightly discard what has been successful. Equally you must not slavishly cling to what has been successful in the past in the belief that it will continue to deliver. Times and circumstances change and strategy, tactics, approaches and methods must change with them too.

My main worries at present are:

- the Government's resolve: you kept the Government's nose to the grindstone between the election and the Recess; subject to attitudes after the Recess, you will need continually to crack the whip to retain cohesion and drive, if my experience at my level is any guide;
- notwithstanding the need to keep a momentum, your reputation for being a workaholic: this is becoming a little counter-productive. We need, over the next 6 months, to persuade the world that in your second term, with 4 years' experience behind you, you are running the country effectively and managing to relax. You don't need to persuade anyone you are on top of your job. The present balance is wrong. People are beginning to worry about you;
- your presumed approach to leaks and need for secrecy: I am particularly worried about this because, of course, the media revels in leaks and in cracking Government security. We need to avoid its becoming a game you cannot win (especially if we indulge in disinformation) in which the media delights in putting you down. That would be very unhelpful. This is not to belittle the seriousness of some leaks, as underlined by Sir Robert Armstrong's letter to Permanent Secretaries (which was of course leaked). But they seem likely to continue, and however seriously you view them, and whatever action is taken to root out the culprits, I am sure the appearance of a more relaxed approach needs to be given publicly. We ought to aim to take the excitement out of leaks by a studied boredom.

*I'm not so sure. You show by your example that hard work is needed for success.*

*I agree with this, but it is a serious problem and*  

- 1. I should like to see a really serious effort to catch and punish leakers*
- 2. We must not be relaxed about protecting really sensitive papers.*

*F.E.R.B.*

Linked to this is the need to avoid any reputation for undue secretiveness. There is a lot of nonsense in the media's campaign for more open Government. But there is no reason why we should apparently hand them arguments. I would hope that we could generally be more relaxed in your second term and operate to your - and the Government's - advantage rather than allow leakers and other informants to command the field.

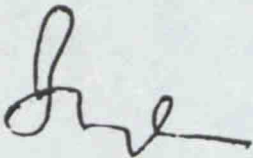
Conclusions

Your first administration succeeded, in spite of rising unemployment, largely because of you and the way the British public felt you to be relevant to the treatment of their problems. But it was also partly because of the sheer irrelevance of Labour's approach and the insignificance of the other Opposition parties. All the current evidence suggests that Labour will remain irrelevant in the foreseeable future. But we cannot count on the Alliance remaining insignificant any more than we can count on the progressive reduction in unemployment.

In its second term the Government will succeed on its merits - mostly economic. But you are no less the key to the Government's public appeal and in my view a little relaxing of your image is desirable.

Agree? Discuss?

Yes not



B. INGHAM

1 September 1983

cc Mr Ingham  
File A14

Info & Relations


TELEPHONE ROOM

CALLS FROM THE MEDIA

Mr Ingham has told me that twice in the last week you were unable to contact anyone from the press office, either in the office itself or at home, to whom you could put through telephone calls from journalists and that the journalists then persuaded you to put them on to either a Private Secretary or to the Duty Clerk. I gather that in the first of these two incidents the journalist concerned made himself pretty unpleasant to you. Mr Ingham has told me how sorry he is that this should have happened and that on both occasions there was nobody from the press office available.

Neither Mr Ingham nor I think it right that Private Secretaries or Duty Clerks should have to deal with journalists. If, therefore, another occasion arises when you are unable to put a journalist's telephone call on to the press office or on to the duty press officer at home, you should tell the journalist that there is no one immediately available but that you will call him back very soon once a press officer is available. If you are unable to contact the duty press officer and if the journalist is causing trouble, you should telephone Mr Ingham or Mr Gaffin or any other press officer at home in that order.

Failing all else, you should telephone me at home.

 C. A. WHITMORE

13 November 1981

010  
MR. WHITMORE

TEMPORARILY  
RETAINED

S. Gray

5/3/16

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS  
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

PRESS OFFICE CALLS

We have had two instances over the past week when journalists have bullied our switchboard into putting them through to a private secretary or duty clerk because a press officer was not immediately available. I am very sorry about both these incidents and so is Liz Drummond, who is the press officer concerned in both cases.

The first was last Saturday when, after a pretty fierce week, Liz slipped out to do some food shopping. It is usual practice to ask switchboard to "stack" calls when we have to do personal chores at weekends. Unfortunately, [redacted] made himself pretty unpleasant to our telephonists who eventually put him through to Charlotte Stevens, who had in turn to take his abuse and to direct [redacted] to Northern Ireland Office. So far as I can see, [redacted] was using us as a convenience.

I do not know [redacted] but I shall tell [redacted] to pass on the thought to him that [redacted] cannot expect much co-operation from us in future without an apology.

Second, last evening [redacted] naughtily got himself put through to Michael Scholar with a query on rates while Liz was travelling home.

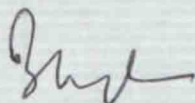
It is wrong that a) the switchboard should be bullied by journalists; and b) private secretaries or duty clerks should have to handle journalists; that is what we are paid for, though we cannot be at their beck and call every minute of a 7-day week.

Could I suggest you:

- i) , inform telephonists that they should only put journalists through to press officers; and

/ii) if

- ii) if they have any trouble with journalists to put them straight through to me, Mr. Gaffin or any other press officer they can find at home in that order, so that we can deal with them firmly.



B. INGHAM

12 November, 1981



*Information - Publicity*

## 10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

14 December 1979

*Dear Richard,*

The Prime Minister has seen the Paymaster General's minute of 10 December in which he said that he was increasingly worried by the tendency for journalists to interview administrative civil servants without Information Officers knowing.

There are, as you know, standing instructions about relations between civil servants and the Press, and Sir Ian Bancroft has made it his practice to remind his Permanent Secretary colleagues regularly of the conventions. In particular he has emphasised:

- (a) that the most important consideration is that officials should speak to the Press only with the authority and knowledge of their Ministers. There should be an understanding with the Minister concerned about what senior officials can and cannot do in relation to the Press. In some cases Ministers might feel it right to give a general delegation over a wide area; while in others a Minister might want to be consulted specifically about each interview;
- (b) that normally the Press should be seen in the office with an Information Officer present.

Sir Ian Bancroft asked Permanent Secretaries as recently as 21 November to remind their officials of this guidance following a request which I understand the Paymaster General made at one of his weekly meetings. Sir Ian Bancroft considered at the time whether to write round to his colleagues about the matter but because of the danger of such a letter being leaked, and in current circumstances being quite unfairly misrepresented as an attempt to muzzle the Press, he decided to make his request orally.

The Prime Minister has considered against this background whether, as Mr. Maude suggested in his minute of 10 December, an instruction on this matter should now be issued from here. She has, however, decided not to do this because she doubts whether there is any more that can usefully be done in addition to the steps that Sir Ian Bancroft has already taken and because she believes that any letter from No. 10 would be even more likely to find its way into the hands of the Press than one from Sir Ian Bancroft.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Ann Whitmore*

MR C A WHITMORE

RELATIONS WITH THE PRESS

You asked whether there were standing instructions issued about relations between civil servants and the press. Indeed there are, and Sir Ian Bancroft has made it his practice regularly to remind his colleagues of the conventions.

In particular, Sir Ian has emphasised to his colleagues:

- a. that the most important consideration is that officials should only speak to the press with the authority and knowledge of their Ministers. There should be an understanding with the Minister concerned about what senior officials can and cannot do in relation to the press. In some cases, Ministers might feel it right to give a general delegation over a wide area; in others a Minister might want to be consulted specifically about each interview;
- b. that normally the press should be seen in the office with an Information Officer present.

Sir Ian Bancroft asked Permanent Secretaries to remind officials of this guidance in June 1978, and repeated this request on 21 November this year, following a request from the Paymaster General conveyed by our Chief Information Officer after one of the Paymaster General's weekly meetings.

Sir Ian Bancroft considered at the time whether to write round to his colleagues on the matter, but because of the danger of such a letter being leaked, and in current circumstances quite unfairly misrepresented as an attempt to muzzle the press, decided to make his request orally.

*David Laughrin*

DAVID LAUGHRIN  
Private Secretary  
13 December 1979

Prime Minister

I refer to Sir Ian Bancroft's advice on the minute below from the Paymaster-General.

I don't think we can do more on Mr Maude's point than Sir Ian Bancroft has already done. If I were to write round issuing a reminder of the rules in your name, it would be even more likely to leak than a letter from Sir Ian Bancroft.

*agreed*

Do you agree that I should reply on your behalf to Mr Maude telling him what Sir Ian Bancroft has done and saying that you do not think that any instructions from here will add very much and may well be leaked?

*Yes*

*JWH  
13 Dec*





PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

10 December 1979

PRIME MINISTER

I have seen the Chief Press Secretary's memo to you of 7 December about the Cabinet leaks on milk prices and the devaluation of the Green Pound, and I spoke to you about the point he makes in paragraph 5 of his memo.

Both he and I are increasingly worried by the tendency for journalists to bypass the Information Sections of Departments and talk directly to Administrative Officers. This makes the task of Information Officers, who are often unaware of these interviews, extremely difficult.

I should be grateful if you would consider whether it would be desirable for you to issue an instruction that officials - other than Information Officers - should never talk to journalists unless either their Minister is present or they have specific authority from their Minister to do so.

ANGUS MAUDE

W. R.  
PRIME MINISTER

Stingham  
F  
cc. Paymaster General  
MB

1. I think you should be aware of two apparent leaks from yesterday's Cabinet on:

- i) milk prices, in The Daily Telegraph (by-lined by the agricultural correspondent);
- ii) the proposed 5% devaluation of the Green Pound (The Guardian).

2. The cuttings are attached.

3. I have discussed these with the Paymaster General. We conclude that the milk prices leak is probably a 'professional agricultural' one. The sources of the Green Pound devaluation leak is more speculative because this was raised by political correspondents with Mr. Gaffin who took the Thursday afternoon (4 p.m.) Lobby. Mr. Gaffin refused to discuss the matter. On the face of it, however, the source seems to be political, though it could be in the Commission in Brussels. However, both are calculated to please the farming lobby.

|| 4. All this makes life very difficult indeed and I am rather alarmed that, in a week when the appearance in the press of Cabinet minutes has led to a leak inquiry, two Cabinet decisions should be more or less immediately leaked. ||

5. The Paymaster General and I are particularly concerned lest one consequently should make the life of the Government Information Service more difficult than it already is. Press Office are seldom, if ever, the source of leaks and we have the assurance of the Chief Information Officer at MAFF that his Information Division did not have the information to leak in either case.

  
B. INGHAM

7 December, 1979

Guardian - 7/12/79

### Green Pound to be devalued

THE CABINET agreed yesterday to devalue the Green Pound by 5 per cent, a move that will push up prices for farmers and increase food prices by an average 1 per cent.

Mr Peter Walker, the Minister of Agriculture, will announce the Government's intention at a meeting of EEC Farm Ministers in Brussels on Monday.

Daily Telegraph. 7/12/79.

### 1½p ON PINT OF MILK

By Our Agricultural  
Correspondent

Milk is to go up 1½p to 16½p a pint for ordinary pasteurised milk from Sunday, Feb. 10. A Government announcement to this effect is expected soon.



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