

✓ Press Office

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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

13 January 1984

Dear Sir,

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The Lord Privy Seal is concerned that in the coming months of the Parliamentary session the progress of Government business should not be impeded by unnecessary Points of Order over the handling of Government announcements in the House. The weeks before the recent Christmas Adjournment were not very happy in this respect.

He would therefore be grateful if Departments could give renewed attention to their procedures for handling important Government announcements and in particular to the following points:

(a) The need to consult this office, No 10 and the Chief Whip's Private Secretary, at the earliest practicable stage, on timing and on whether a statement should be in oral or written form. Where the requirement to consult seems marginal, Departments should err on the side of caution.

(b) The importance of not exposing the Government to charges of discourtesy to the House, on the grounds that information has been disclosed to the Press before being given to Parliament. The Lord Privy Seal shares the serious view taken by the Chair in matters of this kind and would be grateful if Departments could therefore take particular care in considering the timing of Press Conferences or Releases in relation to announcements in the House.

(c) The necessity of ensuring that requisite copies of texts (eg. Written Replies, Statements) and documents (eg. Bills, White Papers) are made available at the appropriate times and in sufficient numbers. Failure to do so is a source of justifiable irritation to Members and of much potential delay in the conduct of business. Experience strongly suggests that there is a need for careful attention to these details; in cases of doubt or difficulty, Departments should consult this office and the Chief Whip's Private Secretary.

The Lord Privy Seal very much hopes that, by this means, it will be possible to reduce significantly the opportunities for delaying Government business in the busy period ahead.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to Members of the Cabinet, with the request that they draw it to the attention of other Ministerial offices in their Departments; and to the Private Secretaries to the Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever

David

D C R HEYHOE
Private Secretary

H Taylor Esq
Private Secretary to the
Secretary of State for Home Affairs



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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

13/1

15/ January 1984

Amo. memo.

The Lord Privy Seal has it in mind to write to Departments on the lines of the enclosed draft. It will clearly be helpful if the letter can be sent soon after the House returns, but I should be grateful to know if there are any amendments which you would like to suggest.

I am copying this to Tim Flesher (No 10).

*Yours ever,
D.C.R.*

D C R HEYHOE
Private Secretary

M Maclean Esq
Private Secretary to the
Chief Whip
No 12 Downing Street

Enc.

I am concerned that in the coming months of the Parliamentary session the progress of Government business should not be impeded by unnecessary Points of Order over the handling of Government announcements in the House. The weeks before the recent Christmas Adjournment were not very happy in this respect.

The procedures for handling important Government announcements are well-established, but I should be grateful if Departments could give renewed attention to the following points:

(a) The need to consult this office, No 10 and the Chief Whip's office, at the earliest practicable stage, on timing and on whether a statement should be in oral or written form. Where the requirement to consult seems marginal, I hope that Departments will err on the side of caution.

(b) The importance of not exposing the Government to charges of discourtesy to the House, on the grounds that information has been disclosed to the Press before being given to Parliament. I share the serious view taken by the Chair in matters of this kind and I would be grateful if Departments could therefore take particular care in considering the timing of Press Conferences or releases in relation to announcements in the House.

(c) The necessity of ensuring that requisite copies of texts and documents are made available at the appropriate times and in sufficient numbers in accordance with the established procedure. Failure to do so is a source of justifiable irritation to Members and of much potential delay in the conduct of business. In cases of doubt or difficulty, Departments should consult this office and the Chief Whip's Office.

I hope that, by this means, we shall be able to reduce significantly the opportunities for delaying Government business.

I am copying this to Cabinet colleagues with the request that they draw it to the attention of other Ministers in their Departments; to John Wakeham and Sir Robert Armstrong.

112 JAN 1984

