

PRESENTATION OF ECONOMIC POLICY: QUESTION OF PROCEDURE

You asked me for comments on Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of January ^{26th} 2 on the above.

There are two aspects to this:

1. 'Question of Procedure of Ministers' (with which Sir Robert deals); and
2. Supplementary Guidance.

First, Procedure of Ministers. As Sir Robert says, there is nothing in this to discourage Ministers from participating. Indeed, the whole tenor is positive rather than negative. And I can assure you that the attitude of myself and No 10 Press Office is positive - and much more positive than ⁱⁿ previous Governments I have known!

So far as the distinction between news bulletins and magazine programmes is concerned, we expect Ministers (as does "Questions of Procedure of Ministers") to take every opportunity to hammer home news announcements, policy developments, measures, statements, reacting to events etc. But Sir Robert does not state positively enough the need for coordination with No 10 on magazine programmes. How can No 10 Press Office fulfil its co-ordinating function on a basis of ignorance?

*He does
back
the continuation
of this consultation
and co-ordination
by demand
MUS*

How can we ensure that the Government's point of view gets over, in ignorance of the voices being raised on its behalf? How can we prevent 2 or 3 or 4 Ministers appearing counter-productively in one programme without knowing who has been asked? And how can we ensure that the right format is obtained - ie one which gives the Minister the best chance of getting over the Government's point of view? In short, I stress the importance of clearance of all bar radio and tv news appearances with No 10.

*~ No-one is disputing this
MUS*

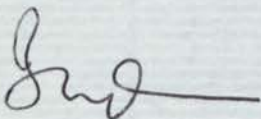
Second, Supplementary Guidance. Angus Maude's letter to the Home Secretary, copied to Cabinet colleagues and others of February 21, 1980, (see Annex I, please ignore marginal notes) may well be the reason for any feeling that Ministers are discouraged from making radio and tv appearances. In fact that is not the intention. As the letter suggests the balance is a fairly fine one, but experience is against heated confrontation, especially in front of invited audiences.

I have already undertaken to raise the whole issue of the differentiation (which cannot be defended in logic) between radio "Any Questions?" and TV's "Question Time"; I will report as soon as possible.

Third, at risk of appearing negative, I must register my utter and absolute opposition to 'fly on the wall' radio and tv techniques, which Angus Maude's letter deals with. If anyone has any doubt, just pause and think about the consequences of the BBC's series on the police, featuring (devastatingly) Thames Valley Police.

Conclusion

I believe the tradition, rules and practices are essentially positive. I cannot sustain the argument that rules are always interpreted positively. But I can work to achieve positive interpretation. I had another go at my meeting of Chief Information Officers on Monday.



B. INGHAM

27 January 1982