

cc John Haskings
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The Daily Telegraph

135 FLEET STREET LONDON EC4P 4BL TELEPHONE: 01-353 4242 TELEGRAMS: TELENEWS LONDON EC4
TELEX: 22874 TELENEWS LONDON

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Dear David,

I feel that something must be done, and done quickly, about Margaret's speech-writing machinery.

Last week, she asked Alfred to compose a piece on conscience for an American luncheon. She rejected his first draft and asked me to produce another according to a carefully-discussed scheme. I did so, and this was in turn rejected. She then invited another draft from Alfred, but insisted on discussing my draft with me for three hours at the end of which she decided on a completely new structure, of which Alfred was informed at ten o'clock at night.

Indeed, I have over-simplified: in the first instance, Alfred was required to produce not one but two.

This is madness. Most of us have other things to attend to, and simply have not the time for this kind of lark. Worse still, the final synthesised product is always far worse than any of its predecessors.

It seems to me that in future no one should raise his pen to write a speech until a short avant projet has been agreed upon, that she must be made to stick to this agreement and urged to leave the speech whenever possible in the hands of whoever is charged with it. She might hand it over for final subbing to a speech-editor, or even conceivably do this herself.

I certainly have no authority to put this to her, though I have no objection to being quoted. I know that Alfred shares these views, and I am sending him a copy of this letter. I also know (as you probably do) that they are broadly shared by everybody who takes part in the exercise. Could you speak for us or even (because, when the election comes, the matter will be of extreme importance) persuade one of her top colleagues to talk to her firmly.

I think we have had a minor victory over trades unions. Thorneycroft's draft seems excellent, though should be slightly strengthened on the closed shop. I only hope it gets delivered without second, third and fourth thoughts!

Yours ever,

Peter.

c.c. Alfred Sherman, Esq.