

To members of the Shadow Cabinet for information

HEA

30.3.79



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

29 March 1979

Dear Humphrey,

You asked me when we talked on 20 March for advice on the convention under which the Leader of the Opposition and her colleagues might consult senior officials in Departments against the possibility of the Opposition forming the Government following a General Election.

I enclose a copy of a short note which the Prime Minister has himself approved setting out the practice in this matter. The Head of the Civil Service has today, following the announcement of a General Election, sent a copy of it to each Permanent Secretary.

*Yours m.
Ken Snow*

The Rt. Hon. Humphrey Atkins, M.P.



with compliments

THE RT. HON. HUMPHREY ATKINS, M.P.

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Meetings between the Opposition and Senior
Civil Servants in a Pre-Electoral Period

Governments of both Parties have allowed some contact between senior civil servants and Opposition leaders in the period of a run-up to a General Election. In practice this has been interpreted as after an election has been called or within six months of the end of a Parliament, whichever is the earlier.

One main purpose of such contacts is if the Opposition wish to inform themselves on factual questions of departmental organisation and structure or to keep senior civil servants abreast of organisational changes which might be contemplated. Equally, discussion of policies which the Opposition might wish to introduce immediately is permissible: but clearly there should be no discussion of the Government-of-the-day's policies. Thus the objective is to enable the Opposition to let senior civil servants have some idea of their plans so as to enable any early changes to be made as smoothly as possible if the election results in a change of government.

In the nature of things the number of people concerned in such matters, both within the Opposition itself and within the Civil Service, is extremely limited. The initiative for arranging such contacts lies with the Leader of the Opposition to approach the Prime Minister on the general issue. Thereafter "Shadow" Ministers should approach Permanent Secretaries only with the knowledge of the Leader of the Opposition.

Hooker