

GRS - 85DA

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

FM DOWN 270849Z SEP 79

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 543 OF 27 SEPTEMBER

FOLLOWING FOR PRIVATE SECRETARY.

THE PRIME MINISTER: POSSIBLE INTERVIEW WITH DIE WELT

1. DR RAINER BARZEL, DEFEATED CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE FOR THE CDU/CSU IN 1972, ASKED TO SEE ME AND CAME FOR A TETE-A-TETE LUNCH TODAY. THE OBJECT OF HIS CALL WAS TO ENQUIRE WHETHER THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE PREPARED TO GIVE AN IN DEPTH INTERVIEW FOR QUOTE DIE WELT UNQUOTE, AT WHICH HE WOULD BE THE INTERVIEWER. THE BACKGROUND, AS HE EXPLAINED IT, WAS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S VICTORY AT THE POLLS AND HER ASSUMPTION OF THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER HAD AROUSED IMMENSE INTEREST IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND HER SUBSEQUENT POLICIES HAD BEEN FOLLOWED WITH SYMPATHY AND HOPE THAT THEY WOULD SUCCEED. THE IDEA WOULD BE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY OF EXPLAINING HER POLICIES IN THE BROADEST SENSE OVER THE WIDEST FIELD BY QUESTION AND ANSWER, ALTHOUGH THERE WOULD ALSO BE SOME EDITORIAL DESCRIPTIVE MATTER-PLACE OF INTERVIEW, WHAT THE PM WAS WEARING ETC. DR BARZEL WOULD BE PREPARED TO SUBMIT THE QUESTIONS BEFORE HAND. HE WOULD COME TO LONDON TO DO THE INTERVIEW TOGETHER WITH AN INTERPRETER. HIS PREFERRED TIME WOULD BE BETWEEN 14 AND 21 OCTOBER ALTHOUGH THERE WOULD NATURALLY BE LATITUDE TO SUIT THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONVENIENCE. I UNDERTOOK TO TRANSMIT THE REQUEST BUT MADE IT CLEAR THAT I COULD IN NO WAY ANTICIPATE THE PRIME MINISTER'S DECISION.
2. I SUPPORT THIS PROPOSAL FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS. I THINK IT WOULD BE WHOLLY IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNT OF THE PURPOSES AND INTENTIONS OF HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT TO BE WIDELY PUBLISHED IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC FROM THE HIGHEST AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE. QUOTE DIE WELT UNQUOTE IS ONE OF THE THREE MOST WIDELY CIRCULATED SERIOUS PAPERS IN THE FRG (THE OTHERS ARE THE QUOTE FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG UNQUOTE AND THE QUOTE

CONFIDENTIAL

/ SUEDEDEUTSCHE

SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG UNQUOTE). MOREOVER IT HAS A PARTICULAR CONNECTION WITH BRITAIN SINCE IT WAS ORIGINALLY LICENSED AFTER THE WAR IN THE BRITISH ZONE. ITS NEAREST EQUIVALENT IN THE UK IS, I SUPPOSE, THE QUOTE DAILY TELEGRAPH UNQUOTE, BOTH IN FORMAT AND EDITORIAL POLICY, ALTHOUGH IT IS WITH QUOTE THE TIMES UNQUOTE, QUOTE LE MONDE UNQUOTE AND QUOTE LA STAMPA UNQUOTE THAT IT PRODUCES A JOINT MONTHLY EUROPA SUPPLEMENT. THE OWNER, AXEL SPRINGER, IS ARGUABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL PUBLISHER IN GERMANY. DR BARZEL CAN, IN MY JUDGEMENT, BE RELIED ON BOTH TO PUT THE QUESTIONS AND PRESENT THE ANSWERS FAIRLY. MOREOVER THE TIMING IS RIGHT, SINCE AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW OF THIS SORT WOULD PROVIDE AN ADMIRABLE CURTAIN RAISER TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S FORTH-COMING VISIT AT THE END OF OCTOBER.

3. THE ARGUMENTS ARE NOT OF COURSE ALL ON ONE SIDE. DR BARZEL, ALTHOUGH FOR HEALTH REASONS NO LONGER IN THE FIRSTFLIGHT OF FEDERAL POLITICIANS, IS STILL AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE CDU AND OF THE BUNDESTAG. THE CONSERVATIVE VICTORY IN THE UK WAS WIDELY ACCLAIMED HERE AS A FILLIP FOR THE CDU/CSU, AND STRAUSS HAS CLAIMED TO BE QUOTE THE GERMAN MRS THATCHER UNQUOTE. THERE IS ALREADY SOMETHING OF A PRE-ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE HERE, WITH SOME FAIRLY HEAVY FIRE BEING EXCHANGED BETWEEN STRAUSS AND LEADERS OF THE SPD EG DARR. IT COULD BE HELD THAT IF THE PRIME MINISTER WERE INTERVIEWED BY DR BARZEL IN A STRONGLY ANTI-SPD PAPER (WHICH DIE WELT IS) IT MIGHT CLOUD HERE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FEDERAL CHANCELLOR WHICH, OF COURSE, MUST HAVE PRIORITY.

4. I DO NOT THINK THAT THIS NEED BE A DECISIVE OBJECTION. THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS ARE STILL A YEAR AWAY, AND IT COULD NOT REASONABLY BE MAINTAINED THAT ANY INTERVIEW THE PRIME MINISTER GAVE TO AN OPPOSITION POLITICIAN COULD SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCE THEM AT THIS DISTANCE. IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER TO AVOID ISSUES WHICH ARE A MATTER OF PARTY POLITICAL CONTROVERSY HERE. MOREOVER IF THE INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE AND WERE PUBLISHED IN ADVANCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT HERE ON 31 OCTOBER, HER DISCUSSIONS AND PRESS CONFERENCE WITH CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT WOULD CANCEL OUT ANY RESIDUAL PARTY POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FOR THE OPPOSITION.

CONFIDENTIAL

5. NEVERTHELESS IF, AS I HOPE, THE PRIME MINISTER IS WILLING TO MEET DR BARZEL'S REQUEST, IT WOULD BE WISE IF SHE WERE TO CLEAR HER LINES WITH THE CHANCELLOR FIRST. I THINK THIS COULD BEST BE DONE INFORMALLY BY A TELEPHONE CALL FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRIVATE SECRETARY TO RUFUS IN THE KANZLERAMT, RATHER THAN THROUGH THIS EMBASSY. IT COULD BE EXPLAINED TO RUFUS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY OF GIVING THIS INTERVIEW, WHICH SHE BELIEVED WOULD BE HELPFUL IN TERMS OF EXPLAINING UK POLICIES TO THE GERMAN PUBLIC. SHE WOULD OF COURSE BE CAREFUL TO AVOID ANY IMPRESSION OF TAKING SIDES IN GERMAN INTERNAL POLITICS. BUT SHE WOULD NOT WISH TO GO AHEAD IF THE CHANCELLOR THOUGHT THAT THE INTERVIEW MIGHT CAUSE HIM ANY POLITICAL EMBARRASSMENT. I BELIEVE THAT A MESSAGE ALONG THESE LINES WOULD EFFECTIVELY DISARM THE CHANCELLOR AND THAT THE CHANCES OF HIS RAISING ANY OBJECTION TO THE INTERVIEW WOULD BE VERY SLIGHT. BUT, AS HE TOLD ME AT DINNER THE OTHER NIGHT (MY LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE OF 20 SEPTEMBER), HE BELIEVES THAT THE ESSENTIAL THING FOR RELATIONS OF CONFIDENCE BETWEEN HEADS OF GOVERNMENT IS THAT THEY SHOULD BE COMPLETELY FRANK WITH ONE ANOTHER. AN APPROACH ON THESE LINES WOULD SHOW THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ACTING IN THE SAME BELIEF.

6. IN SHORT, I CONSIDER THAT THE ADVANTAGES TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST OF ACCEDING TO DR. BARZEL'S REQUEST CONSIDERABLY OUTWEIGH ANY QUALMS, AND THAT THESE QUALMS CAN BE SET AT REST IN THE MANNER I HAVE SUGGESTED.

WRIGHT

[COPIES SENT TO NO.10 DOWNING ST]

FILES:

WED

NEAD

OID

IPD

P AND C D

FS

FS/LFS

FS/FUS

SIR A. DUFF

COPIES TO:

SIR JOHN HUNT

CABINET OFFICE

MR BULLARD  
MR FERGUSSON

- 3 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London S.W.1

2 October 1979

*Dear Michael,*

Possible Interview by Prime Minister With "Die Welt"

We discussed on the telephone the recommendation conveyed in Bonn telegram 543 that the Prime Minister should accept an invitation to give an interview to Dr Rainer Barzel on behalf of "Die Welt".

The arguments in favour of accepting the invitation as well as the possible pitfalls, are well set out in the Bonn telegram, with which we agree. I know that so far the Prime Minister has not given any interviews of this kind. Nevertheless from the point of view of the continued improvement of relations between the UK and the FRG, at what is a most convenient moment for putting our views firmly on record, we consider it would be very useful if the Prime Minister felt able to accept this invitation.

As for the question which Sir Oliver Wright raises whether the Prime Minister should give an interview to a leading member of the CDU (opposition) party (paragraph 3 of the telegram), we agree with the suggestion that the best way round the problem would be for you to have a word, on the Prime Minister's behalf, on the telephone with Jurgen Ruhfus. But, if you would prefer, we could, of course, ask Sir Oliver to do this instead.

*Yours Wca*

(P Lever)  
Private Secretary

M O D'B Alexander Esq  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

Mr. James

Michael Alexander would like something to go in the P.M.'s box on the request from Joe went so that if she says yes, he can begin the process of clearing it from the political viewpoint with the Federal General Chancellor's Office. Charles A \_\_\_\_\_  
4/10

11

PRIME MINISTER

I have requests from German Television (ZDF) and from Die Welt for interviews pre-Bonn. FCO advice is that if you are willing, these are both splendid outlets.

The format for television would be "Meet the Press" style with two German reporters based in London. Die Welt would be an interview with Dr Rainer Barzel.

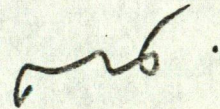
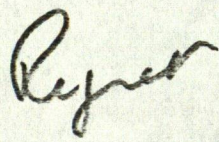
As I wrote pre-Rome, I hope in due course a pattern may evolve whereby you contrive to meet the indigenous press (that based in London) to set the scene, and I am sure Bernard Ingham will take this up with you in due course, but we have not yet established this style - indeed pressure has been such that your pre-visit briefing has come too late to make it sensible.

For the particular visit to Bonn I advise against. This is a one-day job. It is in itself a foothill to Dublin. There are some political uncertainties, and you would almost certainly feel obliged to do the same pre-Paris. Your diary is already over-full- indeed you have Chairman Hua only the day before

Shall I decline with thanks?



Henry L James  
9 October 1979





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Press Secretary*

16 October 1979

*Dear Nand*

Your letter of 2 October to Michael Alexander about the possibility of the Prime Minister giving an interview to Die Welt before her next visit to Bonn. She has in fact declined this invitation, and I have written to the Ambassador accordingly.

Paul Lever Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Foreign Secretary  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
Downing Street  
London SW1



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Press Secretary*

16 October 1979

*John Oliver*

The Prime Minister has in fact declined - with regret - the invitation to conduct an interview with Die Welt before her next visit to Bonn. We spoke about this by telephone. In practice she has given no single exclusive interview to any overseas journal since taking office. Nor indeed has she given any television interviews other than those arising in a news context.

Her time between now and 31 October is very much committed; we are in the pre-run to the reassembly of Parliament and she has the visit of Chairman Hua pending. So the portents were not good anyway.

She has, as a matter of fact, only given one interview to the British press since taking office - for "NOW!" - a fortnight ago.

With best wishes.

*John Oliver*

HE Sir Oliver Wright GCVO KCMG DSC  
British Embassy  
Bonn