



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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SHADOW CABINET PROVINCIAL TOURS

I have chuntered on at several meetings about the desirability of establishing as a matter of routine a more fruitful framework for the kind of programme undertaken by members of the Shadow Cabinet when they undertake regional tours, generally to marginal seats, and am now responding to Angus Maude's challenge at a fairly recent Research Department meeting to set these thoughts on paper. I emphasise that I am not criticising anyone in particular in what I say since I know that area offices work hard to put together constructive programmes.

But let me start by stating my main anxiety - that the traditional pattern often consists of a Conservative Businessmen's lunch, a Conservative Ladies' tea, and what turns out to be a Conservative public meeting. This seems to me to concentrate too much on our own supporters and is not geared to get the maximum publicity. Nor does it very much help to get over the Party's main image problem of non-indentification with "ordinary people".

The positive proposals which I suggest for inclusion in any such programme are as follows:

1. Visits to factories and so on (obviously hospitals, schools, old people's homes, etc. are acceptable alternatives or additions). In order to avoid Shadow Ministers looking like "A poor man's Prince Philip" which is what happens if the visit consists only of a walk-round with the managing director, such visits should include meeting with shop stewards or the like, either separately or jointly with the management.

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2. Local television and, above all, local radio should be involved. Recent survey evidence suggests that local commercial stations are regarded as being very well in tune with the thinking of ordinary people. Apart from interviews, it is worth trying to fit in a short meeting with the management of local stations on their premises.
3. At the end of the day, after a public meeting, it is worth trying to arrange a late off-the-record supper with local newspaper editors (even if this means cutting out the round of Conservative Clubs). Eric Ward of North Western Area recently confirmed to me my impression that such occasions produce a substantial long-term dividend.
4. Spending a Saturday afternoon by attending a major sporting function. Louis Edwards (Conservative), Chairman of Manchester United, together with Matt Busby, put this point to me very strongly last weekend on the basis that Labour Ministers fairly regularly inspire or accept invitations to their ground. Suitable publicity can easily be arranged.

There is one other equally important but more general point that follows from this - namely the desirability of having available ideally a regional brief for Shadow Ministers to supplement the constituency background notes which are often unduly detailed. Such a brief should contain three or four headline points which should be part of our consistent message.

This leads me to another point, namely the desirability of doing more to identify the several major policy points on which we need to have clear and attractive policy positions with particular regional importance. I attach a copy of the note that I recently produced on the British Leyland theme. Another obvious example is the need to have a constructive and continuous message for the textile seats: Manchester say that this issue is important in as many as thirty seats in the North West and it obviously has Yorkshire implications as well. The opening few columns of the Prime Minister's speech on the Address presents an attractive and not unconstructive awareness of this issue which I believe we should be able to match without betraying important political principles. Another example, which had led to some of our present problems, is devolution since it now seems to me to be clear that we ought to have done more, following Margaret's pledges at Dundee, to impress the importance of both these pledges in a consistent and aggressive fashion.

One final point is made in conclusion that such an approach has certainly been successful in securing for my visits much more local press and radio coverage than would have followed from nothing more than stock Party speeches to largely Party audiences. I am sure that all this is well understood by those who prepare programmes for the Party Leader. My point is that we do it more comprehensively. No doubt there are many difficulties, but my main objective is a reasonably consistent brief to Area Officers on this general subject and the preparation in the Research Department of the kind of briefs I have in mind.

The Rt. Hon. Lord Thorneycroft

cc The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher MP  
The Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Joseph Bt., M.P.  
Angus Maude MP  
Christopher Patten  
Tom Hooson