

# Conservative Research Department

32 Smith Square, London SW1.

~~24 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HX. Telephone 01-222-9511~~

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KB/SEN

Director: ALAN HOWARTH

Mr. Richard Ryder,  
10 Downing Street,  
London SW1.

Confidential

18th March 1980

*Dear Richard,*

Public Opinion Background Note No. 7

As arranged, I enclose a copy of my latest weekly Public Opinion Background Note.

*Yours  
D.K. Britto.*

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Public Opinion Background Note 7  
(Produced 15th March 1980)

1. Introduction

In looking at the events of last week which saw the massive reduction in majority in Southend East, our defeat in the Lords and the problems over the Olympics, Alan Watkins in the Observer on Sunday concluded his piece in the following terms:-

"Nothing much of long-term political significance need be read into this. Still, there is no getting away from it; Mrs. Thatcher has not had a specially good week".

Such a conclusion can be produced at the end of almost any week in Government yet it does provide a useful warning for our "tracking" research - we are not particularly concerned with short-term fluctuations but with long-term trends. Having said this, we need to be careful not to take too seriously the results of the Gallup Poll that will almost certainly appear on Thursday and probably show a considerable increase in Labour's lead - the last published poll showed a 4½% Labour Lead when it was conducted in early February.

2. Voting Intention

Our latest tracking study completed last Monday (10th March) showed a Labour lead of 9% over Conservative; full details are given below:-

Voting Intention

	<u>CON</u>	<u>LAB</u>	<u>LIB</u>	<u>OTHER</u>	<u>LEAD</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
May 1979 (GE)	43.9	36.9	13.8	5.5	+7.0
13/18 June*	42	43½	12	2½	-1½
<u>1980</u>					
9/14 Jan	36	45	16	3	-9
17/22 Jan	38	42	17	3	-4
23/28 Jan	40	39½	18	2½	+½
30/4 Feb	37	45	16	2	-8
6/11 Feb	37½	42	18	2½	-4½
13/18 Feb	40	43	15	2	-3
20/25 Feb	38	47	13	2	-9
27/3 March	36	47	14½	2½	-11
5/10 March	37	46	14½	2½	-9

\*First Gallup Post-Election Survey

3. Government Record

Approval of the Government record improved slightly in the week up to 10th March - up to 31% compared with 28% in the previous week (the lowest level since the Election). See below for details:-

Government Record

	<u>Approve</u> %	<u>Disapprove</u> %	<u>Don't Know</u> %
13/18 June*	34	41	25
1980			
9/14 Jan	33	53	14
17/22 Jan	32	56	12
23/28 Jan	35	52	13
30/4 Feb	29	58	13
6/11 Feb	30	55	15
13/18 Feb	31	58	11
20/25 Feb	30	57	14
27/3 March	28	58	14
5/10 March	31	56	13

\*First Post-Election Survey (Gallup)

4. Popularity of Political Leaders

Almost no change in popularity of the leaders of all three main parties - see below for details:-

Popularity of Political Leaders

	<u>Mrs. Thatcher</u>			<u>Mr. Callaghan</u>			<u>Mr. Steel</u>		
	<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Dissat.</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Is Good Leader</u>	<u>Is Not</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Is Good Leader</u>	<u>Is Not</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
9/14 Jan	39	54	7	53	35	12	62	19	19
17/22 Jan	38	55	6	47	41	12	58	17	25
23/28 Jan	42	52	6	49	39	12	62	18	20
30/4 Feb	37	56	7	50	38	13	57	19	23
6/11 Feb	37	55	9	50	36	14	60	18	22
13/18 Feb	41	53	5	49	40	11	62	15	21
20/25 Feb	39	54	7	50	37	13	58	18	24
27/3 March	37	56	7	53	33	14	57	18	25
5/10 March	37	57	6	52	34	13	58	17	24

5. Communication

The vast majority of the electorate (63%) claimed not to have heard anything making them more or less favourably inclined towards the Government in the previous seven days. 10% claimed to have heard something making them more favourably inclined towards the Government and 28% something making them less favourably inclined.

Only a few items mentioned as making electors more favourably inclined towards the Government - 3% handling of steel strike, 2% relations with Unions and 2% Rhodesian Elections. On the less favourable side we found the following main items mentioned: Cost of living 6%, public spending cuts 5%, handling of steel strike 5%, Olympics 3%, relations with Unions 3%, the leader 2% and policies in general 2%.

6. Published Polls

The M.O.R.I. Poll published in the Evening Standard last Monday and showing an 8% Labour lead had been conducted before the survey I reported on last week.

Two surveys (Marplan in Sun - 14th March 1980 and N.O.P. in the Observer - 16th March 1980) found a vast majority of the electorate who wanted the British Olympic team to go to Moscow. Marplan found 71% thinking a British team should be sent and N.O.P. 69%.

Marplan in the Sun also reported on a series of other questions on various aspects of Government policy and found:-

- 63% of electors do not want the Government to make more money available to end the steel strike (49% of Trade Unionists took this view).
- 70% of electors think our present proposals for Trade Union law reform are "too soft on the Unions" or "about right" - 65% of Trade Unionists took the same view.
- On taxation 44% wanted "reductions in income tax but increases in taxes on what they bought", 21% "reductions in taxes on what you buy, but increases in income tax" and 35% "no changes in income tax or other taxes on what they bought".
- 62% of the electorate voted our policy in Rhodesia "a great - limited success".