

Box

24th September, 1981

CONFIDENTIAL

Thank you for your letter of 23rd September, with which you enclosed a copy of the transcript of the Southern Television Programme on 22nd September.

Thank you, too, for having taken the trouble to send this round by hand.

I must say that I think that the whole piece shows the greatest irresponsibility; I am in no way surprised that Brian Shallcross should be anxious to play the matter down.

IAN GOW

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Deputy Chairman: R. ALISTAIR McALPINE

Confidential

23/9/81

Dear Ian,

Apropos our telephone conversation, we've just got hold of a copy of the script which Brian Shallcross gave on Southern Television last night - copy herewith.

As you will see, it's all rather vague and tentative - as an old hobby man I'd say it bears all the marks of a "think piece" with very little factual base. Shallcross certainly had nothing to add to it when I spoke to him this afternoon - in fact, he seemed to me rather concerned to play it down.

Will keep you in touch if we hear anything more

Yours,

Harry

Southern TV

22/9/81

(1)
BRIAN SHALLCROSS

There is no doubt that dissension among Tory back benchers over the way in which the government and the prime minister are handling the current situation is at an all time record high.

Last week's cabinet reshuffle, was seen by many Conservative M.P.s as being simply Mrs Thatcher packing the cabinet with Ministers who share her inflexible attitudes, rather than choosing a cabinet which reflects the broad spectrum of opinion within the Party.

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PM ———
B ———
Today's unemployment figures, of just a thousand under three million without work, will only increase the heavy undercurrent of rebellion that I have heard of privately over the past weeks and months, which has built up now into a unique situation.

What we are witnessing ~~are~~ are serious meetings among conservative backbenchers... many of whom have been at Westminster for years, where discussions are taking place as to how best to openly show Mrs Thatcher that a large ~~number of~~ ^{number of} Tory M.P.s totally disagree with her approach to the nation's problems. ~~Two ways seem to have emerged, and are being seriously considered, though I must stress no final decision has been taken.~~

slide PM

~~The first is this...~~ In November Mrs Thatcher automatically comes up for re-election as party leader.

Normally this would be a mere formality. But some backbenchers are putting forward the idea that an M.P. should stand against her.... not to defeat her, but to allow backbenchers the chance of mustering just enough votes against her to display their anxieties.

B

Those who are suggesting this course of action believe there could be as many as eighty or a hundred tory backbenchers willing to vote for the candidate opposing the prime minister, simply to ~~show~~ register their disapproval.

The M.P. opposing Mrs Thatcher must be seen as someone with no axe to grind, and with, now, no real political ambitions in the Party.

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Morrison

Devizes M.P. Charles Morrison is the name I've heard bandied about in this context.

Against this course of action is ~~the obvious~~ the obvious harm it would do the Party in terms of its public image.

This is being weighed up right now as M.P.s think out what they should do.

B to a

Another idea... less dramatic and so rather

less clear cut in its purpose is this....

the chairmanship of the powerful 1922 Committee is also up for grabs this winter.

At present held by senior ^{Conservative} Edward Du Cann, ^{Tom}, this is the committee of all ^{party} backbench M.P.s that meets regularly to discuss matters, and there is no doubt the ^{party} leader listens to what emerges.

Now Mr Du Cann is by no means a Thatcherite, ...he has openly criticized her economic policies, but he is an establishment figure, and so if someone like sacked cabinet minister Sir Ian Gilmour were to stand against Mr Du Cann, many M.P.s believe this would be seen by Number Ten and others as a way of expressing opinion for or against Mrs Thatcher....especially since Sir Ian Gilmour is so openly opposed to her approach.

This has the advantage over the other idea of putting up a candidate against the prime minister, in that it would not be seen by the public as ^a massive split in the party. As I say, no ^{final} decisions have been taken. But the fact that serious discussions are taking place where these ideas are being followed through in detail, is an indication of the real discontent rife among backbench conservatives at Westminster.

slide
Du Cann

slide
Gilmour

B.