

21 July 75



Dear Margaret:

A very long time ago, that is, just before the Referendum,

Humphrey Atkins asked me to write down some thoughts about the short term future of politics, & I promised to do so after the Ref:<sup>m</sup>. I have not kept my promise, because I simply did not know what to say, and I am not sure that I know now, because the situation seems to me to be quite unpredictable, and, for us, very difficult.

However, before the Recess, I think there are one or two things wh: I wd: like to put down on paper, if only





as a basis for reflexion during the holidays.

I do not myself believe that the Government's

- present package will work, but its publication has given <sup>back</sup> the Government the initiative wh: it was very quickly losing up to, and including, the Woolwich bye-election. The press has rallied round it, and we have got some stick for neither saying 'yes' nor 'no' to it. This was predictable, but, I am sure, undeserved. We do not believe ~~in~~ it, and therefore, pace the Times, could not support it. But the House of Commons is not simply a debating society, and I myself am convinced that to oppose it would have brought undesirable consequences
-





both for the party and the country. It is, quite certainly, better than nothing in the sense that it will have, and indeed has had some effect on international sentiment. We are therefore right to warn of its defects and deficiencies, whilst conceding that, as there is no alternative, it must be given its chance.

So long as this situation continues, the Government neither needs our support, nor has asked for it. I therefore deprecate as undignified, and open to misconstruction attempts to spell out what conditions we should exact if we were asked for it. We should also avoid any





an attempt to throw the Gov<sup>t</sup> out based on an ad hoc alliance in the lobby with the left of the Labour Party. Such an attempt w<sup>d</sup> only be justifiable if (i) the Gov<sup>t</sup> had obviously lost its majority and (ii) we were prepared to fight and win an immediate election. So the present Parliam<sup>t</sup> will lurch and totter on into an unpredictable future.

At any moment, but not predictably, the Gov<sup>t</sup> might be faced with resignations. This might be fatal for it only if a senior Cab<sup>l</sup> Minister resigned, and I see no immediate prospect of <sup>his</sup> ~~it~~ happening. Our immediate policy





must therefore be based on the assumption that we will go into an election at some unpredictable time in the future, and on the present system of election. I do not believe an alliance with the Liberals is possible at the moment, because I do not believe that either we or they could carry a united party with us if we made a deal. There can, however, be no harm in keeping in touch with liberal leaders and making ad hoc arrangements to vote with them on particular issues. A situation might arise in which a Lib: Con: coalition or alliance wd be possible, but in my view only if (a) the Lab: party split and (b) it was





for some reason not practicable to make a tripartite pact of moderates and (c) there was a prospect of an immediate election wh: we could hope to win with, but only with Liberal help. If (a) and (b) were fulfilled <sup>(but not (c))</sup> it would be probably better to go out for a Conservative appeal to the Country, with the thought of inviting Libs or Cross benches to join us if we won.

In the meantime we must reflect on the possibility of a Labour split, with Wilson still in the saddle. In this event he might approach Liberals and Conservatives to join him in the Gov<sup>t</sup>. This





might be done formally, in which case the appeal wd be to yourself and Jeremy Thorpe. But it is at least as likely that it wd be made informally, in which case the appeal might be to Ted Heath & Jo Grimond. This wd present great difficulties both to yourself and the party and not least to Ted Heath's former colleagues, both inside and outside the Shadow Cabinet. My present estimate is that such a Gov<sup>t</sup> might be popular, and might well command the support e.g. of the Times & Lord Shawcross. It would, however, not be stable, because it would have





no power base in the country, and could not appeal to the country unless it formed me. It wd therefore be driven to seek some form of electoral reform in the present Parliament, or else some "coupon" endorsement of candidates as in 1918. <sup>Possibly it wd be a combination of the two</sup> I do not know what wd be the result of all this, but I believe it would shatter the present party system, and, certainly, the present Conservative Party.

I am sure you wd be wise if at all possible (wh: I fear it may not be) to heal the breach with Ted Heath as soon as may be. I do not





myself believe there is an ideological difference between you. On the other hand, in politics, personal difficulties can be as troublesome, and as lasting, as ideological differences.

yrs:

A large, stylized handwritten signature in cursive script, consisting of several loops and flourishes.