

Conservative Research Department

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KB/sgc

Director: ALAN HOWARTH

Mr Richard Ryder
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Dear Richard,

PUBLIC OPINION BACKGROUND NOTE 50

I enclose a copy of my latest background note on public opinion. The note includes a fairly detailed consideration of the various opinion polls that have looked at the likely level of public support for a Social Democratic/Liberal/Centre Party. I feel that it should be stressed that all opinion research in the 'hypothetical' i.e. presenting to respondents a situation which does not at present exist and asking them for their response is fraught with danger. It must however be admitted that the potential for support for a Centre Party grouping is clear - it is only the actual level of support as shown in the various published polls that is certainly an overestimate.

Yours
Kerr

D. K. Britto

Enc.

PUBLIC OPINION BACKGROUND NOTE 50

1. Introduction

Our latest Gallup tracking study was conducted between 21st and 26th January 1981 and found a 7.5% Labour lead compared with 13½% in the previous survey conducted 14/20 January). The Daily Telegraph published the findings from both surveys. The latest study was completed largely before the Labour Party Special Conference and the rapid developments with regard to the Centre Party/Social Democratic Party (Alliance?) held last week. Various other opinion polls have looked at aspects of likely public reactions to the development of a hypothetical Centre Party/Social Democratic Party and have included questions looking at voting intention. A Marplan survey published in the Guardian on 29th January and conducted on 27th January found a 2% Conservative lead (Conservative 42%, Labour 39%, Liberals 13% and Others 7%). An N.O.P. poll published in the Daily Mail on January 29th and conducted on January 27/28 found a 2% Labour lead (Conservative 39%, Labour 41%, Liberal 15%, Others 5%). An Audience Selection telephone survey conducted on January 26th and published in the Sun on January 28th also found a 2% Labour lead (Labour 41%, Conservative 39%, Liberal 16% and Others 3%). Please see Section 5 of this note for a consideration of published polls looking at attitudes to a possible Centre Party.

It would appear from the published polls that there has been a substantial public reaction against Labour after their special conference shown both in terms of the standard voting intention question and public support for a 'hypothetical' Social Democratic Party. We will need to watch very carefully what happens to both support for the Labour Party and for a possible Social Democratic Party over the next weeks and months.

2. Voting Intention

	<u>CON</u> %	<u>LAB</u> %	<u>LIB</u> %	<u>OTHER</u> %	<u>LEAD</u> %
<u>1979</u>					
May (GE)	43.9	36.9	13.8	5.5	+7.0
13/18 June*	42.0	43.5	13.0	2.5	-1.5
<u>1980</u>					
27 Aug/1 Sept	37.0	49.0	11.5	2.5	-12.0
2/8 Sept	36.5	48.5	12.5	2.5	-12.0
10/15 Sept	35.5	45.0	16.5	3.0	-9.5**
17/22 Sept	35.0	47.0	14.0	4.0	-12.0
25/29 Sept	35.5	47.0	15.0	2.5	-11.5
1/6 Oct	40.0	43.0	13.5	3.5	-3.0**
8/14 Oct	35.5	41.5	20.0	3.0	-6.0
15/20 Oct	40.5	43.0	14.0	2.5	-2.5**
22/27 Oct	37.5	42.0	18.0	2.5	-4.5
29 Oct/3 Nov	34.5	47.5	16.0	2.0	-13.0
5/10 Nov	41.5	40.5	14.0	4.0	+1.0
12/17 Nov	36.5	47.0	15.0	1.5	-10.5**
19/24 Nov	35.0	48.0	14.0	2.0	-13.0
26 Nov/1 Dec	35.0	49.5	13.0	2.5	-14.5
3/8 Dec	35.0	47.0	14.5	3.5	-12.0
10/15 Dec	35.0	47.5	14.5	3.0	-12.5**
<u>1981</u>					
7/12 Jan	34.0	48.0	15.0	3.0	-14.0
14/20 Jan	33.0	46.5	18.5	2.0	-13.5**
21/26 Jan	35.5	43.0	17.0	4.5	-7.5**

* First Gallup post-election survey

** Published Polls

2. Voting Intention (continued)

As pointed out in the introduction to this note our latest Gallup tracking study found a 7½% Labour lead but the interviews for the survey had been conducted largely before the special Labour conference. Research conducted after the conference has found a further dramatic fall in Labour's position in terms of voting intention with results ranging from a Conservative lead of 2% to a Labour lead of 2%. None of the polls have shown any really significant changes in support for the Liberals.

3. Government Record

Slight improvement in approval of the record of the Government - but improvement not significant in polling terms.

GOVERNMENT RECORD

	<u>Approve</u> %	<u>Disapprove</u> %	<u>Don't Know</u> %
<u>1979</u>			
13/18 June	34	41	25
<u>1980</u>			
27 Aug/1st Sept	31	56	13
2/8 Sept	31	58	11
10/15 Sept	29	57	13
17/22 Sept	30	59	12
25/29 Sept	27	60	13
1/6 Oct	30	57	13
8/14 Oct	32	55	13
15/20 Oct	34	54	12
22/27 Oct	29	60	11
20 Oct/ 3 Nov	<u>30</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>12</u>
5/10 Nov	32	54	14
12/17 Nov	29	60	11
19/24 Nov	27	60	13
26 Nov/1st Dec	27	62	11
3/8 Dec	26	64	11
10/15 Dec	29	59	12
<u>1981</u>			
7/12 Jan	27	61	12
14/20 Jan	26	63	11
21/26 Jan	28	58	14

4. Popularity of Political Leaders

Slight improvement in Mrs Thatcher's personal popularity. Mr Foot's popularity has continued to fall and he is now at the level of being the most unpopular Leader of the Opposition in any survey Gallup have conducted since they started to keep track of the popularity of Leaders on a regular basis in the mid 1950's. Mr Steel's popularity has also dropped.

POPULARITY OF POLITICAL LEADERS

	<u>Mrs Thatcher</u>			<u>Mr Foot</u>			<u>Mr Steel</u>		
	<u>Sat</u>	<u>Dis-</u>	<u>Don't</u>	<u>Is</u>	<u>Is</u>	<u>Don't</u>	<u>Is</u>	<u>Is</u>	<u>Don't</u>
	%	sat	Know	%	Not	Know	%	Not	Know
<u>1980</u>									
27 Aug/1 Sept	38	56	6	-	-	-	50	21	29
2/8 Sept	35	59	6	-	-	-	57	18	25
10/15 Sept	37	58	5	-	-	-	59	19	22
17/22 Sept	36	59	5	-	-	-	59	17	25
25/29 Sept	33	60	6	-	-	-	60	18	22
1/6 Oct	38	56	6	-	-	-	56	20	25
8/14 Oct	37	58	5	-	-	-	60	16	24
15/20 Oct	38	56	6	-	-	-	57	20	24
22/27 Oct	37	57	6	-	-	-	50	34	16
29 Oct/3 Nov	35	58	7	-	-	-	55	18	26
3/10 Nov	39	53	8	-	-	-	49	17	34
12/17 Nov	34	60	6	38	38	24	51	22	23
19/24 Nov	32	63	5	41	37	22	58	20	22
26 Nov/1st Dec	32	63	5	38	39	23	54	16	27
3/6 Dec	33	62	5	28	33	39	52	18	24
10/15 Dec	35	59	6	30	35	35	59	17	24
<u>1981</u>									
7/12 Jan	33	61	6	24	39	36	56	21	23
14/20 Jan	31	63	5	26	42	32	63	19	18
21/26 Jan	34	61	5	23	43	34	57	19	21

5. Published Polls

a) Audience Selection (Sun 28th January 1981)

An Audience Selection poll conducted on January 26th and published in the Sun on January 28th looked at attitudes to a hypothetical Liberal/Social Democratic Party. They asked 'If you could vote for a combined Liberal and Social Democratic Party - that is a coalition party led by people like David Steel, Roy Jenkins and Shirley Williams - how would you vote' - they found 43% saying they would vote for a Liberal/Social Democratic alliance, 22% Conservative, 19% Labour, 1% Others and 15% did not know how they would vote. The Audience Selection question was phrased in such a way as to get as high

level of support for a Liberal/Social Democratic Party as possible. Although it must be admitted that there is a substantial degree of public support for the idea of a Social Democratic/Centre Party grouping, opinion research questions to electors about whether they would vote for a hypothetical party at a hypothetical election will always tend to grossly overstate the level of this support.

Audience Selection found 28% of the electorate thought David Steel would be the best Prime Minister for the new party, 21% Shirley Williams, 9% Roy Jenkins, 6% David Owen and 1% William Rodgers.

When Audience Selection put to people who said they would vote for a Social Democratic coalition a list of possible reasons for voting for them, they found 30% selected 'to get a moderate middle-of-the-road government'.

Audience Selection found over three-quarters of the electorate regarding the result of the Labour Special Conference on the way the Labour Leader should be selected as either a 'very bad decision' or a 'rather bad decision'.

b) N.O.P. (Daily Mail 29th January 1981)

An N.O.P. survey conducted January 27/28 and published in the Daily Mail on 29th January found three in ten electors saying they would vote for a hypothetical Social Democratic Party and when asked on a separate question, four in ten for a Social Democratic/Liberal alliance. They found that Shirley Williams was the most popular potential leader for a Social Democratic Party.

c) Marplan (Guardian 29th January 1981)

The Guardian on 29th January 1981 included the results of the first opinion poll to be conducted by this paper since the early 1960's. The poll had been conducted by Marplan on January 27th. They put four voting options to the respondents and found 31% saying they would vote Conservative, 29% Labour, 27% Social Democratic/Centre Party, 11% Liberals and 2% Others. The analysis they developed (which need to be treated with a degree of caution) suggest that 21% of those who voted Conservative in 1979, 27% of those who voted Labour and 27% of those who voted Liberal would be ready to vote for a Social Democratic/Centre Party.

d) N.O.P. (Observer 1st February 1981)

The Observer on 1st February 1981 published the results of an N.O.P. poll conducted for them on 29th January. They offered respondents three choices in terms of hypothetical voting behaviour at a General Election.

1. The existing parties without a new Social Democratic Party.
2. The existing parties plus a Social Democratic Party
3. The Conservative and Labour Parties plus a Social Democratic - Liberal alliance.

Hypothetical Voting Intention

	<u>Choice 1</u> %	<u>Choice 2</u> %	<u>Choice 3</u> %
Labour	44	35	32
Conservative	37	27	25
Liberal	16	10	-
Social Democrat	-	26	-
Social Democrat/ Liberal Alliance	-	-	41
Nationalist	3	2	2

This particular question allowed N.O.P. to develop an analysis of the source of Social Democrat/Liberal support - of those who supported us against the other existing parties (Choice 1 above), 30% subsequently switched to the hypothetical new alliance, 25% of intending Labour voters did the same. N.O.P. found backers of the new alliance being more numerous among the young (18 - 34), the middle classes and the trade union members. In regional terms support for the Social Democratic/Liberal alliance was weaker in Scotland and Wales when compared with England.

N.O.P. found respondents regarding Shirley Williams as the most popular of the various potential leaders of a Social Democratic Party, (37% preferred her, 27% David Owen, 19% Roy Jenkins, and 3% William Rogers).

e) M.O.R.I. (Sunday Times 1st February 1981)

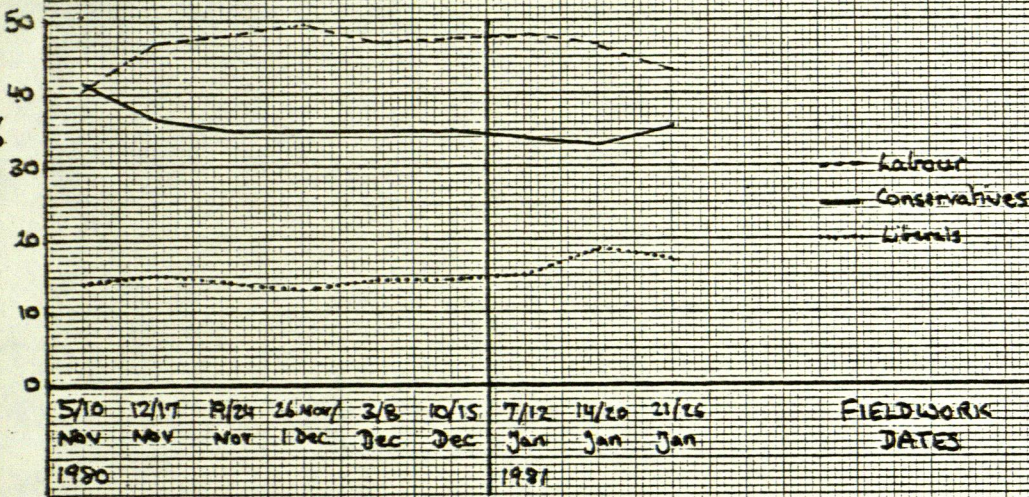
The Sunday Times on 1st February 1981 included a report on a M.O.R.I. survey conducted on 29th/30th January in three Labour held constituencies in Teeside (Middlesborough, Stockton and Thornaby). Two of the Labour members for these seats (Bill Rogers and Ian Wrigglesworth) have announced their support for the Social Democrats. It is difficult from the findings of the M.O.R.I. poll in three Labour seats to justify the Sunday Times headline 'Shock for Tories in Centre Poll'.

We have known for a long time there is a high level of dissatisfaction with both our government and the Prime Minister in Northern Britain - it is not surprising that in these three constituencies M.O.R.I. found 80% of respondents dissatisfied with the Government and 79% dissatisfied with Mrs Thatcher. M.O.R.I. examined how electors in two of the three seats would vote if Rogers/Wrigglesworth stand in their present constituencies as Social Democrats or as Social Democrats in alliance with the Liberals. In Thornaby (Wrigglesworth's seat) they found he would be defeated by a wide margin by an official Labour candidate but that support for the Conservatives would drop dramatically probably transferring to Wrigglesworth. In Bill Rogers constituency of Stockton he might just, according to M.O.R.I. poll remain as M.P. if he stands as a Social Democratic candidate (it would be a neck and neck situation) but he would probably lose it he stands in alliance with the Liberals (but result would be very close).

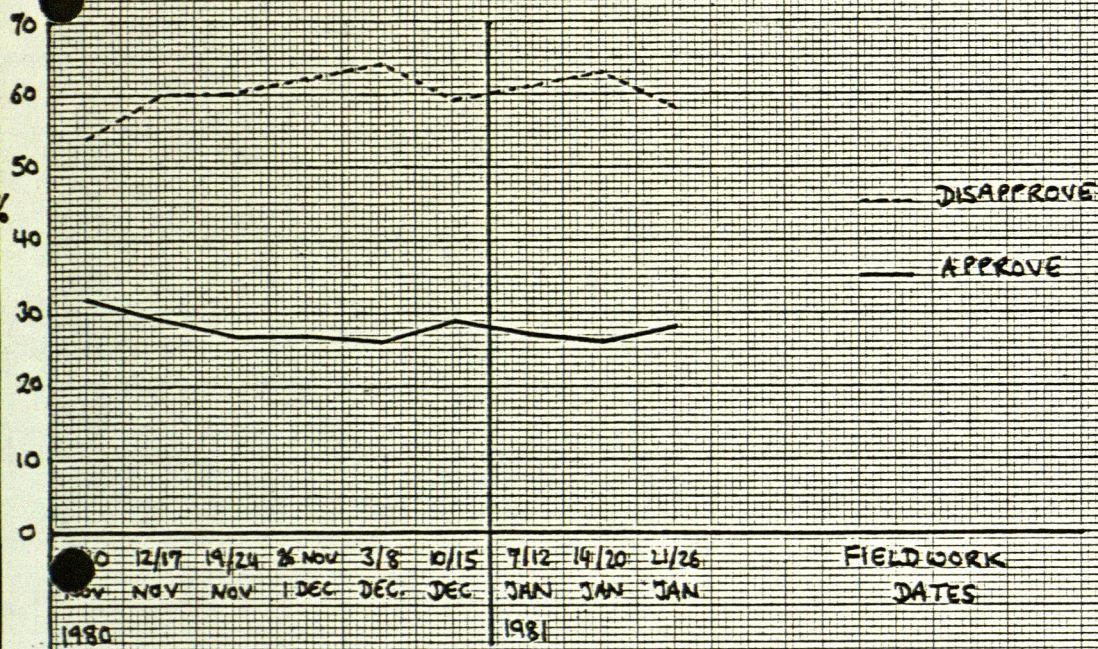
Conservative support would drop dramatically. In the third constituency of Middlesborough with Arthur Bottomley as member - M.O.R.I. found that the Social Democratic Party would gain at the expense of the Conservative vote..

	Voting in May 1979 General Election	Intention with S.D.P. and Liberal standing	Intention with S.D.P. and no Liberal standing
<u>STOCKTON (Rogers)</u>			
Labour	53	39	44
Conservative	36	14	14
Liberal	0	8	-
Social Democrat	-	39	42
Other	2	0	0
Labour majority	17	0	2
<u>THORNABY (Wrigglesworth)</u>			
Labour	51	51	54
Conservative	39	8	9
Liberal	9	5	-
Social Democrat	-	36	37
Other	1	0	0
Labour majority	12	15	17
<u>MIDDLESBOROUGH (Bottomley)</u>			
Labour	56	67	71
Conservative	31	10	10
Liberal	9	5	-
Social Democrat	-	18	19
Other	4	0	0
Labour majority	26	49	52

VOTING INTENTION



GOVERNMENT RECORD



POPULARITY OF POLITICAL LEADERS

