

10 December 1981

Dear Ken,

We agreed to talk again after Christmas & I promised to let you have a further note before you went away.

1. Of course I greatly appreciate Margaret's offer of the CPRS post & her evident confidence in my ability to do that job. My response is that I would be happy to do it provided I was reporting to her (I did, after all, come into Whitehall to serve her) and provided we are sure that the job (the $5\frac{1}{2}$ ^{year} strategy with all that entails) can be done from that position.
2. Our first thought was whether an approved head of CPRS could in effect work to me. On reflection I doubt it. He would either be working directly for Margaret or else in effect to Robert Armstrong. He would

(2)

be technically senior to me. If he was strong enough to do the job well, he'd not wish working under my direction. If he was prepared to do so, he'd probably be, and be seen to be, a weak head of CPRS. And he would take some time to play himself in & to think his way into a strategy of this kind. So it's either me as head of CPRS or a new head & me dropping out.

3. Can the CPRS job be political? This is the key question. Unless I am able to use CPRS (almost as if it were an embryo Prime Ministers Dept) to overcome the absurd & artificial distinctions between "governmental" & "political", then there is no point in Margaret appointing me to the job. I have no doubt the mandarins will object & will be supported by the more conventional colleagues.

But the arguments will be bogus. Civil servants work to design & implement Govt policies. If they are successful, do they not ultimately improve the Government's electoral prospects? Is this thus "political" & in breach of their code of conduct? If national recovery requires 2 terms, is not winning the election an essential policy objective & the other policies are to have time to work? Of course it's "political", but no more so than the Private Office briefing Margaret for Questions etc. I rehearse these arguments not because they're new but because we shall have to overcome them. A 5-year strategy has to weave into a seamless garment policies for this Parliament; & policies which will be featured in the Manifesto for the next Parliament. Communications (Francis

Lynn, Bernard Ingham, no less than Central Office) will be an integral part of that strategy. We won't be asking officials to canvass votes, but there will be objections just the same, questions in the House etc.

4. Margaret has, I understand, said she's prepared to override any numpus about my appointment. Will it also be possible for me thereafter to maintain links with C&S & C&S on policy work (on the basis that they too want to help the country)? To be seen with Cecil?!
5. Personally, I have no difficulty with any of this. Against the historic task of turning round the country, I don't give tuppence for the objections of, say, Armstrong & Wass. They are

(5)

part of the country's problem, not the solution
as we should be prepared to break their
conventions (ie "Fair rather than break the
rules") as was done in the war. After
all, Wilson bought in some 30 or more
advisers paid for by the tax-payer. Did
any one object then - or is it only Conservatives
who must not be political? (Perhaps
the answer is to appoint a labour supporter
à la Rothschild?)

6. If I head GRS I may want to break the
rules in other ways. For example, I may
not be ready to accept the people the system
offers me. I might want to seek out
different individuals (with the ^{best} advice of
Andrew Ingham & John Vericker, for example)

& make some changes.

- 7. I make the above points at same length as they are central. Which is it to be
 - Whitehall conduct ?
 - or - National results ?

I am totally uninterested in occupying a prestigious niche while being prevented from attempting real achievement.

- 8. I would like the Policy Unit to become part of CERS so we have a foot-hold in No 10 (ie both sides of the baize door). I do not want a new politically appointed head of Policy Unit unless he was chosen by me (< then of course approved by Margaret). I probably don't need such a person anyway,

but would like to think about that & be free to make proposals if it looks necessary.

9. As in paragraphs 5(i) & (j) of my paper to Margaret of 4 December, the Cabinet would have to know what we were doing, though some key parts of the strategy may need to be kept in the confidence of a small inner group to avoid ^{the risk of} giving away our "game-plan" accidentally. And Francis Pym would have to work to the strategy as regards day-to-day presentation.
10. All the foregoing still leaves the question of whether Margaret herself is convinced of the need for a 5 year strategy or is simply

saying she would like me to stay & would be agreeable to my taking on the C.P.S.

The latter is a perfectly rational position - & of course a gratifying indication of her confidence in me. But it is different. I only want to work in a way which directly contributes to:

- The re-thinking of a complete & credible 5 year programme which includes, contributes to, and requires -
- The return of a Conservative Government with a big majority, with Margaret as Prime Minister, enjoying increased freedom & authority to complete the tasks she wants to complete.

(9)

I cannot achieve that "mission" as head of
the Policy Unit (whether or not enlarged) or
as head of the CRES, operating in
the present mode.

Apologies for the length of this letter but
this seems the right time to clear our
minds - before any decision is made.

Yours ever

John

P.S. I have copied this to Ian Gow.

P.P.S. I have to say that Margaret's less than
enthusiastic response to the "Westwell week-end"
on strategy makes me feel doubtful about all this
She will have to permit or approve this kind of work.