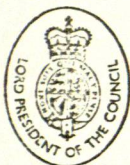


NOTE OF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING ON 3 MARCH 1982

Present: Prime Minister
Lord President of the Council
Home Secretary
Chairman of the Party
Secretary of State for Scotland
Chief Secretary
Secretary of State for Employment
Mr Wakeham (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for Industry)
Mr Cropper (Conservative Research Department)
Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary
Mr Lilley (Conservative Research Department)
Mr True (Conservative Research Department)
Mr Ward (Lord President of the Council's Office)

Law and Order

The Home Secretary introduced his paper on the presentation of Conservative policies on law and order. He said that the Government had fulfilled its electoral commitments, especially those concerned with improving the size of the police force, so that in many ways there was little left to do in major policy terms. The problem was that despite all the Government's efforts, the public perception was of a rising crime rate generally, a phenomenon at which the police themselves were confused. It was not helpful that there were arguments within the police service as to the most effective methods of policing. As to the incidence of crime, the most numerous offences could be broadly categorised as burglaries outside London and muggings - to which it had to be accepted that young West Indians made a disproportionate contribution - inside London. Crime statistics for the Metropolitan Police area, which were about to be released, were very bad. As he saw the position, what was now needed was a new police strategy and a new presentation of it. He was hopeful that research work now in hand would have fruitful results. There were no simple answers; corporal punishment was a dead end; and the public had to understand the complexity of the issues.



2. The following points were made in discussion:

a) Law and order was likely to be a key political issue at the next election, in some parts of the country overshadowing all other issues.

b) The presentational handling of crimes committed by young West Indians would need careful treatment, since it was important to foster good race relations.

c) The expanding prison population represented a very dangerous situation; it was increasing at an alarming rate and when it reached the figure of 45,000 it would be necessary to re-open the army camps. There was a major conflict of views between the penal reform lobby on the one hand and the general attitudes of the public, the police and the Conservative Party, on the other on the question of sentencing policy.

d) In Scotland the position was slightly different in that although muggings and similar offences were on the increase, the immigrant population was small. But in Scotland too the police, who had before recent manpower increases tended to blame manpower shortages for rising crime, were casting around for other reasons; notably what they saw as excessive leniency in sentencing policy, and in the granting of bail.

e) There was a risk of a dangerous alliance of interests between extreme leftwing organisations, elements of the immigrant communities and criminals. Civil disorders, particularly in London and Liverpool, could by no means be discounted in 1982 or 1983. It would be necessary both to have the operational capability to control any such disorders, and presentationally to deal convincingly with the causes. A particular problem was the disposition of the Government's opponents to lay the blame solely at the door of unemployment.



f) There was some evidence of increasing reluctance on the part of juries to convict in circumstances where conviction appeared reasonable. It might be there was a reluctance on the part of juries containing a strong immigrant element to convict their own kind. This was bad for police morale. There were good grounds for seeking to change the rules on the composition of juries although this would be controversial both inside and outside Parliament and could not easily be contemplated until public opinion was strongly in favour of reform.

g) The Conservative Party was always seen as the natural Party of law and order; but no government had it within its power to bring about a disciplined and orderly society. The Government must not be put in the position of taking the blame for every problem that arose in the law and order field, and it was necessary to emphasise the many other factors which had a bearing on the issue. Discipline at home and in the schools was a major factor; and generally fostering a greater sense of individual responsibility was both traditional to Conservative philosophy and relevant to standards of public behaviour. The Government should therefore seek at every opportunity to widen the law and order debate; both by pointing to those of its social policies which were also relevant, eg education, and to the fact that ultimately the public itself had to bear a share of responsibility for the preservation of law and order.

h) Another issue which needed more emphasis than it had been given in the paper was the position of the victims of crime.

i) In presenting the Government's policies on law and order it was important to keep in the public mind the Conservative Party's traditional respect for individual liberty.



3. The Committee agreed that the paper was a valuable and comprehensive analysis of the issues raised in the presentation of Government policy on law and order; and that the Government could justly claim that with the measures it had taken to increase police effectiveness, and the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill, it had fulfilled all its promises. But it had to be recognised that the trends in society were such that despite all the Government's efforts there could well be public perception of increasing crime. The public disappointment would be all the greater because of its identification of the Conservative Party with law and order. Presentationally it was important to stress all the positive steps the Government had taken. But it was equally important to stress the wider issues and to get over the message that a safe and orderly society could not be brought about by the Government alone and was the responsibility of every member of the public. The relevance of non-Home Office policies, eg those designed to promote better standards in schools, should constantly be stressed. At the same time it had to be recognised that in this field more than most particular problems were bound to arise unexpectedly which might cause great public concern, and to which the Government would have to respond as best it could.

4. It was agreed that the paper should be revised to take account of the points made in discussion. In particular it should highlight the Government's concern for the victims of crime. There should be some emphasis put on the virtue of personal ownership - a capital owning democracy - as a means of engendering a personal sense of responsibility. In the process of amendment, the first section of the paper should be revised so as to avoid giving the impression that the Government's presentational approach was based only on evidence from opinion polls, rather than on its deep concern for this issue. At an appropriate time there would be value in a major speech by the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary developing the themes set out in the paper and aimed in particular at widening the debate.



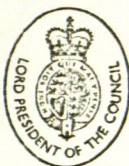
Economic presentation

5. The Committee considered a revised version of the paper on economic, employment and industrial policy presentation. The following points were made in discussion:

- a) The section on new industries should be expanded; Mr Wakeham would provide Mr Lilley with appropriate material.
- b) The paper should acknowledge that the private sector had indeed borne the brunt of the recession. More should be made of the point that to a large extent this was due to the demands of the public sector where the Government's efforts to achieve greater efficiency and economy should be highlighted. The closures of steel plants, for example, were tangible evidence of the Government's determination to slim down the public sector - which was the reverse side of the coin of unemployment - and the Government should not be shy about this. It should take as much credit as possible from its efforts to make the public sector face reality.
- c) The paper should now be revised to take account of these points, and to remedy certain errors of transposition. It should then be circulated as soon as possible to all Ministers in advance of the Budget. For this purpose, Section III should of course be detached, as appropriate only to the Liaison Committee.

Budget presentation

6. The Committee discussed measures to help presentation of the Budget. It was noted that the immediate follow up to the Budget announcement was primarily a matter for Treasury Ministers who had made appropriate arrangements. It would be valuable after the announcement to give a special Treasury briefing to selected back benchers; a personal briefing by the Chancellor had been arranged for Mr du Cann. It was important to present the Budget as a measure designed to help industry and thereby employment. It was noted that the Secretary of State for Industry was already preparing his presentation on these lines. Inevitably revalorisation of excise duties would be seen as offsetting any steps to index tax thresholds; this must not be allowed to distort press reporting, and the general public perception of overall Budget strategy. There had been much media comment on recent falls in oil prices; it was desirable to get over the message that these reductions were a benefit to industry which they could not expect to see duplicated in the Budget; industry could not have the same benefit twice.



7. It was agreed that there would be value in placing articles in the press by Ministers, with the aim of increasing public awareness of the Budget's purpose and its relevance to the economic strategy. It was also agreed that the anniversary of the letter by the 364 economists should be celebrated by an appropriate article by an economist sympathetic to Government policy; messrs Griffiths, Congdon and Harris were among the names mentioned. It was noted that Central Office had already arranged to give appropriate briefing material after the Budget to the Conservative candidate in Hillhead; it was further agreed that similar briefing would be required for all Conservative candidates in the local elections. It was noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was appearing on 'Question Time' in the week of the Budget; and it was agreed that whichever back bencher was to appear on 'Any Questions' should be properly briefed on Budget matters before the programme.

Other business

8. In considering topics for the weekend which the Government might wish to emphasise, it was agreed that Budget speculation would overshadow everything else. It was noted that the Central Office briefing note was to be based on the Prime Minister's recent speech to the EEF. It would be desirable for the note to set recent oil price reductions in their proper context, as good news for industry and world trade and virtually equivalent to a tax reduction for industry.

9. It would be necessary for the Prime Minister, the Lord President and the Chairman of the Party to meet at 11.00 am the day after the Budget to review presentational arrangements. The next full meeting of the Committee would be deferred until Wednesday 17 March at 11.00 am, when the main item of business would be Mr Stanley's paper on housing policy.

PRESENTATION OF POLICY: HANDLING THE BUDGET

The Treasury has devoted considerable trouble to ensuring as good as possible a reception to each Budget right from the start in 1979. One of the most important aspects of this is the briefing of the Party, particularly backbenchers. Although the techniques used are not in any way novel, an account of them may be of interest in itself and, perhaps more important, may suggest that similar exercises could be undertaken more often in relation to other matters.

The Budget obviously poses many special problems. It embraces several areas of economic policy, a multitude of specific decisions of interest to the country at large or to specialists in the City. The nature of the immediate response it secures is itself a major concern. The accompanying documents - Red Book, Public Spending White Paper and so on - are difficult to digest quickly or, a fortiori, to interpret politically. The politics of what is being done or proposed is often controversial or obscure unless guidance is offered at the same time. Clearly the Budget speech itself enables the Chancellor to do a good deal to set the scene. But it cannot achieve the instant enlightenment needed by, eg, the 50-60 MPs who broadcast this year on the same evening, or many of those who spoke in the Budget debates.

A standard Research Department Brief cannot be prepared in the normal way because of Budget secrecy. The standard official documents cannot be made political enough because of the conventions which, properly enough, determine how they should be written.

Those with very particular interests which they have been pressing on the Government will not normally be given the special treatment needed to reassure them in the welter of confusion which breaks out when the Chancellor sits down.

To get round all this, the following steps were taken:

(1) The key points of the Budget were summarised in a one page note designed to help all those appearing on radio or TV.

(2) A full political brief on the Budget was prepared by Treasury special advisers. This brief and the key points were made available to all those MPs going on radio or TV on Tuesday, and through the Whips' office in the usual way.

(3) A special short note on the aspects of the Budget most relevant to Scotland was made available to all Scottish MPs directly after the Budget speech.

(4) Briefing on policy towards the charities was made available on a restricted basis to a few senior backbenchers.

(5) Special steps were taken to explain to Mr Grylls why his Study Group's proposals were not being adopted /Including a personal letter from the Chancellor which was handed to him at the end of the speech⁷.

It would be absurd to attribute the Budget's reception to these measures. But it is clear from the response that they were much welcomed, that they helped to ensure a clear consistent response from the Party, and that they may have removed unfounded anxieties about particular issues from a number of minds.

The lesson all this suggests is the advantages to be derived from an active rather than passive approach. Many backbenchers, perhaps the majority, are unlikely to collect let alone study the routine CRD brief which is typically made available in the Whips' office. If they are to be briefed quickly and well and in large numbers, some kind of direct "mail-shot" is essential. Provided it is not undertaken too often and is restricted to major issues, it could help improve the understanding and presentation of policy to a useful extent. Precisely how it is best undertaken is an important but secondary matter. Where Departments have the resources (in particular a special adviser), they may be able to do what is necessary themselves with the assistance of the Whips. In

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other circumstances Central Office may be able to deal with much of the logistics. In both cases consultation with the Whips' office is essential and invaluable.

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