

PRIME MINISTER

Note of a Meeting of the 1922 Committee held at 6 pm on Thursday
31st January 1980

1. There were about 100 backbenchers present - there was only a One Line Whip, and it was Thursday evening.
2. Peter's speech, which was delivered with all his old fire and style, was as follows:-
 - (a) We won on 3rd May in 1979 for two main reasons:-
 - (i) first time voters supported us to an unexpected degree.
 - (ii) there was a swing to us of 8½% among all Trade Unionists, and a particularly marked swing to us from skilled and unskilled workers and their wives.
 - (b) We must not panic when we receive letters of complaint from those who said ~~we~~ they have voted Conservative all their lives, but would never do so again. He had seen it all before. The important thing was to remain resolute, not to apologise, and to send a reasoned explanation of Government policy.
 - (c) The situation in the West and in the United Kingdom had come about because of years of weakness both abroad and at home. Time would be need to halve and then to reverse the long years of decline.
 - (d) There was no future in seeking to reverse or to water down the policies on which we were elected. It was much better to take tough action now. If we weaken now we will never get things right.
 - (e) Turning to Trade Unions, he said that Denning was one of the greatest Judges the country had ever known, but he was likely to be reversed in the House of Lords. If that happened it would be interpreted by many Trade Union Leaders as a licence to strike. Indignation against the abuse of Trade Union power was mounting although it had not reached the same pitch as in the winter of last year.

Any reforms which we made must be with the support of public opinion. Our objective must be that the Unions should not usurp the power of Government and Parliament to govern the country. Nevertheless, the timing of any changes in the Employment Bill, was a matter of the most delicate political judgement, and we must leave that judgement to the Cabinet.
 - (f) We will have a rough time in the Local Elections in May. Nevertheless, he was determined to mobilise the full resources of Central Office and to put up "a hell of a fight".

- (g) The presentation of the gas price increases had been "a shambles". He will do his best to ensure that we learn from our mistakes. (This was greeted with prolonged applause).
- (h) He had the finest team at Central Office and Research Department.
- (i) He would welcome increased contact between himself and Central Office on the one hand and the Parliamentary Party on the other. He said that he would welcome greatly invitations to address the Parliamentary regional groups of MPs.

3. Questions

- (a) Ivan Lawrence said that we were not yet doing enough about the reform of Trade Union Law. We really must have the courage to do what in our hearts we knew needed to be done, and we must not flinch from that. - "the point is well taken".
- (b) Cyril Townsend said that he had always been opposed to the moving of Research Department to Central Office, and asked for an assurance that Research Department would keep its own identity. - "Research Department will certainly keep its own identity, although I am not sure that Central Office will!" Research Department is making a wide contribution to many aspects of the work at Central Office despite the initial protests; its quality is very high.
- (c) Hugh Fraser said that many steel workers did not agree with their union leaders nor with our policy for union reform, which is too weak. We must have the courage to make a new job of this now. We cannot go to the country in four years time with a trade union policy which has failed. - "I agree that we will need to have the courage to do what we know is right."
- (d) Winston Churchill commented that the television studio at 32 Smith Square was no longer available, but that many Conservative Members of Parliament had valued the opportunity of having television training. - "There is no longer a television studio at Central Office. It is cheaper and better to have training facilities elsewhere. If anyone would like television training let me know and I will arrange it."

4. Generally speaking, on the issue of trade union(reform) law Peter's reference in his speech, to the fact that "the timing of any changes in the Employment Bill was a matter of the most delicate political judgement" was interpreted by many as lining him up with the doves rather than with the hawks. A contrary impression was given by his replies to the questions from Ivan Lawrence and Hugh Fraser.

5. This view that there had been an inconsistency between the ~~many~~ speech and the replies to questions was expressed by Peter Morrison and John MacGregor (with whom I dined) and by Edward Du Cann who telephoned to say just this this morning.

6. John MacGregor is a Whip on the Employment Committee. Despite his Heathite background, he has been moving steadily to the right. He believes, very strongly, that we should amend the Employment Bill so as to:-

i. reverse McShane

b. to remove immunities from the unions so far as their funds are concerned.

7. Although I am a very staunch admirer of Peter, I had the impression, simply from looking at faces during his speech, that some of our younger members did not appreciate the worth and value of the man.