

Prime Minister.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Chief Whip warned you that Mr
Ponsonby's mind was turning to the need for
a change, though he did not mention his
ambitions with regard to a seat in the Cabinet!
If you think X is a starter, do you want
to discuss with the Chairman?
Do you want to have a talk with
Mr Ponsonby himself?

16th December, 1980

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My dear Margaret,

I am inflicting this letter on you, as I have become increasingly worried recently by the conclusion that I am not serving the Government as well as I should, and I have decided to set down a few thoughts, so that you might bear my position in mind if and when you want to carry out a re-shuffle.

Basically, I feel I ought to leave D.H.S.S. before long for these reasons:

(A) My state of health: I have hyper-tension, diagnosed just over a year ago. It is controlled by medication, but this has the effect of slowing me down - indeed it is meant to do so - and I cannot undertake the very long hours which are worked by most of my colleagues. I can still work harder and longer than the average man of my age, but I cannot, for instance, do all-night sittings.

(B) In the long term I am only interested in being a Minister if it involves substantial power and responsibility. If I were stimulated by Cabinet-level responsibilities I could probably drive myself into harder work despite my health problems. As it is I become very depressed at being only an observer of major events. Probably anyone who has served in a Cabinet would find it difficult to adjust to more junior office.

(C) The work in D.H.S.S. seems to me profoundly boring. I am sure we have the longest memoranda in Whitehall and the most niggling decisions.

(D) I am probably the wrong person to be Minister for the Disabled during the International Year of Disabled People. I have told the disablement lobby too many home truths about the economic situation. They consider me unsympathetic, which is not true, but the mud sticks (there are a number of committed socialists in that lobby anxious to discredit me for political reasons).

I could, of course, simply offer you my resignation on "health grounds" or "personal grounds" but I fear that this might be interpreted as representing some dissent on policy. I do not want to give that impression. I support the general trend of Government policy - indeed I would have preferred to see a tougher line on spending cuts and T.U. legislation, but I fear that some Press comment would portray a resignation as a throwback to my Labour past.

Meanwhile



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Meanwhile, I am generally quite effective, and I am in considerable demand, as a speaker at Conservative functions around the country, including major Area Conferences. Whatever else happens, I want to continue to help in this way. Were I simply to withdraw to the backbenches I might be less in demand. In my constituency they might also feel let down.

It may be that I should simply "soldier on" and I will do this if you say so. Alternatively, you might like to consider:

(1) A transfer within the Government: obviously I would like to serve in the Cabinet, but, if that is not on, a sideways move into a Department more in the mainstream of the international or economic problems facing Britain.

(2) A role in the Party, rather than the Government: this might well be the best answer, as my strength lies in broad-brush political arguments rather than in mastery of detail. Is there scope for my appointment as a Vice Chairman of the Party overseeing -

(a) our attack on socialism in all its forms, including any new groupings in the "centre" (in particular I think I can be effective in describing to industrialists and businessmen the real dangers of a Michael Foot administration);

(b) the growth of the C.T.U. and, more broadly, the development of a strategy to encourage the de-politicisation of the unions;

(c) our appeal to potential converts from Labour and to groups who have traditionally supported Labour - trade unionists, Council tenants, black people, etc.

In that event, I should try to find one or more non-executive directorships, or consultancies, to supplement my Parliamentary salary. I could then do a great deal of speaking/writing/broadcasting on behalf of the Conservative Party, particularly on the themes mentioned above. My health would, I believe, allow me to work quite hard at all this, as I would be better able to pace myself if I were freed from the pressures of Departmental work.

Needless



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Needless to say, I should welcome a discussion with you at any time you wish, but I felt it might be helpful to set out the problem on paper.

Very best wishes for Christmas and 1981.

Yours ever,
Reg
Reg Prentice

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister.