

REPORT OF A MEETING. 5.11.75

Those present: N. Lamont MP, Miss Patricia Hodgson (Chairman of the Bow Group), Norman Strauss, Frank Johnston (Telegraph), Simon Webley, John Hoskyns, Terry Price, Alfred Sherman, Patricia Kirwan.

General notes of discussion

Norman Strauss saw the future of the group on two levels:-

1. generating new ideas. Representing an open minded appreciation of the current power structure and authority. Producing a workable new data programme. The group would contain a cross section of people: marketing/communication specialist, MP, business/city, journalist, scientific.
2. a multi-level group to interpret and check the communication feasibility of the data produced by group 1. To include representatives of Sun/Mirror readerships. KJ and MT would be encouraged to attend these meetings as observers.

Thereafter, one should return to the beginning, to learn from and modify the results of "test marketing campaign" at stage 1.

AS would seek out suitable MPs, who should be in the mould of traditional politicians. Names mentioned were John Moore, Nick Winterton, Tim Sainsbury, Michael Latham, John Biffen and David Mitchell. He would also review the Chairman of the various policy making committees.

Norman Strauss would investigate journalists. Names mentioned were Colin Welch, John Cole (Observer), Jo Regaly (to try out ideas on) Chris Dunkley (TV correspondent of FT), Bob Finnigan (BBC World Service) John Decker (BBC Money Programme). He would meet and discuss this with Frank Johnston.

It was generally agreed that assuming a conservative government had won an election, the main problems would be:

1. to move the country back to prosperity and market place freedom without ruling out completely the possibility of the need for intervention at some stage.
2. create a climate in which people would be happy to work again and create a situation where moderates would be in a position to refute the left wing.

The future of Britain, at present, was bleak, it was a sad investment area, people were apathetic towards the capitalist society in general. It was essential to break that apathy to win confidence. One way to start would be to emulate Labour by debating policies (not slogans) publicly - not relying on a similar group of people to come up with their personal view. Using a marketing analogy, the question was how to get a share and understanding of peoples' minds and "purchasing behaviour". It is impossible to do it mathematically, but possibly by producing a host of word variables which would be discussed at length in a group situation (as proposed here), using people whose minds are in tune with the public and the market place. The present normal party policy generating procedure of one person coming up with an idea was not the answer.

2.

The Conservative party must generate policies which are acceptable to the electorate and enable the Party to

- a. win an election
- b. govern afterwards.

It was essential that there be some feed-back with the electorate. Policy makers must know how fast they can progress in what direction, what directions the electorate are moving in, and fit the two together. As the electorate moves, the Party can move one step further, but it cannot impose ideas on people unless they wish it, nor can they fly in the face of current electorate psychology.

Psychologically, the party needs to produce data (product/policy) which is new or believed to be new. It was emphasised that psychological exhortation is not enough, nor is it possible or advisable to re-present existing policies/products.

The electorate is looking for new, relevant data. Unless policies are different and fit latent public needs now coming to the surface, they will fail.

It was important when considering feedback to realise that policies impinge on popular opinion in three ways:

1. the perceived popularity or unpopularity of the policy itself.
2. the results as they are or are perceived to be.
3. the extent to which the results of a policy create additional demand either in the direction of original policies or counter to them.

Policies can be popular in themselves but the results undesired; they can be effective and the result can be to press on further on the same lines, OR they can lead to demand for actions which, though not consciously designed to reverse the effects of the policy, effectively do so. For example, as in personal taxation which to some extent stems from a desire for social services, the cry goes up once taxes have reached a certain point.

General points

Bureaucracy which is permitted to flourish in a power situation becomes counter productive. It becomes self sustaining and generating, applying the law without precision and discipline.

Unions

We must not attack union structure, but leave it strictly alone. As a party and when in government, we must persuade people to be more responsible within their own interest groups: at work, in local activities, in church, football etc. Unions should come into this category. TP felt it would be necessary to have a minimum entrenched in law - i.e. legislation for union elections.