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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN DAVID CROUCH MP AND SIR ROBIN DAY -
WORLD AT ONE, 8 DECEMBER

- RD: One of those present at the private meeting of Tory dissidents last night was Mr. David Crouch, MP for Canterbury. I asked Mr. Crouch whether this meeting came to any collective decision or was merely an exchange of views on when and how to rebel?
- DC: Some Conservative Members feel very very strongly that a marker has to be put down by abstaining on the debate this afternoon.
- RD: Which is about the Government's package and public spending policy?
- DC: That's right, on the public expenditure announced last week by Geoffrey Howe. Others have taken the view that this is not the moment for making it difficult for the Chancellor, more difficult than it already is. I happen to be in that latter group.
- RD: If this isn't the moment to make it difficult for the Chancellor when will be because if you feel strongly that his policies are wrong should you not act?
- DC: In a way yes. And I've thought a great deal about this and as I see it what he did last week was to announce a part budget. It's an expenditure statement, it's not a whole budget it's not even a mini budget, it's an expenditure statement. The budget follows in the Spring and I think that what we've got to do now if we feel that what he's doing is not entirely right is to warn him of what we want done by the Spring in the Budget.
- RD: And what would that be in essence?
- DC: Well first of all I think he's gone a long way to helping those of us that feel that there had to be some relief to the economy and he's done this in a certain degree by extending the

DC (cont) Government spending by five billion. I mean people can argue that's just a paper figure but nevertheless he has moved in the direction I wanted. What he hasn't done is to take some of the burdens off industry and I hope and I would be very very disappointed if he didn't do that in the Budget.

RD: You agree therefore with Mr. Christopher Patten in today's Times that the Budget must contain a package to revive industry

DC: Absolutely.

RD: And are you prepared to abstain or vote against that if it is not forthcoming?

DC: I think if we do not take the burden off industry which we can do by means of a removal of part of wholly of the national insurance surcharge which we carry in this country and other countries don't carry, we will be holding back industry at a time when it wants to catch the wave of expansion that can begin.

RD: Mr. Crouch, how many Tory MPs were at this private meeting?

DC: About two dozen.

RD: And how many more do you think are sympathetic to the general view of that two dozen?

DC: You could perhaps double the figure.

RD: So about fifty.

DC: I think it's as much as that but you see there are varying degrees of agreement or disagreement and there is another element that I must mention to you that many of us are very worried about and that is that our tough economic policies to reduce inflation to make British industry more competitive have had an unfortunate fall-out and that is of course unemployment. As you become more competitive it means you

DC (cont) work with fewer people, become more productive and it means people are on the dole queue.

RD: Who was in the Chair at this meeting?

DC: Sir Ian Gilmour played a prominent part.

RD: And do you think that these two dozen and perhaps the other two dozen who are waiting to see what happens perhaps will go as far as voting against the Government at some stage?

DC: Not today.

RD: But in the coming months?

DC: I do detect that there is a real movement in the Conservative Party now to say ... they go back to their Constituencies, we all do. The message we're getting in our Constituencies is yes the Government's done a good thing in controlling inflation but and the but is when are we going to see an expansion of industry and a mopping up of unemployment and the creation of more jobs. Even if that is only a few hundred thousand we don't expect to reduce it by millions.

RD: But the point I put to you Mr. Crouch is whether you and some of these Tory dissidents would go as far as voting against the Government in the coming months?

DC: That is a real possibility now ...

RD: So that is in effect a threat of the Government being defeated because if 25 or more Tory MPs voted against the Government the Government would lose its overall majority would it not?

DC: You're heading me into very conjectural ground Robin and I do not believe as many as 24 would vote against the Government but as many as 24 or more will between now and the Budget be making very strong representations to the Chancellor and to

DC (cont) the Government and the Prime Minister that really we must
begin to give hope to British industry and encouragement.

RD: Mr. David Crouch, Tory MP.