

SECRET

FUTURE PROGRAMME FOR THE LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Liaison Committee performed a very useful function in the eighteen months prior to the recent General Election. It is worth considering how it might be adapted to a new situation.

The choice of June 9th for the General Election has been totally vindicated by a splendid result. But it has to be recognised that the final stages of preparation were rather hurried. The Manifesto was a readable and sensible document, but it did not give much away in terms of detailed policy commitments for the new administration. There was little time for detailed consideration of the reports of the 1982/83 Policy Groups. We therefore find ourselves in a position to design - at leisure, but not at too much leisure - a programme of action for the new administration.

The Liaison Committee could assist in this phase of the new Government's work by identifying and analysing certain broad policy areas which are capable of yielding high political returns in 1988. Some examples are appended.

Some of the topics in the Appendix relate to an individual department of state. Most of them are cross-departmental. Some of them may already be the subject of ministerial and/or official enquiry. Most of them would probably benefit from an examination by Ministers, working in conjunction with small groups drawn from the ranks of Policy Unit, Special Advisers and CRD. And, possibly, in the style of the nine 1982/83 Policy Groups, with the help of outside experts and party members.

Membership of the Liaison Committee could be reviewed by the Prime Minister in the light of new ministerial appointments, and of the transfer of the CPRS function to the Policy Unit. Ministers having departmental interest in matters under discussion would, as hitherto, be invited to attend and speak.

This phase of the Liaison Committee could last through to 1985 or 1986, at which point it might be appropriate to switch back to the modus operandi of 1981-83.

The advantages of the Liaison Committee for all these purposes are:

- i) leisurely, but disciplined, tempo
- ii) absence of pressure for immediate decisions
- iii) flexibility of membership

SECURITY

There remains the vexed question of security (leaks) which dogged the work of the CPRS. This is a sad and intractable problem, for by giving way to fears about premature publicity we may stultify the discussion of radical ideas altogether.

This issue is, in fact, a crucial challenge to governments in a xerographic age and the present Government would do well to try and crack it. Could not the Research Department be allowed to think - and write - the unthinkable? We are not an organ of government; we do not operate on government premises nor do we use government pencils; we are not even answerable to one particular organ of the Conservative Party.

Radical ideas such as these can be safely discussed within bodies such as the CPS, Adam Smith Institute, IEA. Indeed they are, all the time. The question is, how to bring them forward for discussion by the Party and the Government without everybody saying they have already become part of Party of Government thinking? The answer is probably to put them forward in such profusion as to look ridiculous - rather as the Adam Smith Institute has done with its Omega Project. And then for the Prime Minister to let discussion of some go on longer than others.

THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is: to take the radical ideas circulating in the outside world, and bring them into discussion in the Cabinet Room via the medium of papers written in the offices of the Research Department and presented to members of the Liaison Committee at an irregular series of meetings held over the first year or two of the new administration.


PETER CROPPER
25th July 1983

APPENDIX

Wider Ownership: the extension of private ownership into personal pensions, and into direct ownership of quoted investments by reducing the cost of securities dealing.

Prevention of theft: an attack on household burglary by breaking into the rings that exist for disposal of stolen property, by fiscal encouragement of electronic security devices and by more effective policing.

London's road congestion: to break the back of London's traffic problem by making sweeping improvements in the system of radial roads and in Central London parking.

Professional Monopolies: to devise means of speeding up and simplifying the process of house transfer; to reduce the cost of dealing in small parcels of securities.

Revival of a Rented Sector in Housing: to consider more ways of circumventing the political obstacles to revival of a private rented housing sector.

Simplification of the Tax and Social Security Systems: to question whether it is inevitable that reform of the tax and social security jungle must wait until the Inland Revenue computerised system is operating at the end of the decade.

Increased investment in job creating industry: to examine the reasons for the slump in the return on capital, to consider the conditions for revival and to consider how the big international corporations might be encouraged to step up their industrial and manufacturing investment in the UK.

Improved status of careers in industry: to examine the progress made in recent years in improving the status of careers in engineering and manufacturing industry, relative to careers in the professions.

Development of bodies such as Chambers of Commerce: to examine the relevance of continental experience, of private sector initiative in fostering enterprise, vocational training and job creation, and to consider the scope for encouragement of bodies such as Chambers of Commerce.

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