

Briefing Note

No. 33
14.10.82.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONFERENCE SPEECH

In her address to the Conservative Conference at Brighton on 8th October, the Prime Minister began by praising those who had fought in the Falkland Islands: "The spirit of the South Atlantic was the spirit of Britain at her best. Those who fought had brought a renewed sense of pride and self respect to our country ... If this is tomorrow's generation, Britain has little to fear in the years to come."

Disarmament

The Prime Minister referred to an issue transcending party politics - nuclear weapons: "This Government will give the highest priority to our national defence, both conventional and nuclear." To disarm unilaterally would be to renege on the first duty of a British Government - the defence of the realm. She reaffirmed that she wanted to see both nuclear and conventional disarmament, but pointed out: "Aggressors attack because they think they are going to win, and they are more likely to attack the weak than the strong." The catalogue of Soviet aggression - Hungary, the Berlin Wall, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and the threats to Poland - spoke for itself.

In the light of the extreme resolutions passed by the Labour Conference at Blackpool - on unilateralism, the EEC and nationalisation - she declared: "There must be millions of Labour supporters who are thoroughly disheartened by what they saw at Blackpool last week. I say to them: Forget about the Militant Tendency - come over and join the Tory Tendency."

EEC

Though our contribution to the EEC budget was too large, withdrawal from the Community would damage the interests of the British people: "Even the threat of withdrawing destroys jobs. Firms that invest in the Common Market often decide to come to Britain. Labour's threat to withdraw makes companies hesitate and look elsewhere. That Labour threat is losing us jobs now."

Inflation

The Prime Minister explained the economic circumstances that had brought recession and unemployment throughout the world: "For more than a decade savers in America and Europe have been systematically robbed by the steady erosion of their savings and for more than a decade the ranks of the unemployed have swollen in the wake of inflation." In Britain, as elsewhere "the long hard job of ringing inflation out of the system" had begun. The Government was sticking to its policy. When Britain recently went to the IMF, it went as a nation giving help to others, unlike Mr. Callaghan's Government in 1976. "No longer shall we have two nations, those who profit from inflation, and those who lose by it. Mrs. Thatcher added "We are not a one generation party. We do not intend to let Britain become a one generation society."

Unemployment and Strikes

Mrs. Thatcher pointed out that a major contributory factor to unemployment was Britain's strike record. Even public service strikes, like the present NHS dispute, did harm to Britain's reputation. "When I travel overseas, time and again they say to me "You have so many strikes.

If it were not for that we would give you more contracts, we would invest in Britain'. In vain do I say that private industry has few strikes. The fact is that the much publicised disruptions in the public sector do Britain down every time.... We cannot say it too often - 'strikes lose jobs'."

Mrs. Thatcher declared that: "To-day's unemployed are the victims of yesterday's mistakes ... If we are to beat unemployment, and we must, we have to do it together. The Government are getting inflation down, interest rates down, reforming trade union law, cutting regulations and removing restrictions. The rest is up to industry, the workforce and management in partnership."

Privatisation

The Prime Minister said: "We are only in our first term. But already we have done more to roll back the frontiers of Socialism than any previous Conservative Government."

National Health Service

"We have a duty to make sure that every penny is properly spent, and that is why we are setting up a team to examine the use of manpower in the National Health Service ... It is part of our duty towards the taxpayer. Of course we welcome the growth of private health insurance. There is no contradiction between that and supporting the National Health Service. It brings in more money, it helps reduce the waiting lists, and it stimulates new treatments and techniques. But let me make one thing absolutely clear. The National Health Service is safe with us."

Britain's New "Freeholders"

Mrs. Thatcher referred to the success of most local councils in selling council houses, a total of 370,000, including new town and housing association homes, since the Government came to power: "Half a million more people will now live and grow up as freeholders with a real stake in the country, and with something to pass on to their children. There is no prouder word in our history than 'freeholder'."

Education

The Prime Minister said that for the first time for years, a Government was paying attention not only to school organisation, but to the curriculum: "not just to the buildings, but to what is taught inside them."

Constancy and Resolve

The Prime Minister concluded: "People in Britain have grown to understand that this Government will make no false promises, nor will it fail in its resolve. How can the Government urge the people to save and to build for tomorrow if the people know that same Government is willing to bend and trim for the sake of votes to-day? ... Nothing could be more damaging to our prospects as a nation than for this Government to throw away the reputation it has earned for constancy and resolve. It would throw away three years of hard-won achievement."

"On what moral basis would we be entitled to ask for the nation's support next time? ... We will not disguise our purpose, nor betray our principles. We will do what must be done. We will tell the people the truth, and the people will be our judge."

DJN/TS/JLS