

24 January 1983

Policy Unit

PRIME MINISTER

SPEECHES - THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE RUN-UP

Cecil and Ian have told me that you would like me to take charge of the speechwriting team during the General Election campaign.

I should be very glad to do this.

I will offer some suggestions in due course as to who else should take part.

I understand that the general feeling so far is that there is a lot to be said for having one basic speech into which we insert every time a chunk of 500-700 words on the issue of the day for the media to pick up.

This is a tried and proven technique. Callaghan and Reagan both used it to considerable success. If the speech hits the right note, it is worth repeating. And where it is off-key, we change it as we go along.

The Run-Up

The only drawback is that the people covering the campaign might begin to feel that the material is a bit thin. "It's the same old speech; why doesn't he/she ever really get down to discussing X or Y?"

The best way to counter this is to use the run-up to the Election, as Wilson did in 1963-64, to build up a solid impression by a series of major speeches focussed on specific issues. Those who want to ask about X or Y can then be referred back to the "Cardiff speech" or the "Sheffield lecture".

I suggest, therefore, that we should try and target your speeches over the next 6 months or so more on specific issues than we have done in the past. For example, the Glasgow speech (which we are working on now) lends itself naturally to "Industrial Recovery and the depressed regions". The Women's Conference speech could concentrate on the Family and the Individual. The speech to the

Young Conservatives could tackle the subjects of Law and Order and of Immigration. And so on. You would still be able to leave some engagements free for general speeches.

If you think this approach is worth pursuing, would you like a quick meeting to allocate the topics?

The Nuclear Weapons Issue

One obvious candidate for an issue-targeted speech is nuclear disarmament. There is a flurry of articles and opinion polls on this topic at the moment.

The immediate instinct is to assume that all this public attention means that we ought to make the counter-attack one of our major Election issues.

I wonder whether this assumption is entirely correct. The opinion polls show two things quite clearly:

1. The public is strongly opposed to unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain, perhaps more strongly than ever.
2. But public opinion is drifting against the stationing of American nuclear weapons on British soil, specifically against Cruise. This is a reflection not so much of growing anti-nuclear feeling, but of growing anti-American feeling. President Reagan's judgment is increasingly distrusted.

I doubt whether we in Britain can reverse this trend off our own bat.

But any high-profile campaign would have to involve saying loudly and clearly: "We trust the Americans absolutely and wholeheartedly".

A low-profile campaign, on the other hand, would merely take the line: "We continue to play our part in the Western Alliance on lines which have kept world peace for 30 years". We refuse to admit that there have been any great changes in the balance of terror or in the arguments about nuclear weapons; all we are doing is keeping our armoury up-to-date.

We refuse to accept Michael Foot's definition of the nuclear issue as The Great Issue of our times. In other words, we hold our

own ground and refuse to be dragged onto their ground as far as possible.

Naturally, Michael Heseltine should keep up his end of the argument. Naturally, you should continue to allot due space in your speeches (and in the Party Manifesto) to the subject. But we would not obediently accept our opponents' order of priorities.

I therefore suggest that you should not devote disproportionate attention to this issue, and that the Government's attitude should be "deterrence as usual".

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