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Release Time:

RT HON NORMAN ST JOHN-STEVAS MP

20.00 HOURS/SATURDAY
7TH MAY 1983.

311/83

Extract of a speech by the Rt Hon Norman St John-Stevas MP (Chelmsford) to the Chelmsford Constituency Conservative Association at Goat Hall, Chelmsford, on Saturday 7th May 1983.

ALL PARTS OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY URGED TO UNITE BEHIND MRS THATCHER.

"A June General Election now looks more likely than not and while local elections results are always inconclusive as regards general elections, the present results certainly put no further obstacle in the way of an early election.

I am confident that we will win the General Election whenever it comes but it is not going to be the cakewalk that some imagine. The Alliance vote while not big enough to enable them to form a government looks numerous enough to create a risk of a Labour government by default. Alliance voters could well let in an extreme left wing government. The Alliance "Prime Minister Designate" is accordingly not Mr Roy Jenkins but Mr Michael Foot.

Against this danger the Tory secret weapon as always is loyalty. We have differences of opinion over economic policy within the party but it has never been disfigured by the sort of vicious personal infighting that is characteristic of Labour. We are a broad Church not a sect and within the spacious framework of Tory principles there is always room for differences of emphasis. What is important now is to stress what unites our party. I hope that all shades of opinions within the party, dry, wet, of merely damp will now rally in support of Mrs Thatcher. Any differences there have been in the past belong there and that is where we should leave them.

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What the country is asking for is strong and resolute leadership. That is Mrs Thatcher's major electoral appeal. Abroad she has restored Britain's place in the world to a height not seen since the days of Sir Winston Churchill. But she needs a united party behind her to back her up. During the election, whenever it comes I will be working wholeheartedly for her both in my constituency and elsewhere in the country.

I hope we will set out our policy in a broad and comprehensive manifesto. We must draw on the whole of the Tory tradition in our support. We must stress both our determination to encourage individual effort and enterprise and our concern for the social fabric. As Disraeli knew well the Tory party is a national party or it is nothing.

A primary concern should be to get unemployment down. It is remarkable that in the West Midlands in cities such as Birmingham where unemployment is at alarming levels that Conservatives can retain the confidence of the electorate. We must come forward with further measures to help the young unemployed. To have a first experience of life after school, of a dole queue, at a time when one is most hopeful and has so much to give is tragic. We must offer the next generation hope for the future. We have had the hard slog, now in our second term let us turn to positive measures for getting British industry expanding and going once again. There is a real economic recovery taking place: this is not a false dawn but it is a beginning not an end. We must encourage the young shoots of recovery so that they grow stronger.

So the future for the Tory party looks bright. Provided we give our united and enthusiastic support to the Prime Minister we shall establish a post war record for our party of the incumbent Premier gaining a second term.

End.