



## 10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

I attach two alternative press briefs in the event of a delayed (A) or early (B) announcement. In practice what we could say today, in advance of an Audience of The Queen, would not differ much at all.

We would have to cope with the situation by creating a particular impression in the course of our briefing.

8 May 1983

PRIME MINISTER

Chequers - Press Announcement

This note is written in advance of your talks and is designed to concentrate minds on the issue of presentation.

Background

The Sunday press has done nothing to suggest that you would be wrong to go to the country in June - quite the reverse.

The media's view is that the only question about a June election is when - June 9 or 23 (16 or 30 are poor bets).

If there is no announcement this week - and I have led the media not to expect one - that will rule out June 9. Therefore, if nothing done to damp down election fever this week, June 23 will become a racing certainty.

Presentation

There are three main objectives in any guidance given today:

- i. To be as open (as little hole in the cornerish) as possible;
- ii. To avoid if possible charges of dithering, teasing or cutting and running - ie to appear resolute;
- iii. To turn prospective delay in an announcement to good account.

The attached draft speaking note for Press Officers, plus the Q&A brief, seeks to achieve this.

DRAFT SPEAKING NOTE

The Prime Minister met a group of Cabinet colleagues and political officials at Chequers today to take stock of the situation as the Government enters its fifth year.

Those present included the Home Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord President, Chancellor of the Duchy and the Chairman of the Party, Secretary of State for Employment and the Chief Whip.

Mr Ian Gow, the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Secretary was also present along with Mr. David Wolfson, Head of the Political Office at No.10, Ferdinand Mount, Head of the No.10 Policy Unit and Mr. Anthony Shrimpsley, Director of Information, CCO.

The talks began before lunch and continued afterwards.

Earlier in the day the Prime Minister had recorded a broadcast for BBC Radio 4's programme "World this Weekend". In it she said she would decide when there was to be an election when she considered it would be best in the national interest - ie when there was the best chance for this Government to continue "for one or more terms!" But, she added, she would make a decision in her own time.

Any decision about a General Election is a matter ultimately for the Prime Minister and for the Prime Minister alone // Thus today's discussion were not, and could not be, conclusive.

There is unlikely to be any early announcement about a General Election (if pushed: not this week).

Any announcement would be made through No.10.

END SPEAKING NOTE.

DRAFT QUESTIONS AND ANSWER BRIEFING

Question: Hasn't this tease gone on long enough?

Answer: The Prime Minister isn't teasing. She has indicated often enough that she will decide on her own time; won't be pushed; won't be hustled. That is rather in character. You should calm down.

Question: Can you say with authority that there won't be an announcement the week after next?

Answer: Let's take one week at a time. The Prime Minister is not going to close any option prematurely - you wouldn't expect her to.

Question: Then why say an announcement is unlikely next week?

Answer: Because we like to be helpful when we can.

Question: Doesn't all this show signs of dither?

Answer: Not at all. If anybody is dithering it is the media and the Opposition. The Prime Minister is taking what she described today as a very important decision at a steady and measured pace. Far from accusing her of dithering you ought to be admiring her detachment and resolution, given the fever in other quarters and the welter of advice coming from all points of the compass.

Question: Has anything happened this weekend - Sunday Press, opinion polls, BBC broadcast - which make a June Election more or less likely?

Answer: No. The Government does however appear to be rather popular and the SDP/Alliance to be going down-hill.

END

PRIME MINISTER

ALTERNATIVE BRIEF

AN EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT

This paper sets out an alternative scenario if you decide to make an early announcement about a General Election.

In practice, given that you cannot announce an election from this gathering in advance of an Audience of The Queen, the difference between announcements of a decision to make an early or more leisurely announcement is one of nuance.

The only difference to the draft speaking note, in the event of a decision to make an announcement this week, would be the penultimate paragraph of the draft speaking note which now reads "There is unlikely to be any early announcement about a General Election (if pushed: not this week)".

It would be necessary to drop this sentence from the speaking note and cope with the consequences in the Q&A brief which should take the following line:

Question: Why are you no longer apparently ruling out an announcement this week?

Answer: We have never ruled out an announcement this week. Our guidance has been that there would not necessarily be an announcement this week.

Question: So the key time is Tuesday evening or Wednesday after the Prime Minister's Audience with The Queen?

Answer: You will have to wait and see /but I do not think there will be anything on Tuesday/.

/Question:

Question: What has caused the Prime Minister to change her mind about an early announcement?

Answer: You will have to wait and see whether the Prime Minister has indeed changed her mind, as you put it.

Question: How would you explain an early announcement if one were to come?

Answer: If it came, quite simply: the Prime Minister has decided that it is in the interest of the nation that it should know that there is going to be an election in June. Once having decided to go in June, she feels she should let the country know.

Question: Why has the Prime Minister decided not to soldier on?

Answer: If she decides to go in June it will be, as she said in today's BBC interview, because she thinks that it is in the national interest - ie that June will offer the best chance for this Government to continue "for one or more terms".

Question: What is your answer to the charge that she is cutting and running?

Answer: Cutting and running from what? The economy is on the move, the opinion polls are with the Government, the economic indicators are promising. It is not therefore surprising that the Opposition, in their fear of an early election, would characterise any decision to go to the country in June as cutting and running. But the Government's objective whenever it goes to the country is not to cut and run; it is to get a second term in the firm belief that that is what is needed to make the country a better and more prosperous place to live in.

PRIME MINISTER

General Election - who started it?

I said I would dig out evidence from your New Year's Eve interviews of when the speculation about a General Election started.

Both BBC TV and IRN asked questions about the next election - see attached.

I have underlined in pencil some useful words for the BBC TV interview.

*Stephan*

8 May 1983

INTERVIEWER: CAN I ASK YOU JUST ONE ... WELL, A COUPLE OF LAST QUESTIONS, ONE ABOUT THE FUTURE. MR. BIFFEN SEEMED TO BE SUGGESTING ON THE RADIO THE OTHER DAY THAT THE AUTUMN SEEMED TO BE QUITE A GOOD TIME FOR AN ELECTION - IS THAT WHAT HE WAS SAYING OR IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK?

MRS. THATCHER: I DON'T KNOW WHETHER HE WAS SAYING THAT OR NOT, WE HAVEN'T YET BEEN IN POWER FOR FOUR YEARS, WE SHALL NOT HAVE BEEN IN POWER FOR FOUR YEARS UNTIL MAY, YOU DON'T USUALLY TURN YOUR MIND TO THINKING ABOUT THE DATE OF AN ELECTION AT ALL UNTIL WELL INTO THE FINAL YEAR. I CAN'T TELL WHEN THE DATE IS BECAUSE I HAVEN'T DECIDED.

INTERVIEWER: NOT .....

MRS. THATCHER: I HAVEN'T DECIDED, I SHALL NOT THINK ABOUT IT UNTIL AFTER WE'VE BEEN IN POWER FOUR YEARS.

Interview with Peter Allen IRN  
31 December 1982

INTERVIEWER: AND, FINALLY, HAVE YOU GOT A PREFERENCE FOR A SUMMER OR AN AUTUMN ELECTION?

MRS. THATCHER: I HAVE NOT YET BEEN IN POWER WITH THIS GOVERNMENT FOR FOUR YEARS, I SHALL NOT BEGIN TO THINK OF DATES FOR AN ELECTION UNTIL AFTER MAY.

Interview with Brian Curtois, BBC-TV  
31 December 1982