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THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN 1983

CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

29th June 1983

PJC/AS

THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN 1983

A CRD VIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

It seems to be generally agreed that the Research Department, along with the rest of the central organisation, had a good campaign. These notes are therefore written more as a pointer to the scope for further improvement than as a post mortem report.

However it is probably wise to establish at the outset that the Labour Party fought an extremely bad campaign and that the Alliance had not got its act together. Because of our sustained and commanding lead in the polls, the pressures and tensions were less severe than in 1979 - and probably less severe than in most other General Elections. Neither on "monetarism" nor on unemployment did we have to defend the Government's record against really searching criticism; the only point on which the Opposition attacked at all effectively was on the National Health Service.

Nevertheless, if we got away lightly on policy matters - and our Manifesto did not give away much information either - there has been no slowing down in the technological and media revolution. The media increasingly take on the role of opposition, with their endless interviews and question and answer programmes. The campaign becomes more and more concentrated in London; less and less actually happens in the constituencies. Everything conspires to focus public attention on the two, three or four party leaders.

It may be that next time round we need to give more thought to the co-ordination of the Ministerial team as a whole. With one or two exceptions, the senior Ministers seemed to be out of touch with the

centre. Of course, after four years in Cabinet, the senior Ministers know ~~much more about the Government's policy than most of us in the Research Department, so they are quite able to operate on their own. Nevertheless if we had actually needed to mount a concerted attack or a concentrated defence on a particular policy issue, it would not have been very easy to do, given the lack of regular contact.~~ [Maybe modern technology will soon enable us to effect a daily TV link-up between senior Ministers in the field and the Chairman and his team at the centre during a General Election].

*Coordinated
of Ministers
& leads*

2. THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF

The main functions of the Research Department during the campaign period were as follows:

(i) Briefing the Prime Minister for the daily Press

(1) Conference and for her tours. This worked smoothly, along lines established in 1979. Stephen Sherbourne arrived early and read the papers. Desk officers all arrived at 7 a.m. and were given a list of topics on which they were to produce a one page brief. These were considered at the Chairman's 7.45 meeting and discussed with the Prime Minister at her 8.30 meeting. Two or three desk officers stood by continuously to deal with questions arising. During the day we had John Whittingdale on the bus with a suitcase full of facts and figures; contact was established intermittently between CRD and the bus.

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(ii) Monitoring. The other Parties' press conferences were attended variously by Katharine Marsh, Lynda Rouse and Dominic Hobson. They returned to Central Office in time to de-brief to the Prime Minister before our own Press Conference began. The Research Department also provided staff for an 18 hour a day monitoring of the television and radio, preparing an overnight written report for the Prime Minister.

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(iii) Strategy. The Research Department was represented by the Director and two Special Advisers (Adam Ridley and Stephen Sherbourne) at the Chairman's twice daily Strategy Meeting.

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(iv) Daily Notes. As on previous occasions these were produced very efficiently by Tony Greenland, helped by Oliver Letwin. Although they are fairly meaty, these notes are highly regarded and we are not sure what changes, if any, need to be made.

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(v) Questions of Policy. An outstandingly successful Questions of Policy committee operated during the campaign under the Chairmanship of Sir Angus Maude, with Alistair Cooke as Secretary. Input was received in advance from Ministers (see section 6 below), and a total of 265 notes were circulated. Agents and candidates may have been a little swamped by these papers; we must ensure next time that they know what to expect and that they set up a simple filing arrangement in advance. We supplied a full running index.

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(vi) Manifesto Briefing. One of the two toughest jobs we set ourselves was to produce seventy page briefing packs on each of the three leading manifestos. Word processors proved invaluable in this operation; nonetheless it was a real sweat, and sent us all into the campaign fairly tired. [It was a particularly bright idea to send copies of the Labour Manifesto free to all our own candidates. This was appreciated, and should be repeated, probably in respect of other parties' manifestos as well].

(vii) Enquiry Desk. The Candidates and Agents enquiry desk worked well, under the leadership of Dame Felicity Yonge, and dealt with ⁵⁷⁰ enquiries. Information officers (voluntary) were also installed in Area Offices. They came into Central Office one Saturday before the campaign for a three hour briefing session; we will be seeking a report from them on how things went.

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(viii) Saatchi and Saatchi. The Research Department was charged with checking the factual content of all Saatchis' work and of the leaflets produced in the Marketing Department. (See section 8 below).

3. THE RUN UP TO THE CAMPAIGN

The twenty one days of the campaign itself were strenuous, but we knew what we were doing. The really difficult part of the General Election lay, for us, in the run-up period. Uncertainty about the polling date persisted until the last minute; this made a nightmare of the production of our major publications - the Campaign Guide, Speakers Notes and the Manifesto. No criticism is made. The country's affairs cannot be made to revolve around the Conservative Research Department. But we only produced these three items on time as a result of a bit of luck, a bit of judgement and a lot of hard work.

The Campaign Guide was particularly difficult to handle. In May 1982 the date of publication was fixed as July 8th 1983. A schedule was prepared and work intensified directly after Christmas. On Maundy Thursday the publication date was still to be July 8th. Returning from Easter we immediately advanced the publication date to May 25th. Work planned to take thirteen weeks had to be compressed into seven weeks, including the entire type setting, proof reading, indexation and binding. A superhuman task was performed by Tony Greenland, and the support given by McCorquodales was magnificent.

The Campaign Guide is in a sense our flagship. It would be greatly missed. Producing it would be relatively easy if Britain had a system of fixed Parliaments. But we must consider once again whether there is any way of introducing a greater degree of flexibility into the situation. In 1974 the Campaign Guide could not be finalised in time. In 1977 we came out too early and a supplement had to be produced. This time we got it right - just.

No - whole

Speakers Notes turned out to be not such a nightmare, because we had hit on the ingenious idea of having a dry run at the time of the Local Government elections. Thus the bulk of the work had been done in advance and we were left with titivating the first (local government) issue of Speakers Notes for subsequent re-issue. There notes were a good deal more comprehensive than in 1979 and are said to have been appreciated.

who?

The Manifesto did not fall entirely to the Research Department. Indeed Ferdie Mount landed for the bulk of the drafting - and did it well. However it has been suggested in some quarters that the Manifesto was a little bland, and somewhat short on firm commitments. This was in part due to the rushed way it was produced. Nothing like enough consideration could be given, in the time available after their completion on March 31st, to the reports of the nine Party policy groups. And some of the Ministerial input to the Manifesto drafting committee was scrappy. It may - or may not - be felt that a more detailed manifesto would have provided a firmer basis for the next four years work of the Government.

Policy Groups

4. THE EDITORIAL TEAM

As has been said above, the Research Department does not complain about the problems caused by election date uncertainty. The proof of the pudding was in the eating. Nevertheless the conclusion must be drawn that the editorial group is a key part of the Research Department structure; that we were well served this time; but that we should be looking hard at the succession, particularly in the light of Tony Greenland's probable retirement before 1987/8.

The bulk of the editorial work was done this time by the following:

Campaign Guide:	Tony Greenland	[1
Speakers Notes:	Christopher Mockler, Oliver Letwin, Michael Portillo	3
Daily Notes:	Tony Greenland, Oliver Letwin	2
Questions of Policy:	Alistair Cooke	1
Manifesto Briefing:	Tony Hutt, Katharine Marsh, Oliver Letwin.	3
Politics Today (Special issues):	Tony Greenland, Alistair Cooke	2]

As Director I intended to read everything before it went to print. This was made impossible by the fact that I had had to assume responsibility for writing the tricky taxation chapter of the Campaign Guide - which could not be finalised until after Budget Day on March 15th. I do not recommend my successors to take on a specific desk job during a General Election - however severely the complement of the department has been reduced in the preceding years. ✓!

I was only able to relax in this situation because of my complete confidence that Tony Greenland would detect any errors. Which he did with 99.99 per cent success.

5. THE ROLE OF SPECIAL ADVISERS

It will be noted that several of the key names mentioned above were those of Special Advisers. At the event, the Research Department was enormously strengthened by the fact that six of its former members came back for the campaign: 6

Adam Ridley	Treasury
Stephen Sherbourne	Dept of Industry
Nick True	D.H.S.S.
Lynda Rouse	Dept of Energy
Peter Shipley	No. 10
Oliver Letwin	D.E.S.

Also, before they went off to be candidates, we had the help of Robin Harris (Treasury), Michael Portillo (formerly Energy) and David Nicholson.

Without help from these nine people the Research Department would have been in very big trouble. Exactly half our research personnel had, at the time of the General Election, been with us less than a year.

Hopefully it is now established that Special Advisers leave their Ministers and come under direct CRD orders from the commencement of a General Election campaign. This was by no means certain until the last minute on the recent occasion. Partly because of this, and partly because CRD colleagues and ex-colleagues were being adopted as candidates right up to the last minute, we were unable to draw up an organogram of duties until very late in the day.

It felt from time to time that the Research Department was skating on thin ice. It was fortunate that nobody fell through.

6. INPUT FROM MINISTERS

In the run-up period, Ministers were required to feed into the manifesto and briefing processes three sets of material:

1. Draft paragraphs concerning their own departmental affairs for the Manifesto.

2. Briefing material explaining the inwardness of items actually included in the Manifesto.
3. Input of questions and answers to the Q of P committee, commissioned in advance of the campaign.

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Because of muzziness about the nature of CRD's involvement in policy, and initial uncertainty about who was actually responsible for manifesto briefing, the request for this material actually went out from Adam Ridley, acting in the name of the Chancellor. Sorting out all the material that came back in response placed a heavy load on Adam's small office. On another occasion it would be preferable that these requests should go out to Ministers in coordinated fashion from the Research Department, and the necessary security measures should be taken in advance.

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Mention should also be made of the ministerial group of three which was set up once the dissolution had been announced in order to coordinate the assembly of policy rulings. This never really got going; it would have had to be established some weeks earlier to have been much use.

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7. PRINTING AND PUBLICATION

I suspect it was the good appearance, as much as the content, of our publications that secured such high praise in the recent election. Our first word processor was installed just in time to do the manifesto briefing (we had hoped to have two). And the reproduction of the Questions of Policy was generally good.

McCorquodales did their traditionally superb job on the Campaign Guide the Manifestos and the Daily Notes. It is worrying that both members of the team which has worked well for so long - Tony Greenland from CRD and Reg Irwin from McCorquodales - are coming up to retirement.

Successors must be identified in due course. It must be stated that McCorquodales' accumulated experience is vital to the Party at election time. It would be worth considering whether we should not give them back the contract for printing Politics Today, as a means of keeping in touch between General Elections.

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'Reading' were given six weeks notice of the Speakers Notes job, and we were a little surprised to find that, even so, the work had to be put out to sub contractors. They did not do a very expert job; if we had known that Reading would not do the work themselves we would have contracted directly with McCorquodales.

Reading
x McCorquodales
A list of where we use of Reading.

Mention should also be made of difficulties with the Xerox machinery. For some reason the company was late in delivering the additional machines that were needed once polling day had been announced. Our existing machines proceeded to break down as a result of over-load at the precise moment when the process of duplicating the manifesto briefing reached its peak. It is questionable whether xerography was the right process for this job in any case; one wonders if there is a case for offset litho machinery to be installed at Central Office.

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The role and functions of 'Reading' are being reviewed in another context.

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Problems again arose from diversity of type face in the Research Department. We have for a long time been agitating for standardised typewriting machinery; the inconvenience of differing type face is keenly felt during a hectic election period, when one wants to switch work about among the various secretaries, and break big jobs down into smaller parcels. Hopefully in the context of the word processor revolution it will be possible to deal with this problem once and for all by providing the Research Department with its own matching equipment and leaving it there.

8. DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATIONS

It was never made clear who was responsible for the distribution of publications. It was assumed by the Press Department and others that the Research Department was responsible, but there was no good reason why this should be so. And it was a bit of a nonsense that Tony Greenland, in the middle of producing Daily Notes, was pestered by the Press Office for copies of the Campaign Guide and Manifesto which he did not have. He also had to deal with W.H. Smith and John Menzies who wanted to know why they did not have Manifestos for their bookstalls. The outward supply of these publications from Reading, where reserve copies were held, did not seem to have been properly organised.

There was also a problem over custody of copies of the Manifesto at Central Office. Tony Greenland took it upon himself to be responsible *Myers* for the security of the Manifesto before it was released on the morning of the first Press Conference, simply because no one else was prepared to take it on. No proper security arrangements had been made in advance.

Also it should be noted that nobody, apart from Adam Ridley, seemed to take much interest in the final stages of production of the Scottish Manifesto.

9. SAATCHI, ETC

By reason of exceptionally close personal relations between Michael Dobbs, Chris Lawson, Keith Britto, and myself, the process of checking the facts in PEBs, posters, advertisements, pamphlets etc was made to work satisfactorily. The Research Department only made one boob; a serious one, but fortunately the other parties were too dozey to pick it up and capitalise on it.

However, one is bound to say that this aspect of the General Election campaign was rather disagreeable; without the cement of good personal relations things could have gone badly wrong.

In my view the Research Department was being asked to do the wrong thing. We were being given completed drafts and then told that our job was simply to confirm the facts in them. Our comments on style and content were not being sought. I have to say that in my opinion - and that of several of my colleagues - many of these completed drafts were second rate, PEBs and leaflets alike. The messages were sloppy and the style and wording were often poor. Niether at Saatchis nor in our own marketing Department did the copywriters seem to have enough political experience to do the job of drafting at all well.

It was particularly galling to find on one or two occasions that, after we had written or corrected a draft, the Marketing Department would change the wording, introducing actual errors. And materially delaying the whole thing.

I would respectfully submit that if we are aiming at integration of CRD into the Central Office team structure, we should also be aiming to put the work of drafting PEBs, posters and pamphlets squarely into the CRD - and recruiting accordingly. It is vital, in my view, that those engaged in drafting these things should be steeped in the complexities of policy thinking. I cannot see how back room copy writers at Saatchis can know exactly what is the product that a PEB is meant to be marketing. Or how amateurs drafted in at short notice to a Central Office marketing department can be expected to draft effective but judiciously phrased leaflets. No .

Some members of the Research Department would be hopeless at these tasks. Others might reveal a surprising flair if they were invited to become involved. At least the work would get done for sums of money with fewer noughts on the end.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

1. Office Layout. Traffic in the corridor outside my office, leading to the restaurant, was very heavy. As was the smell of food. I hope to be able to re-plan the CRD office quarters so that we have our library and information section on the fifth floor, involving fewer people trying to fight their way through the melee.

2. Restaurant. The service was first class and much appreciated (As were the security arrangements).

3. Cleaners. It took a few days to get the cleaners re-timed, so that they were not vacuuming the floor during our rather tense 7 am -8 am brief writing session.

4. Circulation. Partly because of boundary redistribution, the circulation lists were not in good shape when we came to send out our Speakers Notes. One suspects that the whole circulation system needs bracing up - perhaps as part of a wider review of how we distribute our CRD and CPC material in general.

5. Office Management. We depended heavily on Joanna Smith's experience and devotion for a multitude of administrative tasks - co-ordination of secretaries, temps and volunteers, provision of food at weekends before the campaign began, general personnel management etc. One is reminded again that the Research Department cannot do without its own resident Administration Officer.

6. Library Boys, It is worth mentioning how useful we found our four Library Boys - youngsters working with us between school and university and paid at the rate of £2,600 a year. There may be scope for further development of this system in Central Office.

PETER CROPPER

29 June 1983

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1983

A. A. Walters

Thatcherism Works

"Instead of sinking further and more rapidly into the slough of depression and despair, the impossible occurred."

In March 1981, the British Conservative government raised taxes substantially in a dramatically tough budget. The proposals were greeted with a mixture of rage and indignation, and forecasts of economic collapse. The political wiseacres thought that this heralded the end of Margaret Thatcher. The "wets" (those Conservatives who were opposed to the stringent economic policies of Thatcher) were voicing ominously their criticism and "concern." Here was a budget "dry" as tinder and just as inflammatory.

Calls for reflation rather than retrenchment were loud in the land. Academic economists—including the "great and the good"—were almost unanimous in condemning the Thatcher policies. In a letter to the Times, no less than 364 said that the government's policies had "no basis in economic theory or supporting evidence" that "present policies will deepen the depression, erode the industrial base of our economy and threaten its social and political stability," and that alternative policies (of reflation) should be adopted forthwith. The call was for an increase in government spending and, if anything, a reduction of taxes. This would have the effect of increasing demand and reflating the economy. The Labor Party echoed and amplified this chorus of reflators for this depressed economy.

Since all forecasts expected that the price level would be increasing at roughly the rate it had increased in the previous year—namely about 11 percent—the call for "reflation" may seem a bit odd. But it was more than a corruption of the English language. Groves academe were bristling because Britain was sinking into a slump. Output was falling steeply and unemployment rising sharply. Conventional economic doctrine taught that the only way to prevent an economy slipping further into the abyss of depression was to expand spending, lower taxes and increase the budgetary deficit. Borrow more and spend more—that was the prescribed medicine. And what of the 11 percent inflation? That was thought to be of secondary importance and could be contained by regulations.

The government, however, remained skeptical, if not cynical, about the prescriptions of such economists. After all, these policies of borrow-and-spend, with intermittent income controls, had been pursued from the mid-1960s when unemployment had normally been about 500,000 through to the early 1970s when it rose to about 1 million, finally entering the decade of the 1980s with 2 million on the dole. The

prescription had failed to produce jobs, but it certainly induced more inflation. By the middle of 1980, inflation had reached a peak of 23 percent per annum. Perhaps, therefore, the government may be forgiven for regarding the obloquy of academic economists not with alarm but rather as a featherweight of confirmation that its policies were appropriate.

Confirmation of a more substantial kind came as the year of 1981 progressed. Instead of sinking further and more rapidly into the slough of depression and despair, the impossible occurred. By the summer of 1981 not only had output stopped falling, but the level of production showed an unmistakable upward surge. And in spite of the sharp decline in the United States, Germany and Italy in 1982, Britain's output increased faster than that of

all other OECD countries combined. Even more, remarkably, in spite of a very high value of sterling in 1980-81, Britain increased its share of world manufactured exports in 1982. Meanwhile, inflation fell faster than almost anyone had predicted. This was quite a performance for the typically moribund British economy. Meanwhile, the recovery continues in 1983 at a steady sustainable pace.

There is wide agreement that the 1981 budget established the essential *credibility* of Thatcher's government and its policy. There was to be no more drift into higher deficits and, after monetization, into higher inflation; no validating extravagant wage increases or preposterous investments. The establishment of this credibility was the foundation of the economic and political success of Thatcher's leadership. She meant what she had said—no more but certainly no less.

A second effect of the budget was the easing of conditions in credit markets and the concomitant reductions in interest rates. From November 1980 to March 1981 they had been reduced by 4 percentage points—and for the first time for many a year they fell substantially below interest rates in the United States. Most important, for the next three years the government never suffered a "funding crisis"—those depressing events when interest rates soared in order to overcome the lack of confidence of markets in the ability of government properly to fund its deficit. The long bull market began in the spring of 1981.

Measured by results, the budget of 1981 was a substantial economic and political success. The upturn in the economy in mid-1981 was followed by the rise of Thatcher in the polls of February 1982. It really did appear that the British had acquired a leader of integrity, sincerity and immense moral courage. That was something to be thankful for in the years ahead.

Sir Alan Walters, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and a professor of economics at Johns Hopkins University, was personal economic adviser to Prime Minister Thatcher from January 1981 to August 1983.

By Wright

