

YA



10 DOWNING STREET

Mr Alison

MA

I have suggested in pencil a number of cuts and minor changes. I would see no difficulty in giving it to local papers & The Yorkshire Post. But to put it out more widely would suggest the Prime Minister is behind it. The fact that you do not put it out more widely -

Even though it may
well be picked up
some widely -
would meet the
Criteria.

I think the references
to staff are too
defensive

John
9/3

Prime Minister

Michael - you have done
a fantastic amount
research - but
I'm the speech
will look as if
I really am
worried that
I have asked you
to make it. Mrs
I don't think
Vandenberg will
like the things
about seeing them
Could perhaps you
say some of it
but without
the press
release?
Can we have
a word.
M

I would be grateful if you would have a look at a draft speech which I would like to make, subject to your approval, at my Association AGM this Friday. I attempt to come to grips with a couple of mainstream criticisms which have been levelled at your Administration:

1. That you have retreated into a bunker;
2. That your entourage of advisers has been radically changed, and for the worst, since the General Election.

The criticism is usually held to include your Civil Service as well as political staff, and in repudiating this criticism I have necessarily had to defend the former; but I could change, or omit, this part of the speech if you prefer.

It is designed to be put out as a Press Release.

MICHAEL ALISON

8.3.84

PART OF A SPEECH BY THE RT HON MICHAEL ALISON MP (SELBY)
PARLIAMENTARY PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER,
AT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, SELBY CONSERVATIVE
ASSOCIATION AT SHERBURN-IN-ELMET ON FRIDAY 9TH MARCH 1984

The sight of the Prime Minister at the Kremlin last month, for the funeral of President Andropov, was a cheering one. Obviously the human contacts her visit made possible, across the chasms of conflicting ideology, give grounds for hope. But her presence there, amongst those huddled, secretive, protected men of the Politburo, sent out another signal to viewers here at home. It threw into sharp relief how much more approachable, and familiar, and accessible a British Prime Minister is compared to totalitarian leaders.

I want to stress this idea of accessibility, because it is one of the hall-marks of democracy. And it is certainly a hall-mark of Mrs Thatcher. I believe that no Prime Minister in modern times has

been as accessible and approachable as she is.

I am in a fair position to judge, because as her

PPS it is my task to open ~~and close~~ the doors

that lead into her rooms in Westminster and Whitehall.

And her willingness, amidst all the

preoccupations of government, to give time and attention

unstintingly ^{to individuals who want to speak to her} make even the most dedicated Bedouin

chieftain ^{look} like a recluse.

*Mas - then
would offer
some of our best
friends.*

Let me illustrate this by reference to my

Parliamentary colleagues. The new Parliament will

have been in existence for about 300 days by the end

of this month. In that time the Prime Minister will

have personally ^{have seen} ~~received in her room, either at Downing~~

~~Street or Westminster,~~ some 240 back-bench MPs,

mostly individually or in small groups. Arithmetically

that may not seem a heavy daily workload. But in

reality the concentration is much heavier than it

seems, because Parliament is regularly in recess with

*I fear this
looks so
defensive - and
I think back
benches may
not like it.
Ordinary folk will
expect me to see
them - almost
daily with
Horne*

MPs away; and the Prime Minister herself often has to be away on regional visits at home, or international conferences abroad. So in practice the Prime Minister finds time, on average, to see 2 or 3 MPs individually virtually every parliamentary sitting day, during which she also has to carry on the business of government with its ministerial meetings, visits by foreign dignitaries and so forth. This is the deliberate scale of priority which Mrs Thatcher gives to receiving her back-bench parliamentary colleagues. She will, for example, have met personally [in her rooms] each of the 96 new Conservative MPs by the end of this month, quite apart from the scores of longer-serving colleagues. And Mrs Thatcher does not just confine herself to Conservative MPs. Uniquely amongst Prime Ministers she has undertaken to receive personally any MP of any party who wishes to make representations about problems of factory closures or redundancies in their constituencies. Since January 1981 she has received

36 such MPs representing Labour or Liberal constituencies, quite apart from Conservative Members. All these meetings, of course, are quite separate from the innumerable informal contacts the Prime Minister has with MPs when she votes and ^{dines}~~eats~~ at Westminster week by week.

Another feature of her accessibility is her practice, again unique among Prime Minister's, of answering all Parliamentary questions tabled to her, rather than switching them to subordinate Ministers in her Government.

I mention these facts and figures, not for mere love of statistics, nor simply to boast about the Prime Minister, but rather to ^{show the extent of her} ~~correct what sometimes~~ ^{contacts with Members of Parliament,} ~~emerges as a distorted picture of Prime Ministerial life.~~

~~Some newspapers, for example, like to foster the image of the Prime Minister as a sort of Queen Bee lying~~

~~cocooned, protected, and immobile in the beehive of Number Ten. And~~ ^T the standard photograph of Downing Street usually shows the massive and familiar door of Number Ten firmly closed, as if to emphasise the isolation.

But real life is very different. The door of Number Ten opens and closes to comers and goers ceaselessly. And the Prime Minister is as often out of Number Ten as in. Indeed, she spends close on one-third of the working Westminster week in the House of Commons.

There is, I think, a political point of substance in the facts I have given. For our political opponents like to cultivate the myth that the Government ^{is out of touch.} ~~has lost its way; that it is accident prone;~~ that its supporters in Parliament are dispirited if not ^sdi_Affected; and that the Prime Minister carries

on regardless, in autocratic isolation. I am sure that something like this mythical impression is familiar to you from the newspapers and television.

The facts I have given you should help to correct and dispel this false picture. The Prime Minister is a working Captain, and she is sailing the ship in close and daily contact with a robust and cheerful parliamentary crew. Of course, the elements offer some resistance: who would put to sea without expecting it? But the business of political navigation is to chart a course and then to stick to it. Contrary winds and waves - for example over GCHQ; or Grenada; or public expenditure; or rate-capping - do not fill political seafarers with alarm. On the contrary, they regard them as signs that the ship is really under way.

In conclusion, I should like to say a word about some of those who are advising the Prime Minister on the bridge of the ship. A number of commentators have suggested that her Downing Street staff and advisers have undergone a major crew change, and that in consequence the political navigation is less sure. This criticism does not stand up to examination. Continuity, not change, is much closer to the mark. The Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary, for example, was in post well before the last General Election, and is still there. If his advice was good before June 1983, it is no worse today. The same applies to the Secretary to the Cabinet. Then, again, there is the Downing Street "think tank" known as the Policy Unit. This Unit is virtually unchanged in personnel since before June 1983, save only for Mr Ferdinand Mount, the former Director, who left at Christmas. His successor Mr John Redwood, is

of outstanding calibre. He has striking qualifications both intellectually - he is a Fellow of All Souls - and politically: he has long been active in local politics and has, for example, fought and won a County Council seat from the sitting Labour member. But even John Redwood, with all his skills and attributes, can hardly be expected to have revolutionised the advice his Unit gives to the Prime Minister in the eight weeks for which he has held the post of Director.

So much for continuity. But one significant change has occurred in Mrs Thatcher's staff which represents a considerable net gain. I refer to the recruitment by the Prime Minister of Mr Stephen Sherbourne as a Political Secretary. ~~no one filled this post between 1981 and June 1983, so~~ Mr Sherbourne's unique skills and qualifications - he has been an outstanding special adviser to ^{Conservative} Cabinet Ministers ^{in and out of office} since

~~the 1970s~~

~~1975 - promises to add an edge to the Prime~~

~~Minister's performance which was not available~~

~~before June 1983. In summary, therefore, the~~

~~alleged "crew change" at Number Ten since the~~

~~General Election is a mirage. An old and well-tried~~

~~team is still there, with significant additional~~

~~strength.~~

Tories increasingly critical of Thatcher's inner circle

"I HAVE a feeling that it will be downhill from now on—Mrs T's concentrating on foreign affairs and getting out of touch. And the banana skins don't seem to be stopping."

These comments by a senior Tory MP typify a growing feeling of unease among backbenchers at Westminster.

Moreover, this talk is not confined to the so-called wets or to disappointed office seekers. The worries are shared by loyalists and are being focused on political weaknesses among some of Mrs Thatcher's closest advisers, as well as in the

Peter Riddell reports on backbench unease over the 'remoteness' of Downing Street

balance of the Cabinet.

During her first term, and particularly after the autumn of 1981, Mrs Thatcher had an effective political team which worked well and helped to win last June's election victory. But the team changed last year with a new party chairman, a new parliamentary private secretary and a major ministerial reshuffle. The critics argue that the replacements

lack the effectiveness of their predecessors.

The problems should not, of course, be exaggerated. The Conservative Party continues to enjoy a remarkably high standing in the opinion polls, the Opposition remains divided and the Prime Minister herself seems as determined as ever.

Yet there is often a time lag before a weakening at the centre ripples outwards. The same tell-tale signs which appeared after the Macmillan and Wilson election victories in 1959 and 1966 have started to appear.

There has been a succession of difficulties—the mishandling of the Grenada and GCHQ issues; the recurrence of apparently peripheral but nagging "scandals," such as the Parkinson and Mark Thatcher/Oman contract affairs; the increasing strains in press relations and the internal party arguments over local rates.

Ever sensitive to changes in political mood, Mr John Biffen, leader of the Commons, went out of his way in a weekend speech to reject any comparison with the undermining of Government credibility in the early 1960s.

Now, he said, the Government would endure "the contrived and febrile world of banana-skin politics" because it was strengthening Britain's position in "the real world."

As one former Cabinet minister sympathetic to Mrs Thatcher remarked: "It all needs careful handling. If the domestic scene is undramatic she's got to work hard to keep the political initiative. Talking to the Soviet Union is all very well, but the trouble is she'll start to believe she really is a world statesman."

At present, the criticisms are concentrated more on Mrs Thatcher's advisers than on herself, and mainly turn on the theme of Downing Street's being out of touch.

There are several lines of attack. First, there is Mr Michael Alison, her PPS. His job is to act as the Prime Minister's eyes and ears at Westminster, picking up the gossip and backbench opinion.

Mr Alison, a former Minister of State at the Department of Employment, is universally liked and trusted, but he is a shy and reserved man.

As one of his colleagues remarked: "What you need in that job is a bit of a boozier who will go into the Smoking Room and the bars talking to everyone." And Mr Alison, a strong evangelical Christian, is not that.

Whereas his predecessor, Mr Ian Gow, now the Housing Minister, was regarded by some as too much of an intriguer, Mr Alison seems to have gone to the opposite extreme. For instance, new MPs complain of having little contact with him.

Consequently, some MPs are suggesting that Mrs Thatcher should appoint a second PPS—possibly from among the younger backbenchers—as other Prime Ministers have done in the past.

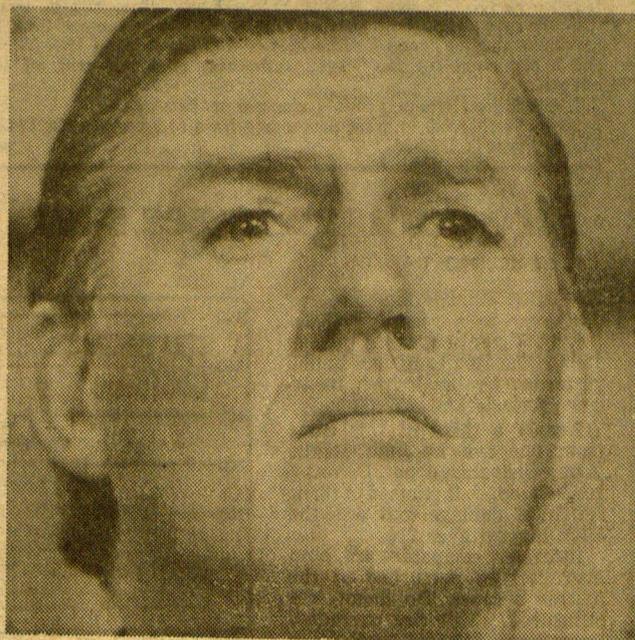
A related criticism is that Downing Street has become more isolated. Some ministers, as well as backbenchers, argue that the political advisers around Mrs Thatcher—as distinct from the Civil Service private secretaries—are zealots without any roots in the party.

Mr John Redwood, the new head of the policy unit, is seen by officials as a sharp and clever man, who has yet to show that he has political weight.

Downing Street officials have developed a siege mentality towards what they see as unjustified press and Labour attacks over Mr Mark Thatcher's involvement with the Oman contract won by Cementation. The result has been to make the Prime Minister and her advisers appear prickly and defensive—whatever the merits of the case.

Mr John Gummer, the party chairman, is also seen by some MPs as lacking the clout of Mr Cecil Parkinson, his predecessor. In part this is not his fault, since he is being required to combine the chairmanship with the post of Minister of State at the Department of Employment—which involves two full days a week on the committee stage of the Trade Union Bill before all his other duties.

The result is complaints



Mr Cecil Parkinson: He has won respect, and some say he may be brought back into the Government

from both sides. Hence, Mr Gummer, who is clearly on his way up, is likely to give up one of his posts before too long.

In contrast, Mr John Wakeham's performance as Chief Whip is seen by Tory backbenchers as an improvement on what went before. Managing a large Commons majority is always difficult and, despite complaints about occasional clumsiness, the whips have generally succeeded in defusing the impact of revolts.

Mr Wakeham is more aware of policy issues with much less of the "loyalty to the regiment" approach than his two predecessors, Sir Humphrey Atkins and Mr Michael Jopling.

Yet there are broader doubts about the balance of the Cabinet. The argument is that the ministerial changes last year weakened the public impact of the Government.

While Mr Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor, and Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary, undoubtedly have considerable influence with Mrs Thatcher and within Whitehall, the have, so far, not established public reputations comparable to either of their predecessors, Lord Whitelaw and, even in his stubborn way, Sir Geoffrey Howe.

On this view, there is an absence of good communicators (like say, Mr Kenneth Clarke or Mr Kenneth Baker, who are outside the Cabinet) a criticism underlined by the effectiveness of some of Labour's new shadow team.

The critics feel that these points have been reinforced by Mrs Thatcher's failure to involve the Cabinet as a whole in the decision to ban trade union membership at GCHQ.

Overall, what has been missing has been a sense of political feel, and many MPs attribute this in part to the absence of Mr Cecil Parkinson.

His role as a close and valued adviser of Mrs Thatcher is being appreciated in retrospect. Indeed, Mr Parkinson's stock is rising at Westminster, following what is seen as his dignified behaviour in recent months.

After a rough personal period following his resignation in mid-October, Mr Parkinson is now back on form and active behind the scenes. Talks of his going to Brussels tends to be played down by friends.

There are even suggestions—unthinkable a couple of months ago—that he might be brought back to the Government in a future reshuffle to help correct the present weaknesses.

APPOINTMENTS

Top posts at Touche Ross

Sir Douglas Morpeth is to retire from TOUCHE ROSS & CO in April 1985. In anticipation of this he is retiring as chairman of the board of partners. Mr D. R. P. Baker who has been managing partner for nine years has been elected to succeed Sir Douglas as chairman and Mr M. J. Blackburn has been elected to succeed Mr Baker as managing partner.

As part of its management restructuring, due to recent acquisitions and expansion, the BEAZER GROUP has appointed Mr Don Evans as managing director of Beazer Commercial and Second City Properties. Mr Evans, who will be based at the group's head office in Bath, will be responsible for further growth of property activities.

Mr Timothy Aitken has resigned from the board of CHEMICAL METHODS ASSOCIATES, INC.

Mr John Watson is leaving ENSKILDA SECURITIES at the end of the month to take a post in the City. Prior to joining Enskilda Securities as executive director in charge of administration he was deputy chief executive of the Stock Exchange. Mr Anthony Hammond is assuming responsibility for administration, replacing Mr Watson. Mr Hammond was previously an executive director of Bank of America International in charge of administration.

Mr L. G. Clugston has relinquished the chairmanship of CLUGSTON HOLDINGS. He will continue as a director and has been appointed president. Mr

J. W. A. Clugston has become chairman and remains group managing director. Mr C. A. Gillott has been appointed an executive director and also an executive director of Clugston Construction.

Mr Iain J. S. Murray has been appointed finance director of SLOANE INDEPENDENT HOSPITALS, a subsidiary of The Fleming Mercantile Investment Trust.

THE PEART GROUP has appointed Mr R. F. Lombard as operations director of its pipeline products division. Mr Lombard, previously with Rolls-Royce Motors and Colts Cranes, assumes total responsibility for the division in order to permit the group managing director, Mr J. P. Glithero, to devote more time to the general engineering and industrial infra-red divisions.

Mr T. A. Welsh, at present a director of Turner & Newall's subsidiary Ferodo, has been appointed a director of PAYEN INTERNATIONAL, another T&N subsidiary, and general manager of PAYEN UK from March 1.

Mr Peter Rooke has been appointed managing director of BURRUP MATHIESON & CO, a member of the Burrups Printing Group. Previously he was employed by Burroughs Corp as general manager of the European and Africa business forms and office supplies operations. Mr David Alder has joined as an associate director. He was previously with Greenaway Harrison and will be responsible for new Business development.