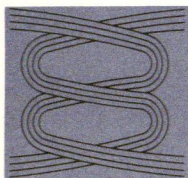


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78 Buckingham Gate London SW1E 6PE · Telephone: Sir Alfred Sherman 01-730 2838 · Nigel Morgan 01-222 0909

Telegraphic address: RESPUBLICA LONDON SW1 · Telex: 895 0111 DUKEST G

"Cogitare qui audet omnia audebit".

26/8/84

Dear Stephen,

I was unhappy with the CPS article for the Times, so I re-wrote it.

Here is the new draft.

It does not differ very much, but since I sent you what I thought to be the final draft, I had better let you see this.

Yours Alfred.

LIFE-CYCLE OF A POLITICAL OUT-RIDER.

(VALEDICTION TO THE CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES.)

New version, 28/8/84.

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Description of the Centre For Policy Studies as the Rightwing Tory Think-tank - as the media have it - recalls Heine's quip ^{about} ~~regarding~~ the Holy Roman Empire of the German People.

Right wing means almost anything you want, and frequently contradictory things too. Not all our members were Conservatives; some had never even voted Conservative. A few were Labour or Liberal members or associates. I suppose we could be described as part of the Thatcherite revolution - however defined. But then, not all Thatcherites are necessarily Conservatives, and not all Conservatives Thatcherites.

Think Tanks are grand affairs whose main job is to answer questions posed to them. We were always very small, but we raised the questions.

Our purpose was to re-shape the national climate of opinion in order to widen the range of options open to a Conservative party which dared take them.

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From the outset, I had conceived our role as out-riders. My thesis was that no Conservative government or opposition, however courageous and adventurous, could afford to take the lead in mooting new policies rooted in critical appraisal of the post-war settlement. The moment the critique which must of necessity precede the enunciation of policy is presented, it provokes a chorus of anathema from "thought guardians" in political life and media for whom early post-war thinking remains the final revelation. The British are a conservative people, but none more so than progressives in thrall to yesteryear's last word.

Young shoots of new thinking are not strong enough to stand the hot blast of denunciation. Temporisers run for cover on the grounds that the "public is not yet ready for such radical thinking". Yet - I argued - unless the new ideas are fed in somehow or other, the public never will be ready, and the post-war settlement will go rolling on by its own momentum till it crushes us all.

This dilemma was not invented by the temporisers; their fault lay in reconciling themselves to the constraint rather than rising to it as a challenge.

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To resolve the dilemma, I argued for some privatisation of Conservative politics, with fringe organisations, "out-riders", who would not commit the leadership, as they breasted the waves of denunciation by the guardians. Insofar as we won preliminary skirmishes of ideas, the leadership could move onto the new ground.

Early in 1974, I mooted the idea to Keith Joseph, whom I had helped with speeches and articles in 1969/70 but had subsequently lost after his return to government. Margaret Thatcher joined forces. She was, in my eyes, always the more radical of the two, in instincts as well as ideas.

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To establish a small organisation, we needed funds. Keith Joseph decided to help fund-raising by making challenging speeches outlining our position and aims. The first two speeches, at Upminster and Preston, enjoyed an impact far greater than their intrinsic merits deserved. We said nothing new, except in our admission that the party had been mistaken, which should have been obvious. However, this admission of fallibility on behalf of his party earned Keith Joseph wide regard, though it horrified colleagues.

I think that the part played by the speeches in precipitating a revolution in Conservative politics owed its impact partly to a widespread feeling that new thinking was needed, which predisposed people to give us the benefit of the doubt, and partly to the fact that the party was fed up with Mr. Heath, but did not see its way clear to precipitating his departure. The speeches and the establishment of the Centre gave the feeling that here was an alternative leadership; the political enzymes set to work and did the rest.

When Sir Keith Joseph decided not to stand for the leadership, Mrs. Thatcher discovered that she possessed that quality, as some of us had already sensed. The rest is history.

5 Some of the drama rubbed off onto us. In politics, appearances are part of reality. Our new standing helped attract supporters and participants. We became the venue for exchanges of ideas between Conservative politicians, intellectuals, journalists, businessmen, and a few trade unionists. Not all of us were of the Right, however defined. Not all were Conservative party members, or voters. A few were members or associates of Labour or Liberal parties.

My participation in speech-writing counted for more than this craft does as a rule, because, because of Mrs. Thatcher's particular modus operandi. Owing to the circumstances in which she had won the leadership, the consolidation of her power over the party pari passu with a change in direction was bound to be a lengthy process. She therefore tended during the early years of her leadership to moot policy through public speeches and interviews more than political leaders generally would do.

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Electoral victory in 1979 brought about a new phase in our life-cycle. On the one hand, we were in a position to feed in second opinions, while remaining free to act as a clearing house for ideas and participant in the public debate. On the other hand, we found ourselves engaged, willy nilly, in an unequal relationship with the departmental civil servants. They are able to criticise, in private sessions with ministers, the views of the outsider, who cannot as of right ask to be apprised of their arguments and data, which enjoy the shield of confidentiality, in order to respond to them.

Not all civil servants take advantage of this position. Some warmly welcome the out-rider's contribution, and collaborate enthusiastically within the bounds of propriety. Others are decently tolerant. Not all ministers permit their tail to be twisted. But in the British system, without ministerial cabinet, the out-rider too easily becomes an outsider, the more so as the lifetime of government increases, and as the ministerial "we" expands to include the machinery of government and all its works, and increasingly identifies the government with the status quo.

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These dichotomies are in the Hegelian sense the out-rider's antithesis, the other side of the coin from his opportunities and successes.

An organisation which has access to party and government leadership and yet earns its bread by thinking the unthinkable and questioning the unquestioned - in short a form of reverse-arbitrage - must live on narrow margins. Without its connexions, real or apparent, it would be just one more voice on the fringes of political life. Let it be too closely identified with the leadership, or the leadership with the privateer, and pressures will grow to curb his incursions. Yet let its intellectual integrity be compromised by a hairsbreadth, and its wider public acceptability would evaporate overnight.

Organisations have life-cycles. When the tadpole becomes a frog, it can no longer breathe under water. But as organisations enter a new phase, their *raison d'être* is bound to be called into question afresh.

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Over the ten years, it seems to me that our successes well outweighed the frustrations inherent in our chosen role. I shall leave the assessment to others. Friends and enemies alike agree that the Centre For Policy Studies exerted sufficient influence on events to carve itself out a modest niche in contemporary history.

Readers would not expect this valedictory glance back to be free from subjectivity or partisanship. Furthermore, I tell the story as seen from inside, which is only half the story, or in fact less than half, since the conventions inhibit me from disclosing the best parts.

In any case, I can never be quite sure how far I helped make the waves or just I floated on a turning tide created by deeper forces which shape the life of nations. But whether or not we made the tide, we rode high on it.

If people feel compelled to present me as amalgam of Pere Joseph, Svengali and the Elders of Zion, they are at liberty to do so, and those who know me will think them fools. But, this carping takes them no further towards explaining why a handful of people whom they disparage could make a wholly disproportionate impact on the political scene, for better or worse.

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Our work in the realm of political and economic ideas, may have counted less than our part in generating in the Conservative Party a sense of intellectual excitement which had hitherto been largely been a monopoly of the left. No one calls the Conservatives the stupid party any longer; at worse, they accuse it of indulging in ideology.

No less important, we showed that even in this mass society, a few stray people with ideas and commitment can still make their mark.

End