

cc Lord President
Mr Sherbourne

PRIME MINISTER

LANGUAGE/VISION

I promised you a note on the above subject

Background

One of the political phenomena of our age is that after nearly 7 years in office you are still not regarded as boring by the media. Your achievements are seen to be real and numerous by all but the most prejudiced commentators. You are not felt to have run out steam. And your leadership is generally regarded as indispensable; you are felt to have no credible rival.

All this is confirmed by your astonishingly rapid restoration from Westland within the space of one week, starting February 11, notwithstanding other problems.

There are identifiable squalls or storms ahead but the general expectation is that you will lead your party into a third successive General Election.

Increasingly, the media is turning its eyes towards October 1987 or Spring 1988. In the process it is beginning critically to examine your first 7 years to try to identify the path you will take in the future.

This process starts with:

- a. your domination of current politics and intellectual argument;
- b. much trimming by the Opposition to accommodate the new climate you have created.

The Problem

This raises the question as to whether there is a real problem for the future beyond Douglas Hurd's prescription on Wednesday evening for the Government of:

- measuring its opponents more accurately
- putting across its achievements more effectively
- describing its future plans more persuasively.

In my view there are two "problems" - or more accurately "needs":

- to maintain a flow of ideas which can be brought together later as an agenda (manifesto) for the 1990s; this would at once meet the need to show regularly that there is a lot of steam left in you yet and to keep the intellectual initiative
- to review your achievements, to define where we have got to now in historical terms which people can readily understand and to outline your aims for the future in a new and more appealing language; this requirement is summarised by the, to you, hateful word "vision": I doubt whether I can make this more acceptable by expressing it in marketing terms - ie the need to repackage your achievements, aims and aspirations.

You should not, however, prevent yourself from addressing a real need because unacceptable labels can be pinned on to a very necessary political process.

Evidence of Need

Latterly, evidence of the need for a new look has been masked by the Westland/BL rows. Moreover, since the press is nothing if not inconsistent, there is nothing like a

sustained criticism of the language in which you express your achievements and ideas. But it surfaces in the way news reporters are driven into irrelevancies because they say you are saying nothing new; in, for example, suggestions by the FT and Ronald Butt on Thursday: "badly [though she] needs to give her Government a new sense of direction"; and in the way they seize upon new phrases-"popular capitalism".

Solution

It follows from all I said in outlining the background that you do not face a serious problem. It is also important that you should not waste now new language which you will need later.

But what I think is required over the next few months is increasing attention to:

- relating what has been achieved to your longer term objectives;
- giving ordinary people the cosy feeling that they know where they are because you can clarify for them the point you have reached in your historic mission;
- regularly finding an arresting phrase which encapsulates what you are trying to do generally or in a particular area of policy;
- bearing in mind that people want to be inspired, not totally excluding language which sounds good simply on the grounds that you think it is so general as to be meaningless; apart from bringing meaning to people's lives your task is also to make them feel good.

Mechanism

If you accept this analysis, the real problem is to find a mechanism for achieving results. The three fora. in which

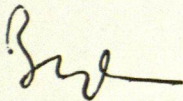
ideas and language can be deployed are:

- Questions
- Speeches
- Interviews

Speeches are the most thoughtful vehicle for repackaging. Media interviews, especially television, are the most potent means of conveying new imagery.

You may feel we should make a new effort in considering speeches and major interviews consciously to freshen up the scene with the odd phrase or two - odd in the sense they come new to the ear and odd in the sense of appearing less than systematic and uncontrived.

You may care to discuss.



BERNARD INGHAM

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