

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

10th February, 1981

Frank Chapple and the Left

Thank you so much for your letter of 4th February, which I have read with the greatest interest.

I certainly hope that you will continue to see F.C.

I would like, very much, to have a word with you about this, possibly after a Division one evening, and I have asked Ian to arrange this.

Thank you again for such a particularly valuable report.

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Political
Office

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PRIME MINISTER

1. Herewith this fascinating letter from Stephen Hastings.
2. You will see that I have underlined his paragraph numbered 4.
3. Do you think that there would be any advantage in sending a copy to Jim Prior?



PERSONAL
CONFIDENTIAL

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

4th February, 1981

My Dear Prime Minister,

FRANK CHAPPLE AND THE LEFT

Frank Chapple, with whom I have struck up a fairly warm acquaintance, lunched with me on 28th January. I thought these notes of the meeting might be of some interest.

1. He has been embarrassed by over friendly public reference to himself by Conservative M.P.'s. If he is to guard his position and profit from it in the general interest Tories ought to be a bit more intelligent about it. He has considerable contempt for Conservative M.P.'s ability to comprehend what he calls 'politics', by which I think he means the sort of ruthless in-fighting which goes on all the time in the Labour movement.

2. He hopes, like everyone else, that the economic situation is going to turn up in time for us before the next election, but cannot see any signs of it yet. He fears that Roy Jenkins and Co. may well enter the ring too soon and become a thing of the past long before the next election. He is therefore counselling them to try to hold on in the Labour Party for the time being and he cited Benn's efforts to provoke them into leaving as being founded on exactly the same analysis. Of the 'Gang' of 4 he reckons the only one who really amounts to much is Bill Rodgers. Shirley Williams cannot make up her mind and I do not think he likes either Owen or Jenkins over much. He has certainly been financing them, but sees no reason why he should go on doing this indefinitely. "It's up to someone else now."

3. I spent some time describing the French trade union set-up where you have the Communist C.G.T. and two rival Congresses as well, including a Social Democratic one, and I suggested that the same should be feasible here. Why should he not lead either an apolitical or a Social Democratic alternative Congress. He protested that he did not want to do this and would prefer to get out of politics, but on being pressed he confessed his willingness to have a go. The trouble is how to help him bring this about. Every manoeuvre depends upon the shifting calculations within the Labour movement and they change practically every day. He is clearly a past master at navigating these waters, but progress is pathetically slow. Nevertheless, in my judgement there is very little, if anything, that outsiders can do to help at this stage, at least.

Chapple spoke of the next meeting of NEDO at which the principal item on the agenda so far as the T.U.C. were concerned would be their latest tome on unemployment. This he has studied and describes as long and well presented, but full of gross generalisations. It contains no new ideas.

4. Chapple insists that we have missed and are still missing a great opportunity to press really telling reforms on the unions. He never remembers them weaker than they are at present, but when recovery sets in it will become steadily more difficult for us to act effectively. He has told Jim Prior this and says he feels he has been discounted by the Secretary of State ever since.

5. On the matter of policy for a new centre grouping, he agrees that it is very difficult to see what they will in fact embrace. His own view is that unemployment is an evil which is here to stay, at least on a much greater scale than we have been used to. He is in favour of two possible ameliorating measures: shift working for 6/7 days a week, thus giving more people part-time jobs; and an imaginative approach to some form of national service.

6. He is of course a dedicated anti-communist who understands a great deal about the workings of the far left groups, but in spite of his spell as a communist I formed the impression that his understanding of Marx/Leninism has always been a somewhat simplistic one and although he claims to know who the dangerous men are, again I doubt whether he is quite as well informed as he imagines. His experience and knowledge of what constitutes real hard intelligence is lacking. We could probably help him in this area, although only indirectly because he harbours a deep suspicion of officials of any kind.

It is worth noting that his long time and devoted secretary has recently married a Trotskyite in the local branch of the Labour party and is no longer trustworthy in his own opinion.

In conclusion I was left again with the conviction that I was dealing with a real patriot and a very brave and cunning man who has an important part to play in the break up of the Labour movement and the counter attack against Marx ism. It would be folly not to keep in touch with him or discount what he says, although the contact must be discreetly handled.

Jim Prior
Secretary

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