

FROM: THE RT HON MICHAEL JOPLING, MP



Box

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21

August 1981

Ian

I am enclosing a copy of a "think piece" by John Gummer which I find thought provoking and extremely convincing on possible political threats to the Party.

I think the Prime Minister, as well as Lord Thorneycroft and Francis Pym to whom I am also sending copies, would be interested in reading it.

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M. Jopling

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The Tories and the Social Democrats

1. A serious problem

There is a spirit abroad that suggests that the Social Democrats are the natural inheritors of all that is moderate in British Politics. This will certainly be the line fostered by the Press and the TV. It is the basic appeal intended by Shirley Williams and the rest. They will be helped by the fact that the SDP leaders look reasonable and moderate and everything will be done to cast them as the natural party of moderation and common sense between the two extremes of Marxist Labour and Friedmanite Tory.

It is in this context that the defection of the group of eight young people is so serious a matter. They are a distinguished collection: three immediate past chairmen of the Federation of Conservative Students, as well as Presidents of students' unions in major universities. The marked fact of the later period of the 1970-74 Conservative Government was that the Party managed to retain the enthusiasm of the young to a remarkable degree. Of course we were helped by the theme of Europe which clasped them to us and made sure that the Labour Party did not gain the converts which it had in 1962/4 (Phillip Whitehead, David Keene, etc). Nevertheless, despite the unpopularity of the Government generally, our score in the Universities and among young people was better than we might expect and indeed these years shewed a remarkable expansion of the Federation of University Students. It was on this base that we were able to build during the period 1974-79 and then capture an unprecedented number of young voters in the 1979 General Election. There can indeed be few comparable examples of a centre-right party in Europe gaining so high a percentage of the 18-25 year old votes. Of course the general feeling against the Labour Government was a major factor but there were certain other reasons which were also important.

2. Capturing the votes of young people in 1979

There were three particular advantages:

a) We had made the Conservative view intellectually acceptable. The Tory Radical tradition as well as Free Market Economics had combined to make us the dominating philosophy in the universities. The Left was pushed back hard by the Conservative onslaught.

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b) We had an important operation in Central Office dedicated to youth development which made the Conservative voice most effective in the universities and colleges and which gave the students a real feeling that they in turn influenced the Conservative Party.

c) We did ensure that the left looked divisive, doctrinaire and reactionary while the right was uniting, concerned, and willing to accept the new world of Europe. We matched the left in its concern for developing nations, human rights, and underprivilege but we outdid them by shewing we opposed tyranny of right and left and had no double standards.

3. The situation today

Two years later people's perception of us has been changed by the recession. The free market economic strain in our philosophy has seemed totally to overlay the Tory Radical Tradition. We have been so engrossed in putting Britain's economy right that we have had little time to say what it is all for. Our means have been right but our ends have been obscure. Unless people are clear as to the reason why, they will find the sacrifices unacceptable. And mere economic objectives are not sufficient - Tories demand more than that. It is an essentially Whig attitude to ignore the real yearning of our people for a better society, and to pretend that all they want is personal material improvement.

4. The intellectual battle

It is not too late to put this right. Indeed it was a necessary part of re-establishing the Government's ability to be firm for us to have talked tough and appeared uncompromising. However, unless we learn again the language of idealism then we shall be wholly open to losing the new generation to the Social Democrats. This makes recapturing the philosophic initiative politically essential. Surely we have learned by now the danger of handing intellectual respectability to the left (even to the rather left). The whole woolly Socialist ethos against which we are battling has permeated society precisely because in the 20s and 30s we allowed the universities to be dominated by our opponents so that to admit to being a Conservative was to admit intellectual inferiority. The party of Bolingbroke, Peel and Disraeli must not allow the

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left-over Left of Jenkins and Owen to seize the intellectual initiative. The danger is the greater because of the importance of the media and its clear connexion with the universities. If the atmosphere of academia is entirely anti-Tory then that is soon communicated via the television and radio to the voters at large.

5. The wider scene

Nor is just it a matter of universities - we are losing the much wider battle for the hearts of our people. The impression that they have of us is that we are doctrinaire in precisely the same way that the Labour Party is. The stage is therefore set for the Social Democrats to appear as the moderate, idealistic, unifier of society. 'The plague on both your houses' is a dangerous and growing attitude. The irony is that only by our economic policy can we create the conditions necessary for our ideals to become a reality. Yet by our concentration upon the means we have obscured our ends. We may achieve economic success but then lose an election because we have failed to fire our people with a real feeling that we know how to use that success. We must not win the war and lose the peace. It will be 1945 all over again. Instead 1981 ought to be the year we begin to ram home the reasons for it all. It is not a matter of changing policy but style - of concentrating on the ends instead of the means. The upturn must be accompanied by a growing confidence that the Conservatives know where they are going and that we are taking the whole nation with us. As our economic fortunes begin to improve our spirits must be lifted as well. People may vote for their pockets but they want to feel they have a higher motive (and what's more quite a lot of them do).

6. Some proposals

A few practical consequences of all this are as follows:

a) 'The reason why' and 'one nation' must become increasingly important themes in all we say.

b) We must remember that people will accept tough policies as long as they feel we are not ourselves hard-faced. Here phraseology is all important. For example:

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We must be seen to understand and to share people's fears about nuclear war and from that position present our defence policy as the answer most likely to preserve peace. The independent nuclear deterrent is best defended in the context of the search for multilateral disarmament.

We must be seen to hate unemployment and to know what it must be like to be unemployed. It's from that starting point that we can best defend our economic policies designed to safeguard jobs and create new and continuing employment. We must never seem to welcome unemployment as a convenient way of controlling the unions and reducing wages.

We must be seen to care for those who are less well off and not always seem obsessed by the thrusting go-getter. Our base is the normal 90 per cent who want stability, continuity, and to be left alone. We must start there and show how our policies ensure that a man and his family can look forward to real security. Only then can we talk of the entrepreneurial few as the means of providing for the many.

We cannot be seen to ignore the Third World. Ours must be a creative view in which we challenge the accepted 'handouts' attitude - not because we are hard-faced and unfeeling but because we seek a better way to help the poor. Brandt could destroy our position among those with a moral view. We must prove we share their ends and convert them to our means.

c) There are some organisation changes which could help a great deal.

i) A return to something like the 1979 Youth and Community Programme in Central Office with concerted Parliamentary support. (This would also entail much closer links between the House of Commons and Smith Square - perhaps at vice-chairman level - an urgent matter in any case.)

ii) A small group, perhaps under Francis Pym's chairmanship, with Ministerial/Central Office membership whose one purpose would be to monitor and counter the Social Democrats. This is important as neither the Party at large nor our back benchers quite know how to handle the SDP - it is all too unfamiliar. (The overt reason for the group could be to prepare for redistribution.)

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iii) The nomination of a small number of ministers to have, in addition to their normal duties, the special remit to hammer home Tory philosophy and to lift the argument to the 'reason why' level. This would require the support of their Secretaries of State in directing the media to them. In particular it would mean someone in the Department of Education, the Home Office, the DHSS and Overseas Development. There would therefore be at least four people who, although relatively junior, would constantly be wheeled in to speak out and consciously put our policies within the Tory tradition and look to the kind of society we are seeking to create. Central Office Press Department would, of course, have to be fully privy to this.

iv) Some personnel changes would seem sensible:

- a replacement for Robert Rhodes James as liaison with the University Senior Members;
- a back bench appointment to Central Office with responsibility for Youth/Community Affairs, who would be responsible for FCS and the student side generally.

d) Above all we must ensure that the people do not think that 'cuts are our only policy'. Our distinctive policy in each of the major fields must be encapsulated and rammed home on every occasion. (Perhaps first to our own back-benchers who seem hard-pressed to talk anything else but cuts!' It might be interesting to see how many could easily state our education policy or our Social Services policy without majoring on cut backs!)

e) Unemployment can only be ridden if our industrial policy is seen as effective and really concerned with those without a job. If we don't get the presentation right here we cannot expect to be seen to have a heart.

7. Conclusion

We needed to show our fixity of purpose in order to govern at all. We have done that. We have changed the mood of the nation and we have a real chance of economic success. Now we must recapture the hearts of the people. They must feel we are their party building one nation together, involved in their hardships and their successes and driven by human concern, not economic theory. If, therefore, we

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place ourselves clearly where we have actually been all the time - in the great Conservative tradition - then the Social Democrats can only eclipse the Labour Party and not us. If they become anything more than the successors of Clement Attlee we have only ourselves to blame. The eight young people who have joined the SDP see them as the heirs of Disraeli - we must prove them wrong or we shall truly have betrayed our inheritance.

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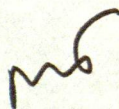
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26th August 1981

Thank you so much for your letter of 21st August, with which you enclosed a memorandum which had been written by John Gummer.

I agree that this is a most thoughtful document, and I have shown it to the Prime Minister.

Do give me a ring when you get back.



IAN GOW