



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

1. Herewith letter dated 10th December from Alan Clark.
2. Are you content, please, that I should reply in the attached terms?

I am,

IAN GOW

18th December 1981

*Yes - but
I worry about
the task*

sentence

not

Clare TP.



10 DOWNING STREET

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

18th December 1981

My dear Alan,

Thank you so much for your letter of 10th December.

It goes without saying that the views which I express in this letter are my own, and only my own.

I do not think it "acceptable to run away where a majority may be threatened by a re-distribution".

I have always taken the view that there is an implied term in the implied contract which a Conservative candidate makes when he accepts nomination as a candidate. That implied term is that, so long as an elected Member retains the confidence of his Association, he will not seek another constituency unless his existing constituency disappears or he is defeated in a General Election.

Of course it is hideously difficult for you looking after Plymouth, working in London, and living in Kent. But it was clear when you were adopted at Plymouth that Albert Costain would be retiring at the next Election. I cannot think (you will correct me if I am wrong) that you explained to your Plymouth Association, before adoption, that when Albert did retire, you would apply for his constituency.

I have no doubt that you are regarded with affection and trust by those who have toiled and toil still on your behalf in Plymouth. I think that you would be letting those people down if you abandoned Plymouth, with a majority of 11,287 for Folkestone with a majority of 16,020. I also believe that your departure from Plymouth and your arrival in Folkestone in these circumstances would provide unnecessary ammunition for the Liberal/SDP alliance.

Perhaps I am a romantic in politics, and I recognise that I am making a subjective judgement; I just know that, for myself, "I could not do it" and that is why I expressed myself so strongly earlier in the week.

.../...

Though it is nothing to do with me, I hope, very much,
that a Ministerial future awaits you.

lh
lh

IAN GOW



From: The Hon. Alan Clark, M.P.

10th December, 1981.

By du Pen

It was good of you to entrust me with another question for the Prime Minister so soon after my gaffe over that blasted Morning Star - and to do it so publicly, in front of two Whips and three colleagues!

You did afterwards raise with me the question of the Plymouth and Folkestone constituencies and so I am writing to you about this, partly because I value your advice as a true friend, in contrast to the plethora of nosey-parkers and busybodies who have pressed me with counsel on this topic from all sides (although I have not yet made any decision, or taken any formal steps).

As I understand it, your caveat is based on two assumptions: first, that to attempt to switch constituencies would be dishonourable; second, that it would be unlikely to succeed. The first of these is something that gives me considerable anxiety, but which I would like to debate; the second is a judgement which I have to make personally, but I will gladly tell you some of the factors that influence me.

As regards honour, I do not see why it is thought acceptable to run away where a majority may be threatened by a redistribution, or other factors, but discreditable to leave a good seat with a strong plurality and an Association in good order. I have had informal discussions with the F & GP in Plymouth about what was on my mind and, although they have said that they would like me to stay as their candidate at the next election, I know that they understand my personal position and I think that they would quite like the fun of selecting somebody else - a 'local man' - if it came to that. Naturally, I would take no such step without first informing all members of the Executive Council personally, and before I have made formal application for Folkestone.

Now, as to the risks. Yes, of course I recognise that these are acute in the highest degree; but I have lived in this constituency since childhood, my own children went to school there, and my roots and associations are within its boundaries. Now that there is a Parliamentary vacancy, am I not to apply simply because there ~~was~~ is a risk that I might be rejected? That is not my way of tackling life's predicaments.



- 2 -

Then again, I must face the fact that the likelihood of my holding office in this, or any subsequent, Parliament (despite the kind things you said the other evening) is virtually out of sight. I have no outside 'job', I am obsessively interested in politics, and yet I am the only Member elected in February 1974 who has never been appointed to any position of responsibility in either Opposition or Government - with the exception of George Gardiner - itself a fact from which a number of inferences can be drawn, none of them comforting.

In all honesty I must tell you that this private disappointment is not lessened by a feeling of depression that many of the general ideals and aspirations, which I hold for our country and which were fortified by the accession of Margaret Thatcher to the leadership of the Party in 1975, and her accession as Prime Minister in May 1979, have been frustrated or diminished.

What then am I to do? I cannot serve my country as I should like; I do not even serve my constituents as I could do if I lived among them; and I have no very obvious answer to my family who ask me what I have to show for seven years in the House of Commons, with weekends in Plymouth. If my father were a hereditary peer I would stay on in Plymouth until he died (he is in excellent health!), but I do not relish the prospect of continuing this pointless separation from my family until I am sixty.

It is for these reasons that my inclination has moved towards the role of an XVIII-century Member, within my own fief. And, if it does not come off I will just have to take consolation from Jane and the boys, my large personal fortune (most of it on loan to the U.S. Government!), my library and running the Estate.

It is very good of you to have read so far. Do not be in any hurry to let me know your judgement. I have promised Tony Royle that I will observe the correct protocol throughout and so far I have not done, nor even finally decided, anything.

Yours

A