

Ancram

27/4/82

1st April 1982

Thank you very much for your letter of 29th March and for your very comprehensive Report on the Hillhead By-Election.

Gerry Malone and his wife are coming to have a drink here at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday 27th April, and I would be delighted if you would join us. I have invited John Mackay as well.

Michael Ancram Esq MP

From: Michael Ancram, M.A., LL.B., M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Personal and
Confidential

29th March, 1982.

Dear Prime Minister,

I am sorry that we did not manage to hold Hillhead or prevent an S.D.P. victory there. While it was always a difficult prospect, there was a moment when I believed that it was possible, with the first-rate campaign and candidacy of Gerry Malone. He has come out of this election with nothing but credit in my view, and has achieved a great deal for the Party in Scotland.

Psychologically our second place was vital. It is in this context important to appreciate that the absence of a large proportion of the student vote probably made all the difference. In that respect our decision on timing was right.

I believe that there were a number of reasons why we were ultimately beaten. The personal pull of Roy Jenkins, strengthened by a well run "human interest" story of how failure would be the end of a "fine political career" undoubtedly had an effect over the last few days.

There were, however, a number of policy areas where we positively lost ground during the campaign. Unemployment was not in my view one of these. We had lost what we were going to lose on that before the campaign started, and successfully neutralised it as an active issue during the first week of the campaign by facing it out ourselves.

Trident was however a vote loser. A surprising number of our own committed supporters openly wavered on this issue in the first emotional response to John Nott's statement. Some of these we recovered, but a significant number we did not. The lesson to me is that we require far more clearly to present the Trident decision in the emotional light of peace-preservation and multi-lateral disarmament rather than in the apparently less acceptable light of confrontatory deterrence. While Hillhead geographically was particularly vulnerable to the anti-Trident emotional appeal, I do not underrate it as a matter of national concern among many of our own supporters.

University cuts was another issue on which we lost support in a constituency with a large number of university connections. The S.D.P. picked up most of these, as I experienced personally. I believe that some of these can be recovered before the General Election as the effects of the economies are seen to be less disruptive than expected.

The third main area of vote loss was among small businesses and shopkeepers. While recognising special Government action on their behalf (which we highlighted) they are resentful at what they perceive to have been an unfair share of the burden of recession landed on them while other sectors, particularly the public sector, have been protected. Closures among their numbers have exacerbated their resentment. My feeling is that many of them will return to us at the next election but wished to register a protest on at least this occasion. This is however an area we will have to cultivate hard again, as the S.D.P. are making a strong effort to attract this part of the electorate.

While perhaps too close to the campaign to judge it objectively, I believe that politically and organisationally we achieved what was possible during the campaign. While the result was not a disaster, I only wish we could have given you a greater boost by pulling it off.

Yours sincerely
Michael

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.
10, Downing Street
S.W.1.