

PERSONAL

PRIME MINISTER

Meeting at Chequers on Sunday 13th April (11.00 am to 5.00 pm)

1. Those attending

Lord Whitelaw (only until 12.15)
Norman Tebbit
Geoffrey Howe
Nigel Lawson
David Young
Michael Dobbs (Central Office)
John Sharkey (from Saatchi's, whom you have not met before)
Brian Griffiths and myself from No 10

2. Purpose of the meeting

The meeting was proposed by the Chairman to look at strategy in the run-up to the election. I do not think he sees the meeting addressing itself to the manifesto. I cannot elicit much about the format the Chairman has in mind; but Saatchi's will be making a presentation with the latest opinion research.

3. How to make the most of the meeting

The material presented to you is only useful insofar as it is a guide to action. The first question must be:

- (a) what should we be doing differently, which would help us win the next election, but which is consistent with our fundamental philosophy?

The second question is:

- (b) how do we make sure that these actions are taken, over the one or two years till the next election; how do you involve colleagues; and how is the momentum maintained and progress monitored?

4. Considerations

Everyone will have their own views as to how to evaluate the material presented at the meeting. These are the considerations which weigh most heavily with me.

(a) "There is no gratitude in politics"

Best example: 1945. People vote on a government's record only so far as it is a pointer to the future. The voters will not re-elect a government simply out of gratitude for what they have already achieved.

For an incumbent government this problem becomes greater at each successive election - specifically, how does a government, in office for 8 or 9 years present itself as fresh?

1957

(b) The future

The other parties will be concentrating most of their fire power on what they will do in the future. So must we. We therefore have to demonstrate that we have got plenty of new (and good) ideas - on those issues which most concern people.

(c) The priorities of the electorate

It is not therefore enough to know where we are stronger than the other parties. We have to know what issues weigh most heavily with people; and then concentrate on these. (Otherwise, most Ministers will tend to concentrate on those policies which occupy most of their time and attention, but to which the electorate may give lower priority.)

(d) Playing upon fears

At the same time, if we are looking to the future, we have to concentrate on what in the opposition parties most frightens voters. We need good poll research here; and our attack must above all be realistic and not "over the top".

(e) The Liberals and SDP

One of the most difficult of all: which argument(s) should be deployed against the Alliance? eg: a vote for the Alliance will let in Labour; the Alliance are split with different policies; they are ex-Socialists; they supported Labour last time and they will do so again.

We can use all these arguments. But do we want to concentrate on one above all?

And there is another question here. Who can best deploy the case against the Alliance? Is Norman Tebbit likely to be a good person to persuade a wavering voter not to defect to the Alliance; or would someone like Geoffrey Howe be more effective? (This is a delicate matter, but very important)

5. Policy work and preparation for the Manifesto

At this meeting you may not want to talk much about the machinery for drawing up the Manifesto. But it will not be too early to set in hand policy work for the next Parliament. Questions which therefore arise are:

- (a) which issues are the most important: because we want to capitalise on our strengths. (eg. privatisation, (still) law and order, trade unions); or because we want to defend our weak spots (eg. education,

health service); or to pre-empt the opposition (eg. jobs).

(b) how do you want to set about this in government (eg. a small group of Ministers under your Chairmanship, with staff work done by Policy Unit and appropriate Ministers).

(c) How far do you want to involve the Parliamentary Party, and have any backbench policy groups?

6. The Government PR in the run-up to the next election

Of course, a Manifesto will only be convincing if the ground beforehand has been adequately prepared. Just as important as the policy contents of the Manifesto is how the Government presents itself between now and the election - to be honest, I think we are still doing this too much by the seat of our pants. You may want to consider how this can be improved - the opinion research presented should help; but it needs to be updated regularly; and we must then act upon it.

7. The leadership factor in the next election

This may be the most important factor of all. The next election will be the first in modern times (and in the television age) when a Government will go into an election led by someone who has been Prime Minister for 8 or 9 continuous years.

First this will accentuate the usual strengths and weaknesses

- experienced Prime Minister (strength)
- time for a change (weakness)

But there is a second factor. You are (and are seen as) the strongest Prime Minister since Churchill. I personally believe that this is potentially your and the Party's greatest strength. (so, it appears, does Healey too).

But how can you capitalise on it? Perhaps the question can be put like this. Thatcherism needs a purpose. In 1979, it was to defeat inflation and restore economic order and efficiency. The need for "Thatcherism" was seen again in the Falklands and the coal strike. Now, looking to after the next election, what is it in the future that we still need "Thatcherism" for.

My own view is that the issue might be - defence of democracy. To save Britain from a Labour Government (backed perhaps by a feeble group of Alliance MPs) controlled by dozens of Derek Hattons, and Bernie Grants (who would probably ditch Kinnock): they would not defend British democratic traditions, they would undermine the police and would be a pushover for Scargill. "Only Mrs. Thatcher - not Kinnock, Owen or Steel - can prevent a tyranny of the Left."

8. Summary: points for action

- (a) What regular poll research do we need between now and the next election?
- (b) On which policy areas should we be concentrating?
- (c) How can the government best present its image of continuing momentum and modernisation?
- (d) What strategy should the party leadership deploy against the Liberals and SDP; and which Ministers might be the most effective in doing this?

- (e) How to improve and co-ordinate the Government's presentation in the run-up to the election; and should a Minister be charged with this task? You may also want to decide which Ministers you want to encourage to appear more frequently in the media. (This is always an over-ambitious task; but if we at least try, we might achieve something.)
- (f) When, and how, to initiate policy work for a Manifesto and a third term. (the two things are not necessarily the same; the latter can go more widely).
- (g) (Perhaps) when and how to proceed on drafting the Manifesto.

SS.

STEPHEN SHERBOURNE

10.4.86

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