

25 September 1986

PRIME MINISTER

PRESS DIGEST

LIBERALS/SDP

- Steel and Owen today to try to pick up the Alliance defence pieces after Liberal debate in advance of Steel's speech tomorrow. Together on ITV tonight.
- D/Star says any pretence that the Alliance rates as a serious political party has been washed out to sea at Eastbourne. A party without a defence policy is no party at all. At the moment the Alliance looks like a proper mish mash - leaderless and without clear policies.
- Today, under heading "The ultimate deterrent for voters" says the Liberal conference vote on defence is a devastating setback for the Alliance. A political party in Britain must have a consistent and credible policy on nuclear defence. Britain needs a third force in politics which only the Alliance can provide. Christopher Monckton, in Today, criticises Steel for his lack of courage at the end of the Liberal defence debate when he should have exercised leadership.
- Express feature on Doctor Owen in Distress, and says that he has one real avenue to power - a deal with the Tories.
- Mail says one can understand the Liberals trying to divert attention away from its conference. It has, after all, done everything wrong. It has been more of a catastrophe than a conference.
- Guardian says Steel is planning constitutional changes to make the annual assembly more representative after the General Election.
- Hugo Young analyses where Owen and Steel went wrong. They invented the "European" - in fact Anglo-French - policy and they have been undone.
- The Times piles on the agony with analyses by Robin Oakley who asks if the Liberals are seriously interested in winning power, and Ronnie Butt who says it is time for a change of Liberal leader; "misfit Steel" maybe its head but not its soul. Liberals could do with a more representative leader.

COALITION TALKS

- Steel denies holding secret talks with senior Tories about coalition (Today).
- Sun in a P1 piece headed "Maggie men in a plot" says Steel has held talks with Top Tory wets about your fate after the next election, according to Liberal sources. But it does not name two serving Ministers who it says it has emerged are plotting with the Alliance to ditch you if you do not win outright.
- Mirror: "Thatcher rejects plot with Libs", claims senior Tory moderates have been holding secret talks with the Liberals on proposals for a coalition Government, but doesn't name anyone.
- Express, rather buried away, says Steel has been holding secret talks in restaurants with leading Tory wets, but 2 serving Ministers said to be among them not named.
- Mail P1 - Mystery of the Liberals and the Tory wets - astonishing claims against Chris Patten and Peter Walker lead to charges of dirty tricks and threat of legal action. Suspicion that this was a Liberal diversion.
- Telegraph says Foreign Secretary is emerging as the Conservative Steel would favour as a caretaker Prime Minister in the event of a hung Parliament.

POLITICS

- Today leads with a MARPLAN poll (Labour 40/Con 34/ Alliance 24) which it says shows a fall in the number who think you are a good leader, but you still beat Kinnock.
- At least one woman should be on every Liberal short list for constituency selection conferences.
- Attorney General not to stand for Wimbledon at next election.
- UCATT, union which sponsors him, has told Eric Heffer to behave or else at the Labour Party conference - threatens withdrawal of cash support; Telegraph feature on the Leftists lying in wait for Kinnock next week.
- Sun asks if NATO could survive if a Labour Government scrapped nuclear weapons, and says of course not. In accusing Cap Weinburger of interference for saying this, ^{Labour are} ~~showing~~ they do not wish the British people to be told the truth.
- Express leader on "Kinnock and the threat to NATO" says Kinnock is furious with Weinburger because the last thing he wants is attention to be drawn to the great and obvious threat to NATO inherent in Labour's policy. The American Secretary is right to be frank.
- Mail says Weinburger is perfectly entitled to say what he did. What is more every word of his is true.
- Eric Hammond, EETPU, threatens clash at Labour Party conference by tabling emergency motion rejecting Left's attempt to make Labour the non nuclear party.
- Telegraph says Britain's political parties, apart from Tories, are in disarray over nuclear weapons. and, heeding Weinburger's warning, the electorate should remember that a vote against American bases may also be a vote against the stability of NATO.
- Guardian leads with story that US/Soviet arms control proposals would almost certainly lead to the scrapping of Molesworth and cuts in cruise force at Greenham Common - meaning opponents of our independnet deterrent can no longer claim it is preventing US/Soviet agreement.
- Labour Party suspends Knowsley N selection process.

N/SOUTH AND EDWINA CURRIE

- D/Star says "super twee Edwina" may be right in saying that people would be healthier if they ate carrots and cabbages instead of crisps and chips, but she has confirmed she is politics answer to Dynasty's unspeakable Alexis.
- Mirror, under heading "Bananas! MPs blast Edwina". A barrage of insults flew in the direction of Mrs Currie after her blunt remarks about "ignorant northerners"; leader headed "An ignorant woman" says putting Mrs Currie into the Government was like building a ship with a hole in its side. She represents the modern Tory Party, indifferent to suffering, impatient of poverty, indignant about those who cannot help themselves.
- Today: North gives Mrs Currie a roasting - "What a load of tripe you talk" - pompous, bigoted and ignorant, according to MPs.
- Express: "Sorry Edwina, but you are talking a load of tripe..." says headline. Britain's nutritionists tell her to eat her words.
- Mail - more helpfully, goes into the "Edwina Guide to good food and healthier living". It says she is unrepentant; leader, however, says she could learn one or two things herself. The North may not have the world's healthiest diet but it hits some of gastronomic high notes.
- Guardian suggests Mrs Currie will wish to retract when she reads the evidence accumulated in the DHSS.
- Times says Mrs Currie back-tracked by admitting there was a link between ill health and poverty (which she had never denied).

ECONOMY

- Britain £886m in the red last month. Imports at an all time record because of summer spending spree. £ plunges and fears of interest rate rises.
- Mirror says you have been doctoring the dole queue figures again - by stopping unemployment benefit from October 5 for those who leave work voluntarily or are sacked, for 13 weeks instead of 6 weeks.
- Express says that despite the trade figures setback the economy is healthy and getting healthier.

INDUSTRY

- Coal miners hit all time productivity record of 3.34 tonnes per shift in spite of overtime ban in South Wales.
- Peter Walker to be first Western Minister to visit Chernobyl later this year - invitation extended at IAEA conference.

PRIVATISATION/FLOTATION

- 4m are thought to have applied for shares in TSB beating B/Telecom's 2.3m. Sun says this is good news.

MEDIA

- Guardian launches campaign to put No 10 on the record at meetings of Lobby.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Sun's latest contender for the barmiest council of 1986 - Houslow for giving paternity leave to lesbians.
- Gloucester, Alliance controlled county council, refuses to adopt a "no discrimination" role against homosexuals.

HOUSING

- Labour Party furious over woman in Chilterns who sells her bungalow, formerly council owned, at £62,000 profit three years after buying it.
- Halifax Building Society buying a limited number of estate agencies.

EDUCATION

- Sun says Kenneth Baker should abandon the idea of student loans because it has been a disaster in the USA, Sweden and other countries.
- Times leader on the whole in favour of loans, but with generous terms and safety nets.

TERRORISM

- Home Secretary will today urge more exchange of information among EC terrorists.
- Express says EC Ministers will discuss plans to turn Europe into a "terrorist free zone" (apparently forgetting about Ireland).
- Mail says there are fears that France will carry out indiscriminate reprisals against terrorist bases for Paris bombings.

NORTHERN IRELAND

- First Ulster policeman to be charged with unlawful killing after firing a plastic bullet is acquitted - storm follows.

RELIGION

- Bishop of Durham at it again, says God should be thought of as a woman as well as a man. Not exclusively male. Must reflect all that is female.
- Bishop Montefiore, of Birmingham, to retire.

SPORT

- Dick Tracey, Sports Ministers, calls soccer administrators to meeting on Luton Town today. Wants them to readmit Luton to Littlewoods Cup.

BERNARD INGHAM