

MR. INGHAM

PRIME MINISTER

PANORAMA

This note is intended to help you prepare for the interview with David Dimbleby tomorrow evening.

Background

I believe that, notwithstanding their over-full agenda (see my earlier minute), there will be two broad themes to the interview:

- (i) NHS: how you propose to get out of the present "mess";
- (ii) the kind of society you are creating in Britain - good for some, but with greater inequalities and with private affluence, public squalor, etc.

Their aim in pursuing both themes will be to polish up their hard, uncaring cliched image they have of you.

The effect of their approach, unless you watch it, will be to bury your achievements over the last nine years under an emotive current problem (NHS) and all kinds of claptrap about the condition of Britain which owes more to their narrow vision of society than reality.

Like the rest of the media they will also be looking for the first telltale signs, as they would put it, of "elective dictatorship arrogance" - e.g. impatience or irritability with criticism and disdain for critics.

At the same time you will need to give no quarter to NHS staff threatening to go on strike - it is absolutely unacceptable and irresponsible, especially when a review body, introduced on the understanding that nurses don't strike, is considering their pay and pay structure.

All this requires a firm but frank approach to the interview - and one which you take at a measured pace, leavening the judicious use of statistics with a certain amount of philosophy about the NHS and Britain.

NHS

On the NHS you need above all to get over these points:

- your first priority when you came to office was to end Britain's steady decline, and the disruptive domination of union bosses and put Britain's finances and economy on a sound basis;
- that was a titanic struggle and on its success, now plain for all to see, depends all you and the British people hope for the country;
- Britain - and its health service - can't advance on thin air - progress requires steady growth in national income. You have, and are providing, the wherewithal and you are absolutely determined not to throw away all these gains;
- but as you continue in office, you are steadily working through long-standing problems - e.g. inflation, unions, housing, education - which your Government most certainly did not invent or cause;
- the NHS which preoccupies us now is just such an issue. But let us put it into perspective. The people of Britain know they have no problems if they fall acutely ill or have an accident - the NHS can and does provide immediately and gives every satisfaction. You intend to keep it that way;
- so what is the problem? Essentially, how to meet the growing demands on the country and the NHS of an

ageing population and ever-more spectacular advances in medical treatment. That is the problem confronting every advanced industrial country, and other countries are trying to do what we are now doing:

- get the maximum value for money through higher efficiency out of the cash already provided by the taxpayer;
- to find new, imaginative ways of increasing the resources for health care over and above the increased sums the Government is devoting to the NHS out of the greater national wealth that your policies are steadily producing;
- without these policies, which have produced seven continuous years of growth, there would be no greater resources for the NHS. That is why you don't simply say the NHS - more especially its patients - are safe in your hands; you go much further and state with absolute conviction that they are only safe in your hands.

Whither Britain?

So far as the kind of British society you are creating, and the possibility that some parts will be left behind - and society will become more unequal - I think you should aim to get over the following points:

- there is unfortunately nothing new about disparities in the economic performance of different parts of Britain. Nor is there anything new about differences in personal income;
- but one thing that has been clear for decades to responsible opinion in those regions is that they will

only progress if there is steady growth in the national economy;

- well now they have got that growth and have had it for seven continuous years. And the fastest falls in unemployment are now occurring in areas where unemployment has been proportionately highest;
- these regions could do themselves a lot of good by extolling their manifold virtues, by putting their best foot forward and by encouraging enterprising people to go there;
- the Government can help, as it is trying to do through its revamping of the DTI and regional assistance, with the objective of promoting and supporting enterprise;
- but the main point is that steady national growth has given these regions their first real opportunity since the War;
- that brings you back to Government policy - the Government's economic policies are as of central importance to the less well-off regions as they are to the NHS. It is not only the NHS that is only safe in your hands - the regions are only safe in your hands;
- and you will fight like hell to make sure they remain safe in your hands;
- as for greater inequalities, what surely matters is whether the general condition of the people is improving, as it is, rather than whether gaps between top and bottom are widening.

Bernard Ingham

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CHLABU