

CCO

Conservative Research Department

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Director: ROBIN HARRIS CBE

RH/CR

27th June 1989

PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

Dear John,

THE EUROPEAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN

- ... I attach - for your eyes only - copies both of the report
- ... which I have written from the Research Department's point
- ... of view on the European Election Campaign and some speech
- ... notes which I have sent in to the Chairman for him to use
- ... when addressing backbenchers on 5th July. It struck me
- ... that some of the points in the latter might, in one
- ... context or another, prove useful.

Yours,
Robin

ROBIN HARRIS

John Whittingdale Esq
Political Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

32 SMITH SQUARE · SW1

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM

RH/CR

To The Chairman
cc Mr Morrison, Mr Lacy, Mr Bruce,
Mr Desborough, Mrs Stotter
27th June 1989

From Robin Harris

REPORT ON 1989 EURO-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

This report is divided into two parts. Part one deals with those activities for which the Research Department had responsibility. Part two consists of some general observations on the Campaign.

PART ONE - THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

1. Staffing

The performance of the Research Department staff - both Desk Officers and secretaries - came up to my expectations. This was particularly commendable because a number of them had to spend nights away from home and to travel to work very early indeed: the public transport strikes worsened conditions.

The basic problem is to generate sufficient enthusiasm between European Election Campaigns among Desk Officers to ensure that they pay close attention to the European aspects of their jobs. Too much of a burden was placed on Edward Llewellyn, particularly in the six months or so in the run-up to the Campaign. The performance of the EDG Secretariat, with the exception of Tim Bainbridge, did not inspire confidence: they were clearly unable to make up for Research Department Desk Officers' lack of experience in dealing with European matters. I recommend that a year before the next European Elections a second full-time European Desk Officer should be appointed, possibly with an assistant as well, who would assist the main CRD European Desk Officer during this difficult period.

2. The Campaign Guide

We produced the first mid-term Campaign Guide which appeared in early April. It was designed to provide special briefing for the local government elections, for the European elections and as background to the Government's tenth anniversary. On balance I am inclined to believe that it represented a diversion of effort which was not worthwhile. Although the publication was of uniformly high quality, I doubt whether it was much used. And work on it inevitably meant that work on other short-term but perhaps more politically fruitful initiatives was suspended.

/3. The Manifesto

3. The Manifesto

This was written with great panache by Chris Patten who resisted with considerable success attempts at committee drafting. It struck a good balance between differing and not entirely complementary objectives. An early deadline was set for its completion and transmission to the Prime Minister - early February - and that certainly helped smooth subsequent work on it and on the rest of the Campaign. The 'mini-Manifesto' and speaking notes for both Cabinet Ministers and Candidates were heavily based upon it: these latter publications were, however, delayed by several weeks because of other work.

4. Manifesto Briefing

In our approach to this operation, we sought to follow the advice given by Andrew Tyrie in his note on the 1984 European Election Campaign in which he said: 'The [Manifesto] Briefing should have been written in the final weeks of the Manifesto's preparation, by the authors, rather than leaving it to a member of the Research Department to produce'.

However, Special Advisers proved in general unwilling - or in some cases just unable - to produce briefing in the format and to the timetable required: there were, though, some notable exceptions to this. The fact that the deadlines originally set were not met increased considerably the pressure on the Research Department in the last few days before the Manifesto's launch. In future, I would not ask Special Advisers to undertake a task which is, in most cases, manifestly beyond them.

Briefing on the Opposition Party Manifestos was produced within the Research Department, drawing on points and comments from Special Advisers. Both our Manifesto Briefing and that on the Opposition Parties was sent in good time to Ministers: edited versions of these were sent in the form of Campaign Notes (see below) to EDG Candidates.

My main concern is that I suspect that this very full briefing was not much used by Ministers who received it.

5. Conservative European Handbook

This was an innovation - both as regards content and format. The ring-binder format - as opposed to bound copy - has a number of obvious advantages. If it is to be retained for the next European Election Campaign, the European - as opposed to domestic - contents of the Handbook should be updated at least annually. It should also go out more widely - not just to MEPs, EDG Candidates and Euro-Agents (with some others inside and outside Central Office) as on this occasion but also to Ministers and, perhaps, more widely still. In my view, the argument for the ring-binder approach is not, however, entirely won. Had we not had a Campaign Guide which dealt fully with non-European issues

/we might indeed...

we might indeed have needed a fuller and more detailed bound volume of the sort produced for 1979 and 1984. The approach adopted on this occasion was, in part, determined by the rules for the use of European Information Fund money. Part I was produced - and the binders themselves bought - with that money. Part II, being more political, was paid for from Party funds. I recommend that we should think hard over the next six months or so about whether we want to continue with the present format.

The main problem was that Part I was produced far too late. Drafts were meant to have been received from the EDG Secretariat by the end of September and the final copy sent out in November last year. In fact the material was sent out on 22nd March this year. As a result the work on Part II - which was done entirely within the Research Department - was completed rather later than I would have liked. The preparation of the Handbook raises in my mind questions about the recruitment and training of EDG Secretariat staff which should be seriously considered. On present information, I would not in future ask the EDG Secretariat to produce even first drafts of any of this material.

6. Campaign Notes

Using the format adopted for the Daily Notes of the 1987 General Election Campaign, 13 issues of European Campaign Notes were produced. They went to EDG Candidates, Euro-Agents and to Westminster Members of Parliament, copies being left in the Whips' Office. A questionnaire has been sent out by Tim Bainbridge asking EDG Candidates what use they made of Campaign Notes and other material.

7. Information Unit

The Unit worked efficiently. It fielded some 15 to 20 or more queries a day from Candidates or Agents and a somewhat higher number from the public. It is right that a Research Department Desk Officer, as on this occasion, should be in charge of the operation: but the EDG Secretariat members provided useful expertise in dealing with specific queries, particularly from Candidates.

8. Questions of Policy

... After a slow start, this Committee seems to have done its work satisfactorily. I attach a separate note by Perry Miller who acted as its Secretary. In future, we must make greater efforts to ensure that at least one of the members of the Committee has had experience of the Committee's work on a previous occasion. The Committee also suffered in the early stages, from a lack of co-operation from Special Advisers. However, this was remedied by a letter from the Prime Minister to Cabinet Ministers urging Special Advisers to co-operate fully in all the European Election Campaign work.

/9. Press Conference Briefing

9. Press Conference Briefing

David Willetts was in charge of this operation, as in 1987. He made an invaluable contribution both to it and to the political conduct of the Campaign. That said, too much of the briefing was concentrated on general issues, having the 1987 General Election Campaign press conferences as the model, which in fact never arose. Consequently, relatively too little time was spent both in the Research Department and elsewhere in the building considering how to develop positive or attacking issues for use at press conferences and speeches. The fact that the Prime Minister only appeared on two occasions at press conferences meant that - with the exception of the conduct of the Campaign itself - we were able to concentrate very much on the subject of the day. The production of the briefs for the press conference briefing was, in general, of a somewhat higher standard than in 1987 - though the pressures were, of course, considerably less. Some central issues of the Campaign, however, such as the Social Charter or the more general issue of 'Socialism through the backdoor' had not been sufficiently considered by us early on in the Campaign and briefing on these matters was, in my view, not up to the same standard as on some less important ones.

10. Liaison with the Advertising Agency

No doubt because both the Director of Communications and the Agency were new to Central Office, time was wasted because the Research Department was not brought in at a sufficiently early stage to influence Agency thinking. However, by the end of the Campaign we were working much better together.

PART TWO - OTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN

1. What Went Right

- (a) The Manifesto was a success. It was well received. It was long and detailed whereas our opponents' Manifestos were flimsy. It also provided us with something around which to unite when the pressure for division grew.
- (b) Relations with Christopher Prout were good throughout the Campaign. For this, undoubtedly, both sides deserve credit. The embarrassments which did occur as a result of EDG actions or remarks were entirely predictable - and almost equally unavoidable. The exercise to bring Michael Heseltine and - to a limited extent - Ted Heath on side reduced some of the damage done by public splits on European issues. In general, the Chairman's conciliatory tactics in the months up to and the weeks of the Campaign paid off. More positively, we made good use of 'outsiders' - Lords Whitelaw and Home and Messrs Tebbit and Heseltine.

- (c) Mr Kinnock showed himself vulnerable to pressure. We exploited his gaffes quickly and effectively. We must continue remorselessly with this approach over the next two years.

2. What Went Wrong

- (a) Clearly, outside domestic factors - inflation, interest rates, health service reforms, water and Community Charge - were bound to be a major problem. They effectively precluded our running on non-European issues, even if we had wanted to.
- (b) The splits on Europe were, therefore, all the more damaging to us. In my view, the split between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor over economic management was at least as important as Ted Heath's and Michael Heseltine's remarks. There are clear lessons in this for the future.
- (c) Our press conferences were much better handled and looked much more professional than in 1987. They also, apparently, appeared more professional than Labour's. However, they did not get the column inches or set the agenda. Perhaps we should have had more of them. Certainly, Ministers should have come along to them with clear ideas of the political points they wanted to make. Instead, they, for the most part, delivered short lectures on their own subjects and were then subject to cross questioning on issues of current interest - which happened largely to be unfavourable. In particular, the graphics - which in themselves were very good - were allowed to determine the content of Ministers' press statements. In future, Ministers who wish to use graphics should have a separate speaking note on these and then issue a short sharp press release. We should also give much more thought to the general points of politics which we wish to get over at a press conference rather than being so locked in to the subject of the day.
- (d) For quite understandable reasons, we did not until the very last part of the Campaign receive much public support from leading members of the Cabinet - with the distinguished exception of the Foreign Secretary. The Treasury were able to offer no useful stories or help at all and were unwilling to advance the process of costing Labour's Manifesto - in my view, one of the few points which would have allowed us to get on the offensive against our opponents. The Prime Minister only took part in two press conferences - the final one being of little political impact. Her schedule seemed to me to be

/too inflexible.

too inflexible. When the media impact of the - extremely powerful - speech which she delivered to the Women's Conference on 24th May was effectively lost as a result of the rise in base rates announced while the Prime Minister was speaking we were unable to find other slots which would allow her to get front page coverage for our Campaign in the days which followed. The inability to use our most effective political figures in the Government - as opposed to outside the Government - is one of the main and salutary lessons from this Campaign.

- (e) With the wisdom of hindsight, I believe that our Campaign was too negative. It is not for me to comment on the advertising which is an area foreign to me. Moreover, one of the dangers of accepting the false view that political advertising is the most important way to win Elections is that when one's advertising does come under fire the whole of the rest of the Campaign is gravely damaged. So perhaps we relied on advertising to do too much for us. The complaint, however, that the advertising was negative covers several different points - some of which are valid and some not. Our problem was that an aggressive advertising Campaign would not have looked so negative if we had been able to get more publicity for the proposals contained in our Manifesto and for the 'vision' of a post-1992 Europe which we have been working towards since the previous Euro-Elections. Whether advertising might have been able to emphasise those positive objectives in Europe I do not know: arguably, the final advertisement written by the Prime Minister suggests that it might have done.

Another problem with the advertising was that we were seeking to be 'negative' about Socialism but finished up being negative about the Community. And that in turn, perhaps mainly through the comments of Conservatives at Westminster and Strasbourg as well as journalists, rebounded on us. All of those who tried to pull out of the 'Social Charter' proposals the material to achieve an effective attack on 'Socialism through the backdoor' know how enormously difficult this proved to be. In retrospect, and knowing as much as I do now about the Community proposals in these areas, I think that I would have advised from an early stage that this strategy was not likely to be sufficiently credible - at least on its own.

It was essentially the substance, not the presentation, (as in the 'diet of Brussels') of our position which

/made it seem...

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The Chairman

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made it seem 'negative'. Real attempts by the Commission - welcomed by Labour - to extend Community competence meant that the Government was resisting pressures from Europe in areas and at times not of our choosing. We were entering a period in which, having been the Party most in favour of integration in the EC, we were opposing Euro-initiatives on subjects from cigarette packets to Economic and Monetary Union. The advertising and the overall political strategy of our Campaign could not avoid reflecting that. Contrary to Christopher Prout's views which he gave us in the last week or so of the Campaign, I doubt whether the electorate were ready for a Campaign which made sovereignty a central issue. So I believe we were right to avoid going still further along this route.

- (f) We need to know more about who voted 'Green' before coming to anything more than tentative conclusions. Perhaps we should have realised that the European Elections would be a classic vehicle for a protest vote, particularly among those well educated middle-class voters who were inclined to turn out: and so, perhaps, we should have been much more aware of the dangers of a sudden switch to the 'Greens'. In exculpation I would only offer the thought that no one else predicted it either. Whether those who voted Green could have been persuaded by us to vote Conservative under present circumstances is anyway doubtful.

RH

QUESTIONS OF POLICY: REPORT

Summary

The Questions of Policy Committee first met on 5th April 1989 to discuss a 'plan of action' for the Euro-Campaign. It met again on 26th April and then weekly until the launch of the Campaign on 22nd May. During the Campaign, meetings were held approximately three times a week (as needed) until 9th June. The Committee was not active during the final week of the Campaign - the practical details of printing and distribution meant that material would reach candidates too late to be of any use.

Draft answers were commissioned in the first instance from Special Advisers and then subsequently, once the Campaign had begun, from Desk Officers. These answers were submitted to the Committee which either passed or amended them. Printing and distribution were organised by Reading.

86 Euro-Questions of Policy were produced (20 more than in 1984) of which 38 were responses to questionnaires. At the start of the Campaign (22nd May), 26 Questions of Policy had been distributed.

Points

1. The Committee relies heavily upon both Special Advisers and Desk Officers to provide concise, clear and accurate material swiftly. Desk Officers were, without exception, keenly aware of the need to provide a quick 'turnaround' in terms of answers to questionnaires. Some Special Advisers, however, did not seem to accord the exercise such a high priority. One or two individuals, having suggested in April topics likely to occur during the Campaign, had failed to provide draft Questions of Policy by the end of the exercise. In addition, when work was sent for checking by Desk Officers, inexplicably long delays occurred before the material was returned.

A couple of drafts were actually found to be out of date on the European aspects of the issue.

Perhaps, in future, a letter could be sent to Special Advisers (copied to their Ministers?) by the Chairman/Director of CRD, stressing the importance of the exercise. I do not think that a request from a Desk Officer acting as Secretary to the Committee has sufficient force to get a response.

2. The Committee was inclined, at the outset, to scrutinise the drafts in great detail and to question facts, figures and policy statements (on one or two occasions this was quite fortunate).

This made for very slow progress. Only when the Campaign had started and I had made representations to one or two Committee members, did any sense of urgency emerge.

It would have been useful if one of the senior figures on the Committee had taken part in this exercise before, and so could have given a steer. As it was, I relied on advice from Robin Harris, Alistair Cooke and Elizabeth Buchanan with which I then tried to persuade the Committee.

3. In a Euro-election, 'Euro' people are needed on the Committee, if only to ensure that the draft answers have a 'Euro-flavour'. However, on this occasion they were keen to avoid references to EC competence wherever possible, and to strike out sentences such as 'This is for national parliaments to decide', even when Special Advisers were indicating that this was an important part of the argument.
4. From a purely practical point of view, it would have been much easier to hold the meetings at 9.30 am, or even earlier. Very little of note came out of the press conferences which would have been worth including in Questions of Policy rather than Campaign Notes, and an earlier start would have increased the likelihood of more Ministers being able to attend. As it was, finishing at 11.30am - 12.00pm made it very difficult to type amendments, check with Special Advisers and prepare an index to go on the van to Reading at 2.30pm.
5. The word processor equipment let us down badly on more than one occasion. I realise that it is shortly to be replaced, but this was of little consolation at the time, when the machinery managed to erase whole discs of information while we were trying to meet a deadline. Fortunately, such mishaps did not prove unduly problematic as I was provided with excellent secretarial assistance by Miss Jo Luck. Her competence greatly reduced the time needed for checking through drafts.

Committee Members:

Rt Hon Tony Newton (Chairman)
Baroness Elles
Rt Hon Lynda Chalker
Mr Peter Lilley
Mr Ian Lang
Mr Tim Bainbridge
Mr Andrew Tyrie
Mr Anthony Teasdale
Mr Richard Gueterbock
Mr Charles Hendry
Mr Perry Miller (Secretary)

SPEECH NOTES FOR PARTY ORGANISATION COMMITTEE 5TH JULY 1989

TWO OBVIOUS SUBJECTS OF COMMON INTEREST:

1. GENERAL PARTY ORGANISATION.
2. EUROPEAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

1. PARTY ORGANISATION

OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS AS CHAIRMAN, I HAVE:

- STREAMLINED THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AT CENTRAL OFFICE, BRINGING ALL CENTRAL OFFICE DIRECTORS UNDER THREE DEPARTMENTAL DIRECTORS WHO, ALONE, REPORT DIRECTLY TO ME;
- MADE A NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CHANGES, BOTH IN CENTRAL OFFICE AND THE AREAS AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF VERY LITTLE CHANGE;

/- PLANNED AND...

- PLANNED AND BEGUN TO EXECUTE THE TOTAL REFURBISHMENT OF CENTRAL OFFICE TO PROVIDE A MODERN WORKING ENVIRONMENT FOR STAFF;

- SOUGHT DELIBERATELY TO KEEP THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE PARTY WORKING TOGETHER - NATIONAL UNION, EDG, CONSTITUENCIES AND, OF COURSE, THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY: A TASK WHICH, AS THE EVENTS OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAVE SHOWN, IS FAR FROM EASY.

CENTRAL OFFICE HAS MORE HIGH QUALITY WELL MOTIVATED AND - BROADLY - HAPPY STAFF WORKING FOR IT THAN IN MOST PEOPLE'S MEMORIES.

BUT WHAT COUNTS IN POLITICS, OF COURSE, IS SUCCESS. UNTIL A FEW MONTHS AGO OUR SUPPORT WAS HOLDING UP VERY WELL. WE STILL DID CREDITABLY IN THE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS. BUT WE DID NOT DO WELL IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS. SO LET ME TURN TO THAT NOW.

/2. THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

2. THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

OUR PROBLEMS - AND ONES OVER WHICH CENTRAL OFFICE HAD NO CONTROL - ARE WELL KNOWN:

- ECONOMIC PROBLEMS: INFLATION AND INTEREST RATES;
- OTHER DOMESTIC PROBLEMS: WATER, HEALTH, COMMUNITY CHARGE;
- TIMING: EURO-ELECTIONS AT MID-TERM (UNLIKE 1979 OR 1984) WHEN GOVERNMENTS ALWAYS RUN INTO TROUBLE;
- GENUINE DIVISIONS OF OPINION, PARTICULARLY IN THE EDG, ABOUT EUROPEAN ISSUES: WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE HAD NOT CHRISTOPHER PROUT BEEN HELPFUL;
- LABOUR'S POLICY REVIEW, IN SPITE OF THE GREAT EFFORTS WE MADE (AND WILL GO ON MAKING) TO ATTACK IT WAS WELL

/RECEIVED BY THE...

RECEIVED BY THE MEDIA, WHO WANT TO WRITE LABOUR IN WITH A CHANCE AT THE NEXT ELECTION.

OUR PRIORITY HAD TO BE TO GET OUT THE CONSERVATIVE VOTE: WE EXPECTED A LOW TURN OUT AND WERE RIGHT.

THE RESULT WAS DISAPPOINTING. SOME CONSERVATIVES VOTED GREEN. OTHERS WERE CONFUSED BY SPLITS AND ROWS - AS ALWAYS HAPPENS WHEN THE PARTY IS PUBLICLY SPLIT. LABOUR'S SUPPORTERS WERE IN GOOD HEART. THE SLD COLLAPSED: THEIR SICKNESS MAY WELL BE TERMINAL.

WHAT WENT RIGHT IN OUR CAMPAIGN

- EXCELLENT MANIFESTO;

- MORE AND BETTER BRIEFING FOR CANDIDATES AND OTHERS THAN BEFORE: WESTMINSTER COLLEAGUES ALSO GOT, FOR EXAMPLE: A SPECIAL MID-TERM CAMPAIGN GUIDE, EUROPEAN /QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS...

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS, A VOLUME OF ATTACKS ANSWERED
(BOTH DOMESTIC AND EUROPEAN) AND (IN THE WHIPS' OFFICE)
13 ISSUES OF EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN NOTES;

- FULL SUPPORT FROM CABINET MINISTERS: FAR MORE VISITS
AND SPEECHES THAN IN 1984: BUT UNLIKE LABOUR OUR
MINISTERS HAVE TO GO ON GOVERNING;
- PRESS CONFERENCES, WHICH LOOKED BETTER THAN LABOUR'S
AND THAN OURS IN 1987;
- WE QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY EXPLOITED KINNOCK'S TWO
GAFFES IN HIS INTERVIEW WITH JIM NAUGHTIE AND HIS ATTACK
ON THE PRIME MINISTER AS 'ANTI-BRITISH'.

WHAT WENT WRONG

- NOTHING WRONG WITH 'NEGATIVE' ADVERTISING - LOOK AT
/BUSH CAMPAIGN...

BUSH CAMPAIGN - BUT WE DID NOT MANAGE TO GET OUR POSITIVE MESSAGE OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN AND POLICIES FOR EUROPE ACROSS SUFFICIENTLY TO MATCH IT: SO IT DID LOOK UNBALANCED;

- DAMAGING ATTACKS BY SOME COLLEAGUES AT WESTMINSTER AND SOME MEPs ON THE GOVERNMENT: OF THAT, THE LEAST SAID THE BETTER;

- WE WERE NOT ABLE TO CONVINCe CONSERVATIVES THAT THERE WAS A REAL THREAT OF 'SOCIALISM BY THE BACKDOOR': BRUSSELS AND STRASBOURG STILL SEEM SO REMOTE: AND SO WE COULD NOT MOTIVATE THEM TO VOTE.

A NUMBER OF LESSONS TO BE LEARNED - BOTH POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL. THE POLITICAL ONES ARE OBVIOUS AND LARGELY SUMMED UP IN ONE WORD: UNITY.

/THE ORGANISATIONAL...

THE ORGANISATIONAL ONES ARE LESS IMPORTANT: BUT, QUICKLY AND CALMLY WE ARE LOOKING AT WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE BETTER.

WE TOOK THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS SERIOUSLY - AND EUROPEAN ISSUES SERIOUSLY, WHICH OUR OPPONENTS DID NOT.

THE NEXT EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN 1994 MAY COME AT AN EQUALLY TRICKY TIME FOR A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT: SO WE WILL HAVE TO TAKE THEM MORE SERIOUSLY STILL.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE SLD ARE FAST GOING THE WAY OF THE SDP. AND THE GREENS, THE MORE THEY ARE EXAMINED (THIS IS A TASK THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT IS URGENTLY CONDUCTING), WILL SHRINK IN SIGNIFICANCE WELL BEFORE THE NEXT ELECTION. SO WE HAVE A RETURN TO TWO-PARTY POLITICS.

OUR AIM MUST NOW BE:

/(A) TO TACKLE...

- (A) TO TACKLE THE PROBLEMS OF THE ECONOMY AND ALLAY PEOPLE'S FEARS ABOUT OUR REFORMS;

- (B) TO ATTACK LABOUR - ITS POLICIES, ITS PERSONNEL AND ITS LEADER - SO AS TO DESTROY THEIR CREDIBILITY.

'QUATRE BRAS'

RH/CR

27TH JUNE 1989