

STRICTLY PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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BARONESS THATCHER : CALLS AT THE WHITE HOUSE

1. Lady Thatcher called this morning at the White House to see the Vice-President. The President subsequently called her into his office for a brief conversation.
2. The President seemed physically fit, but seemed mentally a bit tired. He thought that the campaign had been going better, but that there was heavy media bias against the Administration. White House surveys showed very negative coverage of his and the Administration's positions on all the main television channels. This was quite a handicap to overcome.
3. His opponent was "facile". He was quite a likeable person. But he was on all sides of most of the issues eg. NAFTA, the sale of F15s to Saudi Arabia etc. The White House would be seeking to exploit this further as the campaign continued. The country was mad at the Administration about the economy, even though the U.S. was in fact in slightly better shape than several of the other key western economies. There was a continuing argument with the Clinton camp about the format for television debates. The President believed he would win, but he had a tough fight on his hands.

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4. Lady Thatcher asked why he felt it necessary to take a position on abortion. This should not be a party political issue. The President thought that abortion was not as important an issue as the press suggested. People mostly decided their vote on other grounds.

5. The President asked about the currency crisis in Europe. Lady Thatcher said that it had simply not been possible to keep sterling in the ERM. She thought Maastricht was dead and certainly hoped it was. The President gave me a large wink, apparently unnoticed by his visitor, but otherwise did not comment.

6. There was more of the same with the Vice-President. Quayle was frank about the prospects : "we could lose". He did not think that the President could win California. They would have to direct their efforts elsewhere. This meant that they had to win states like Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania. It was there that the election would be decided.

7. Quayle also said that the mood of the country was for change. Clinton's support was soft but Bush was blamed for the state of the economy : "people are mad at us".

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The gap with Clinton had been narrowed. The President had set out his agenda in his Detroit speech. But as the campaign went on, it would assume a more negative tone. They would have to exploit the character issue against Clinton. Clinton was evasive both about his past, as he was about the issues.

8. Lady Thatcher discussed foreign policies issues with Scowcroft; nothing of any great note emerged.

Robin Renwick

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18 September 1992

cc: Mr Wall, No 10 Downing Street (by fax)
Mr Gozney, PS/Secretary of State, FCO

NB No further circulation

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