

cc John Whittingdale

PRIME MINISTER

BRIAN WALDEN

You are to meet Brian Walden on Monday for a general political chat before the Party conference - and prior to his LWT interview with you on October 28.

The prime purpose of Monday's meeting is to talk politics and John Whittingdale will be there as well as myself.

Brian is well primed and, judging from my talk with him today, is bubbling with ideas.

His main concern, which runs like a golden thread through his recent articles, is that the electorate is suffering from indigestion brought on by a surfeit of reforms.

He knows that you are not receptive to the idea of consolidation and says he accepts that means stagnation and ruination.

What he is searching for is "a slowing down without a loss of dynamic".

He will come armed with some comments on -

- community charge - that really has to be got right
- NHS reform which he accepts has got to be pushed through
- your target group for the election, including C2s

On this last point he says that a Gallup poll in April showed that 28% - the extent of the floating vote - felt you had accomplished a great deal but had done your important work, and that the country needs time to adjust to the changes.

These, he says, are the target group to aim for. If you can win over only 25% of them you will have a winning 46% of the electorate in 1991-92.

So far as your broadcast interview with Brian on October 29 is concerned, this is to be recorded at 10am on Saturday, October 28. They want you to go to their studio on the South Bank. I am seeing the editor next week, but you may care to ask Brian how he sees it.

Content to go to their studio?

This is rather early. They will let the journalists see it - who will promptly

I attach Brian's interview with Kenneth Baker and Brian Walden's last two articles in the Sunday Times.

reply to the interview before it has gone out

B Ingham

BERNARD INGHAM
September 29, 1989

Fighting a losing battle in the war against drugs

POLITICIANS are supposed to have "solutions" to problems and political commentators are supposed to discuss these solutions and suggest better ones. As an explanation of how politics works, this method is somewhat dated, having all over it the hoofprint of the dinosaur. Occasionally, it is not merely a deception, but a menace. I think this is true in the case of drugs.

Everybody knows that President George Bush has declared war on drugs. He promised to do this during his successful election campaign and he would have been foolish not to do so, because many Americans regard drug abuse as their gravest national problem. Drugs do not create quite so much panic in Britain, but there is more than enough concern to make it inevitable that British politicians must have their own little war against drugs.

Predicting the course of this war is not too difficult. Amid a fanfare of trumpets, the forces of righteousness will march out against the evil pushers and users. Victories will be announced and the number of convictions for drug offences will rise. Everybody (except the pushers and users) will be pleased, until some government agency comes up with the disturbing information that the problem is getting worse, not better.

When that happens, the opposition will blame the government and suggest its own solution. This will be to spend much more money on solving the problem. The cry will go up for more customs officers, more policemen in anti-drug squads, more rehabilitation centres, more detoxification units, more hospital beds for addicts with more nurses to service them, and more social counselling.

The government will make some lame excuses about budgetary constraints, but will be coerced by public opinion into spending more money. New victories will be announced and the number of people in prison for drug offences will go



● 'Solutions' such as cutting drug supplies and decriminalisation are doomed to failure, writes **BRIAN WALDEN**

on rising. Television programmes will be made applauding the methods being pioneered by social workers to get addicts off drugs. Then some government agency will admit that the problem is getting worse.

There is no particular reason why this carousel should stop, and my guess is that it won't. What politician can afford to admit that there may not be a solution to the problem of drugs that lies within the power of government? To do so would raise the frightening question of how many other problems existed to which governments had no answer. It is very late in the day to try to persuade public opinion that some social ills are highly resistant to both the long purse and the repressive authority of government. It seems logical to try to destroy the supply of drugs, and high hopes are building that this is what is going to happen to the coca crop of the Andes. But I am sceptical about campaigns to remove the source of supply, because of the cost factor. An Andean peasant can earn 50 times as much for a coca crop that produces cocaine and its derivative crack than he can from a food crop.

Even if the supply of drugs were diminished, this would, in some ways, worsen the problem. The murders, prostitution and general

mayhem that surrounds the drug scene happen because drugs are illegal and therefore relatively expensive. Reducing the supply would raise the price to users, who would respond by committing more crimes to get the money to buy drugs. Moreover, cheaper and more lethal drug mixtures are regularly concocted.

So I have no confidence that a government war on drugs is going to solve the problem of abuse. As a commentator, it is my role to put forward a better solution. But I can't. I have examined other options and none of them is appealing, while some of them are impossible. Take the suggestion that we should, as the jargon has it, decriminalise drug use. This would make the taking of heroin, cocaine and crack legal, and so these drugs could be supplied through normal commercial outlets. There is a certain logic to this proposal, because it would mean that the law of supply and demand would operate and the price of hard drugs would fall dramatically. Users would not have to commit violent crimes or prostitute their bodies to pay for their habit. Naturally, the pushers would go out of business and the whole vast criminal empire, with its colossal profits built upon illegally supplying drugs, would collapse.

To sweeten this proposal, libertarian arguments are used. It is pointed out that people ought to be free to destroy themselves by drug abuse, as in most countries they are free to harm themselves by alcohol abuse. The nannying approach of government has done no good to anybody, except the criminals who control the drug trade. So give freedom a chance.

But decriminalisation is a wildly unrealistic political option. Voters in democracies would turn savagely upon any political party that suggested it. Hard drugs usually kill people far more swiftly and messily than does alcohol. The idea that they should be sold over the counter in Woolworths is not

something that the average voter is going to tolerate.

Decriminalisation would necessitate an international agreement, because no one country dares take the step unilaterally. Not only would it become a pariah, but it could confidently expect that many of the world's drug users would head for its shores forthwith. It is difficult enough to believe that any national group of voters would vote for the proposal, but that they all would is fanciful in the extreme.

Governments could move in the opposite direction and make pushing a capital offence, as it is in Malaysia. But this does not seem to work. The concept of "pushing" is more complicated than it appears. Drug barons are rarely found on streets trying to sell their wares. Usually, they get addicts to do the dirty work for them.

Many addicts, to get the money to buy drugs, become pushers and part of the distribution network. When a non-addict controls a pushing operation, the profits made from it exceed, in short order, anything that could be earned from a lifetime of honest labour, so justifying the risk.

One keeps coming back to the point that, vile though the suppliers are, the heart of the problem lies with the users. There is no universal reason why someone takes hard drugs, nor is drug abuse confined to one social class. But the predominant reason seems to be to gain a few hours of pleasure or oblivion from an otherwise pointless existence. So the underclass is where to look for most drug users.

Getting rid of the underclass might break the back of the problem. But that is going to be a massively expensive and time-consuming business, even if material, rather than cultural, deprivation is the cause. Nevertheless, if there is money to be spent, this is how to spend it.

Meanwhile, we have to live with the drug problem, hoping that its increase will abate. There is little else we can do.

Sunday Times 17/9/89

Sunday Times 24/9/89

How Tories should tackle this middle class outrage

ACCORDING to the conventional understanding of British politics, which dominates the thinking of many observers, the working class opposes the Tories, while the middle class defends them. In fact, many of this government's worst problems are rooted in the savage, relentless opposition of sections of the middle class to everything ministers try to do.

The size of the middle class has grown steadily in recent years, but it is not the *arrivistes* who are leading the anti-Tory outbursts. Those who have struggled into the bourgeoisie from the working class show a certain gratitude to the government for their improved status and enhanced opportunities. It is those who were born into comfort and security who demonstrate the greatest hostility towards the system that preserves their property, money and lifestyle.

The majority of the middle class continues to support the Conservative party and it would be extraordinary if it did not. But its support is muted even when it is openly expressed. It is the disaffected middle class which makes the noise. It makes it effectively, comprehensively and persistently. This well-publicised and inveterate hostility to the Thatcher government has done the Tories immense damage, because the articulate middle class sets the tone of political discussion.

Defining what it is that sections of the middle class dislike about Thatcherism requires us not to accept all their protestations at face value. That they are outraged by the filth on our cities' streets, or the homeless begging, prior to settling down to sleep in doorways, I do not doubt. These sights are offensive and, whatever their causes, the government has been slow to apply a corrective. But not every complaint is so well-founded.

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that wherever the middle class plays a prominent role in the public sector, it adopts the reactionary values which typify that



● People with relative security are much given to decrying the worship of money, writes
BRIAN WALDEN

part of national life. "Spend, spend, and never change anything" is the theme of a thousand letters to the newspapers. The very people who are assumed to handle their private finances sensibly and with caution show no restraint where taxpayers' money is involved.

Perhaps not being directly concerned with the wealth-creating process dulls one's appreciation of its difficulties and importance. Traditionally, the middle class was never in the foremost rank of those who believed that the nation's purse was bottomless, but in those days the public sector was smaller. Many professionals, who are today paid by the state or local authorities, used to conduct cash transactions with consumers. There is nothing like receiving public money for inducing the feeling that the stuff grows on trees.

But other factors have played a part in severing much of the middle class from its ancestral moorings. It would be unjust to claim that the pre-war middle class lacked compassion, but it did have a restricted understanding of working class life and poverty. Brought up to revere the Victorian virtues of self-discipline and thrift, it could never rid itself of the belief that deprivation was caused by fecklessness and the absence of moral fibre.

The contemporary middle class

has received a very different education. Great stress has been laid on how relative moral values are, on the immense diversity of human behaviour, of how necessary it is to understand others and let them "do their own thing". The middle class has become more tolerant and caring. This has been of general benefit to society, but tolerance can lapse into indulgence. There is a disposition in some quarters never to hold individuals ultimately responsible for what they do. This degenerates into a feeling that every serious problem must be the fault of an institution, usually the government.

This relaxed, indulgent outlook runs counter to the somewhat rasping individualism of Thatcherism. The middle class probably felt that the incoherent collectivism of the 1970s required modification, but its instinct for self-help has been blunted and it reacts against a too forceful assertion of the necessity for people to do more for themselves. It is inclined to equate individualism with aggression, ruthlessness and money-grabbing.

Some people who have relative security in life and are not engaged in the fiercer aspects of commerce are much given to decrying the worship of money. They do not seem to think that money has anything to do with the asparagus and claret supplied at their dinner parties, or with their holidays in Tuscany, not to mention their splendid array of beautiful possessions. Possibly wealth that is inherited, or is earned without soiling one's hands or reputation, does seem different from the lucre the coarser members of the community appear so eager to possess. Certainly, there is a section of the middle class worried about the greed of the rest of us.

I am always greatly tickled by hearing millionaire playwrights and other handsomely remunerated members of the gentler professions declaiming against the greed that Thatcherism has imported into society. One scion of this fraternity reduced me to par-

oxysms of laughter by fuming about yuppies' ostentatious luxury while waiting for his chauffeur-driven car at his club. Much of the media fails to see the joke, or recognise the underlying snobbery in such sententious opinions.

Some parts of the established middle class are desperately worried that the country and its gracious artefacts may be falling into the hands of those who do not truly appreciate elegance. Their worries are purely cultural, you must understand, and in no way selfish. It is a view reminiscent of the "coals in the bath" explanation of why the working class of my boyhood needed only very occasional access to hot water.

No argument is going to persuade the disaffected middle class that it is playing with fire. What it needs to enable it to produce a fresh analysis is a taste of adversity. A few years of the kind of government it thinks it wants would have a notable effect and give it a new perspective. In my view, most people require a recent experience to learn a lesson well.

But I have, until now, largely ignored the most striking aspect of middle class political attitudes, which is the inertia of the Tory majority. Just as the anti-Thatcher middle class tends to congeal within the media, arts and public sector, the Tories are to be found in industry and finance. They contribute money, though not in especially generous amounts, but their voice is silent.

Bankers and industrialists are quite staggeringly careless about protecting their long-term interests. This is a British phenomenon, because in the United States, for instance, the business community vigorously makes known its preferences. If commerce dislikes the disproportionate influence of the anti-Tory middle class, then it should spend some money to explain its own values. The days when all the business community needed in politics was a Tory party to do its job for it have gone.