

PRIME MINISTER

I had a talk with Tim Bell yesterday. I know you spoke to him over the weekend and his views are probably familiar to you. His main points (to me) were:

- there is a real and serious problem for the Government, far worse than 1981 or 1985/86;
- the problem is not a failure of policy, or not primary, it's a failure of communication;
- you have become too remote both from your supporters in the House of Commons and from people generally. You are not communicating enough with them;
- to overcome the problem a number of steps are needed;
- you should spend much more time seeing your back-benchers individually and listening to their concerns. It's no good seeing them in groups or in the tea-room. You need to be one-on-one of them, so that they feel you are hearing their advice and listening to their problems;
- you need to be out and about in the country even more than at present, meeting people. Once people actually come into direct contact with you, their perception of you and your policies is transformed and there is a multiplier effect;
- you also need to change radically the way you handle the media. For instance:
 - you should give a weekly press conference, on the model of the ones you give during the election campaign and on your visits abroad. This is by far the most effective way to explain your views and get them across to people;
 - you should do more television interviews, again because you can explain what the government is doing far better than anyone else;

- and you should spend more time seeing individual editors or political editors, even when there is not a particular occasion to do so. It doesn't always have to be a full-dress interview.

No doubt Tim has said all this to you in one form or another. It would require a very radical change in the way you allocate your time and your capacity to be so directly and heavily involved in the business of government and foreign affairs. It would also necessitate a major transformation in the way you deal with the media. Indeed overall it would mean shifting your main role in government and international affairs from substance to presentation/communication. The bits that would have to give would include foreign visits, meetings with visiting foreigners, the 'small' meetings when this or that person pops in, possibly some of the Committees, indubitably some of the paperwork. What it should not be allowed to do is to result in your taking on additional work on top of all that you already do. Even for some-one so superhuman as yourself, that would be tempting providence!

Arguably Tim's view is too media - and presentation -oriented, simply impracticable for some-one who has to run a government and bear the responsibilities of a major world figure. The scope for reallocation of your time is in practice far more limited than Tim's ideas would require. His riposte to that would be that it's no good just going on as we are and hoping things will come right: it is quite clear that something fundamental is wrong and unless you take radical action to change your style and give more attention to presentation, then you are in danger of losing in two years time.

I don't know to what extent you want to pursue any of these ideas. I think Bernard would be hard to convince on some of them (especially if he thought they had come from Tim). But you might want to go over the ground with Kenneth Baker and see whether some at least of the changes are worth considering.

One other thought which occurs to me is that you might want to set up a group now to begin to look at themes for your fourth

government. This would then evolve into manifesto drafting. The advantage would be of getting people to look forward to unity on future policy between the younger members of your Ministerial team - eg John Major, Kenneth Baker, Chris Patten. But it would be essential not to allow Geoffrey Howe to chair it, and that itself may lead to more trouble than the idea is worth.

You may find all this entirely otiose in which case please tear it up. There are no copies.

C.D.P

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31 October 1989

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