

PRIME MINISTER

27 April 1990

TOWARDS THE ELECTION: MECHANICS OF POLICY WORK

This note follows our earlier note of 22 February. It makes proposals for the mechanics of policy work. Next week we will submit two further papers on announcements for the Party Conference and on possible policies for the Manifesto. However, we thought that you should have the present note now, since there is some speculation in the press and party about how policy development will be taken forward.

1. Ministerial Strategy Group

Background

1986/87 provides a model for policy work which we should seek to improve. You will recall that a small group of Senior Cabinet Ministers met weekly to oversee, under your Chairmanship, strategic work on the election. They were thus all bound in to the policy process - and back-benchers and the media knew it. You, however, kept direct control over the process of drafting the Manifesto.

Recommendations

We recommend that you should announce in June that such a Strategy Group had been formed.

We recommend that it should consist of the Lord President, the Party Chairman, the Chancellor, the Foreign Secretary and Brian Griffiths. Other Ministers who might be included are John Wakeham, David Waddington, Nicholas Ridley and Chris Patten. John Whittingdale and Robin Harris would

act as joint secretaries. (Only the very briefest action points need be recorded.)

## 2. Policy Groups

### Background

In neither 1983 nor 1987 did policy groups make any real policy contribution. In 1983 recommendations came in too late for the Manifesto. The 1987 recommendations were either dull or trivial (or both) and were, therefore, ignored.

The temptation is to yield to pressure from backbenchers (and the Chief Whip) to put too many MPs on the groups so as to keep the Party happy. Last time Cabinet Ministers chaired the policy groups on their own subject: this effectively stifled all radical debate since Ministers hate to be bothered, even at elections, by ideas which may imply criticism of their previous performance.

It is important now to come up with some exciting ideas: we need to show up the emptiness and blandness of Labour policies. There is a positive value if a number of these ideas leak - as long as they are visionary without being crazy. All this means ensuring that the groups are chaired by and consist of the best rightminded brains we can attract. Some MPs might be policy group members. But generally, it is best if policy suggestions from the Parliamentary Party come from the backbench committees. (see below)

### Recommendations

We recommend:

- (a) that in June you should announce the setting up of policy groups;



PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

- (b) that they should be up and running by September and report to your Strategy Group in January 1991;
- (c) that Group Chairmen be picked on grounds of expertise rather than status: Cabinet Ministers could only chair a group which did not directly cover a Department's responsibility - otherwise there would be tensions;
- (d) that no more than one or two MPs - and then sound ones - be members of each group; but that Chairmen of backbench committees, consulting MPs, be invited to submit papers on their subjects to the Strategy Group.
- (e) that relevant special advisers act as secretaries to the groups;
- (f) that the Director of the Research Department receive papers and that he or a CRD nominee be invited to attend;
- (g) that policy groups be allowed to roam generally over their territory, but that they be given a few lines setting out their remit. (see below).

We set out in Annex A suggested topics, possible remits and some possible Chairmen.

You may like to discuss these proposals with us - and subsequently with the Party Chairman.

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

ROBIN HARRIS

JOHN WHITTINGDALE

POLICY GROUPS

1. Tax and Benefits

"To report how to achieve lower, simpler taxes and a simpler system of social security benefits, which together would increase incentives, enterprise and employment and are properly targetted."

Chairman: Lord Young

2. Wider Ownership and Employee Participation

(Including share ownership and privatisation, but excluding housing)

"To report how to achieve wider personal ownership of shares, savings and pensions and how to promote employee ownership and participation in businesses."

Chairman: Sir Geoffrey Howe

3. Local Government and Housing

"To report on how to improve local government; how to achieve wider home ownership and greater choice of rented accommodation; how to improve inner city housing; and how to tackle homelessness."

[housing may need a sub-group]

Chairman: Sir Paul Beresford



4. Law and Order and Drugs

"To report on how to reduce the levels and fear of crime, particularly violent crime; how to improve the effectiveness of the courts, police and prisons; and how to combat drug trafficking and abuse."

Chairman: Ivan Lawrence?

5. Family

"To report on how to ensure the divorce law, the tax and benefit systems, broadcasting and education and the activity of the voluntary sector work together to strengthen family life."

Chairman: Chris Patten

6. Education

"To report on how to increase further parental choice in schools; how to devolve greater power over their own affairs to schools and universities; how to improve the quality of the teaching profession."

Chairman: ?

7. Enterprise, Jobs and Training

"To report on how to promote self-employment and small businesses; how to remove barriers to full and part-time employment; how to improve the quality of training; and how to develop all these policies in inner cities."

Chairman: Sir Jeffrey Sterling/ANother businessman

8. Europe and Foreign Affairs

"To report on how to achieve an open, free enterprise Europe and how to promote international free enterprise and free trade."

Chairman: ?

9. Transport

"To report on how to reduce traffic congestion; how to widen variety, choice and security for travellers by air, sea, rail and road; how to finance future transport projects."

Chairman: Nigel Lawson ?

10. Environment, Farming and Countryside

"To report on how to protect the environment - both global and local - without jeopardising prosperity; and how to promote efficient farming, while protecting and improving the countryside and rural communities."

Chairman: ?

11. Scotland

"To report on how to advance the prosperity and quality of life of the Scottish people and strengthen the Union."

Chairman: Bill Hughes

PRIME MINISTER

10 DOWNING STREET