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PARTY POLITICAL BROADCAST
ON BEHALF OF THE
LIBERAL PARTY

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DAVID STEEL MP: How can there be another Party Broadcast so soon after a general election? Well the period immediately after an election is a good time for politicians to reflect and after the election it must be plain to everyone that politicians of all parties have had to reassess their values and their purposes.

Looking back over the past few months I feel above all a great responsibility for the seven and a half million people who voted for the Alliance, it is clear that they would have been joined by a great deal more if they had been more certain of what the Alliance message was. A great many people in this country see us as the party of the future but would like to be sure that we are going to be an effective and united party.

So, how fair is the Alliance? You will have seen that we are in the middle of a difficult debate about our future, difficult perhaps but absolutely necessary, let me explain why. As leader of the Liberal Party I saw the formation of the Alliance in nineteen eighty one as a great step forward in the process of bringing Britain together again and of creating that agreement and cooperation or partnership that is so essential. We touched a chord with the British electorate and there is no doubt that our achievements have been substantial.

We have had great successes not just in by-election victories but in sweeping advances on local councils, twenty three county councils and a hundred district councils now have Alliance councillors in positions of responsibility. But we need to come to terms with the new reality of a third Conservative victory to adjust our policies to the new circumstances and to apply our values of freedom, fairness and partnership in the new parliament.

I hope that we will do that together with the Liberals and Social Democrats working as one in a new united party. SDP members will have voted on that issue and the Liberals will vote in the autumn. My own view is that six years is long enough for an engagement and it is time for wedding bells and that is what, I am convinced, most people want.

There is a great job to be done now by a new and united movement, a job which really got under way with the creation of the Alliance. It seemed to me in nineteen eighty one and it seems to me now that this country must have partnership in industry and local government, in housing, in the community and education and in many other aspects of our life and in that respect the general election has changed nothing. I don't believe that we can have a successful and civilised country without this partnership, this agreement and cooperation. Surely the object of politics and politicians must be to bring a nation together, with common goals and shared standards.

I came into politics because I

DAVID STEEL MP CONT'D: believed, as a Liberal, in the balance of personal opportunity and individual liberty. I believed in the notion of fraternity as well and I still believe in them. We can't be happy with the way we treat our old people or the unemployed or the young or the disabled, we can't be happy about the levels of crime on the streets, burglary, low standards of honesty and decency and we can't delude ourselves that our education system is improving or health service leading the world. Do you notice the decline and squalor of our cities, streets and public places and do you accept that these failings are irreversible, I do not. I believe that a strong opposition to Thatcherism with realistic and sensible policies, an understanding of the need for the creation of wealth, tempered with an understanding of how people actually live in this country is more essential than ever.

For the next five years are going to see a struggle for the soul of Britain. Mrs Thatcher has achieved a great deal but nobody looking back on her years in power will ever be able to say that she brought the country together, nor will they be able to say that her government gave much thought to the underlying reasons for decline and decay and nobody will be able to say that she understood the unease which afflicts our country.

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For many people admire Mrs. Thatcher they find Thatcherism, repugnant. It leaves people anxious and it raises many questions of the nature of our country and its future. Mrs. Thatcher may well have been an affective surgeon, but the surgeon's knife is no substitute for healing.

The Government's most recent proposals for a poll tax simply illustrates how far Thatcherism has departed from the concepts of freedom and fairness and how little they understand real life because they bear no relation to people's ability to pay. The tax is full of laughable of absurdities. Servicemen, transferred to Scotland will find they suddenly have to pay this extra charge out of their wages and we in Scotland are going to suffer this earlier planning vary ruses like hiding people in the attics when the government's tally men come round.

But while all this is going on, it is extraordinary to us in the Alliance to see how the Labour party is trying to appropriate to itself some of the policies which we have been advocating for years. But let me just say this; the Labour Party is in long term decline. Its motive force is the dislike of certain people and certain institutions and an unhealthy distrust of the creation of wealth. It doesn't matter how they try to dress up their policies in the next few years the Labour Party is still the party of the past. An honourable past, but a past nevertheless.

So you'll see why I regard it as so important that the Alliance merges into one, strong united party. Recent polls have shown our supporters have not deserted us, and in my heart of hearts I believe that if we had been one party at the last election we would have had much greater success. Our policies are the right ones for years to come. We know that lasting prosperity cannot be bought on short term, financial manipulation. We know that a credit and consumer boom is no substitute for manufacturing recovery. We know that local government must be responsible and efficient. We know that you cannot have a decent education system without involving teachers. And we know that you can't have a decent health service without proper funding. We know that you cannot have good government from a system riddled with secrecy. And we know that you cannot have a fair society without a fair electoral system. And we know that you cannot have a safe and civilised neighbourhood without creating a real sense of security.

Above all, we know that you cannot in the long run, have a successful and happy country unless all the people, not just some sections and some regions are partners in that country. After all a country is nothing if it is not the sum of its people. I am determined that the progress we have made in by elections and in two General Elections; nearly a quarter of the population gave us their support, will be maintained. And I believe that our success is inevitable because as the Thatcher era draws to a close we have the policies that our country needs and the heart of which our country is crying out. Goodnight.