

Pym's snap election alert

CONSERVATIVES were last night given a strong alert to prepare for the next general election. Speaking after a meeting of Mrs Thatcher's war cabinet, Francis Pym, the foreign secretary, set out the main themes of the government's re-election campaign.

They will be, he said, the traditional Tory aims of seeking to unite the people, Parliament and the country's institutions "in a common cause" and making "a better future for all our people."

The Falklands crisis, he told a party meeting in his Cambridgeshire constituency, showed that voters will not

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find the government to have been lacking in its determination to defend British liberties "wherever they may be threatened."

Pym's speech, dominated by the election theme throughout, confirms Labour fears that the prime minister's closest colleagues are thinking increasingly in electoral terms.

Some Labour leaders predict privately that Mrs Thatcher may call a snap election this autumn. "The Falklands

drama, falling inflation and the state of our party must make her very tempted," one said.

Pym said: "We must turn our minds to the general election, now less than two years away", leaving no doubt that the Tory bid for another term in office is already under way.

In a powerful rallying call for Tory policies to be based on mainstream, "one nation" attitudes, he said: "We cannot, as Conservatives, tolerate a society in which the admittedly large majority of the British population have jobs for life, regular wage increases

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and pensions to look forward to while a significant minority are totally excluded from all the benefits of employment—benefits as much social as financial.

"Such a situation would be morally indefensible and in time would undermine the stability of our society."

Warning that unemployment could persist at previously unacceptable levels for perhaps many years, Pym urged a strategy of "enlightened social policy and pragmatic realism"—"wet" Tory code phrases far removed from the monetarist market-forces arguments of the Tory right wing.

Praising former Tory reformers—and noticeably not mentioning Mrs Thatcher once—Pym's manifesto-making is likely to be seen as a shrewd bid to open up a Tory debate on the government's election strategy while there is time.

Turning to the key electoral question of voters' hopes for ever-rising prosperity, Pym deflated any plans Tory party managers might nurture for a traditionally optimistic appeal.

"That has all changed", he said. "To promise dramatic improvements in our standard of living in these years ahead would be dishonest."

He called instead for a revolution in work attitudes and new concepts of job mobility between employment and voluntary service. Trade unions would also have to take "a hard look" at work-sharing.

In Swansea, Ron Hayward, Labour's general secretary, yesterday urged party workers to "hammer home" the government's responsibility for both the Falklands crisis and the economic slump.