

PRIME MINISTER

PRESENTATION POST BY-ELECTIONS

This note may be helpful in considering what needs to be done after Thursday's elections to improve the Government's performance and how it is perceived by the electorate.

First, a comforting note. In my view the Government did not do at all badly considering:

- the self inflicted wound of Westland;
- the Westland consequentialials of BL/GM and Shops Bill;
- the acutely difficult decision, against a background of anti-Americanism, of Libya; and
- Chernobyl which inevitably created unease.

To put the matter further in perspective: Labour did badly in the by-elections and the local elections are by no means unalloyed joy for any party.

The more objective political commentators would agree with this. Equally, they would say the situation needs watching.

In their terms, the Government would be in a stronger position if it stopped gossiping, and not least if it stopped gossiping about your allegedly strained relations with Norman Tebbit; and if a means were found of steadying the Backbenchers. They also claim that the Labour Party is now more efficient under Kinnock/Whitty than Conservative Central Office. This may or may not be so, but whether it is or not that is the current perception, and perceptions count.

There is probably nothing that cannot be put right by a run of success. But if that run of success is to be achieved we need to work for it.

I believe the following things need to be done in Government:

- first, we need a general appreciation that perception counts - and counts for a great deal; and consequently, that more attention should be paid to presentation. Presentational socks need pulling up. The machine is too slack
- second, we need to identify liabilities and take the greatest care over their presentation. We should start with the presentation of the pay review bodies (which I have not yet seen) and plan the most positive presentation of the Government's decisions
- third, the Government needs to remind people:
 - what it came to office 7 years ago to do;
 - how much it has so far achieved;
 - what still needs to be done; and above all
 - why none of the achievements can be taken for granted and why they could so easily be thrown away.

If this is to be done you need to think in terms of an early speech on these lines - the CBI would be an ideal platform. I believe that one of the problems at the moment is the extent to which so many people - and perhaps especially industry - are taking your economic achievements for granted

- fourth, the major outstanding issues are unemployment, education, NHS and law and order. In one case - NHS - the problem is very largely presentational: convincing

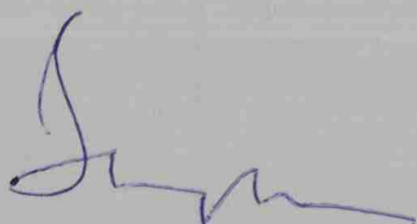
the public that the Government has increased resources rather than cut the service to ribbons, as the Opposition claims. This needs a campaign pitched at national, regional and local level. But such a campaign needs planning. I believe that we need to mount an assault on this problem in much the same single-minded way that we so successfully tackled the CND campaign in 1982-83.

All the action proposed above is designed to convince the public that the Government knows what it is doing, is in command, and knows where it is going.

If there is a liability at the moment it is the impression abroad that the Government is too much at the mercy of events. You need to be seen to be imposing your will on things. All four action points above would create the impression that this is being done.

You may care to discuss.

Yes no



BERNARD INGHAM

9 May 1986